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## INSENTIENCE OF THE WEALTHY IN MAHASHWETA DEVI'S MOTHER OF 1084

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**Abstract :**

*In the novel Mother of 1084, she has created the character of Sujata in this novel to show that a good woman has to suffer all kinds of humiliations even in the present-day so-called sophisticated society. Sujata was none but Mahasweta Devi herself. Her heart bled as she saw that profiteers, drug peddlers, adulterators, spurious drug makers, and self-seeking politicians ruled the roost while the have-nots were forced to live in poverty. In the novel, Mahasweta Devi has presented the eternal struggle between the rich and the poor. The belief that the poor are denied their part of the national wealth is universally accepted. This has resulted in armed struggle which has done more harm than good to society.*

**Keywords:** *poverty, struggle, disparity, betrayal, justice*

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Sujata was born and brought up in a rich orthodox family. She graduated from the prestigious Loreto College and married Dibyanath who belonged to a well-known family but was not rich. She got a job in a bank of her choice since Dibyanath's income was not enough to meet day-to-day expenses. She was subjected to insults and indifference by her husband and mother-in-law. Her husband was a libidinous mania, carrying on illicit relations with several women. She suffered the atrocity silently for a long. Her mother-in-law tormented her by praising her son's depravity:

Dibyanath had always fooled around with women. His mother looked upon his indiscretions with indulgence. For her it was a mark of his virility, her son was no henpecked husband. One can easily see how torturous it must have been for Sujata. But it was not all, Sujata had three children but her husband was never with her at the time of their births. Her mother-in-law would generally go away to live with her sister to avoid being with her at the time of delivery. She was however present at home when she was going to the hospital for the delivery of the fourth child yet she remained unconcerned. Sujata had to ask the cook to call a taxi. This was the treatment given at home to responsible, well-qualified women. (Mother of 1084, 13)

The novelist presents Sujata's example to say that women at least during pregnancy should be treated with utmost love and care. And the treatment that Sujata received should be condemned in the strongest terms. Sujata's fourth child, Brati, was altogether different from his siblings who had nothing to do with social conditions. But Brati was greatly upset by the injustice and corruption rampant in the society. He could not close his eyes to 'adulterated food,



drugs, and baby food'. He was disgusted with self-seeking leaders, profit-mad businessmen. Being an angry young man, he "rejected a society of spineless, opportunities time-servers,

masquerading as artists, writers, and intellectuals. He was not liked by anybody in the family except his mother.

The government had wrongly identified the youths fighting for social justice, unlike communists and Naxalites who were getting arms from China. These awakened youths were targeted by the police and the agents and profiteers jointly. Brati and his comrades were surrounded by the killers while they were inside Somu's house. Nandini had joined the movement. She was arrested, confined in a solitary cell, and subjected to torturous interrogation, during which her skin was burnt with lighted cigarettes. Other comrades were killed in public places.

When Brati died or any other of his comrade died nobody dared to say a word of mourning - they died unsung. The administration and the hired killers had caused too much fear that the family members had to conceal the truth of the deceased or the killed being a family member. On receiving the news of the death of Brati, Dibyanath ran about in the official circles to make a close secret of it. Dibyanath refrained from going to recognize Brati's dead body, nor did he allow his wife to take his car to the morgue lest it should be seen and made by others. The police did not allow Sujata to see the face of her deceased son. She recognized him by his blue shirt. Saroj Pal, Deputy Commissioner of, the Detective Department, had bluntly said:

No, you won't get the photographs, you failed to teach your son properly, and your son had ganged up with anti-socials. Your son deserved no mercy. No, you won't get the dead body. No, you won't get the dead body. (34)

But when Tuli saw it a suppressed scream burst out of her since it was crushed by the heavy end of a weapon. Brati had two-three marks of the gunshots on his body, indicating that he was first shot dead and his face was crushed later with hatred. The novelist wants to ask what heinous crime was committed by these young men which deserved hatred of that degree. Nobody tried to know what these youths wanted and what they campaigned against.

Brati's father had succeeded in concealing Brati's death. He did not want to keep anything of Brati within the view of the visitors. He gave instructions to remove Brati's photograph and shoes, "Dibyanath tried 'to wipe Brati out' (41). Dibyanath did not love Brati because Brati also did not like his father due to his carnality. But Dibyanath had another reason for removing Brati's things. "He did not want anybody to know that his son Brati had joined the group fighting for social justice. There was the fear that the family would be targeted Somu's family had been harassed. The persecutors here were crueler than British rulers" (44).

One great problem of society was that none wanted to know why the young men were sacrificing their lives. Those who had turned against them for their gain and the police who were least concerned with the social problem could be exceptions, but persons like Sujata and other pare rite of the killed youths should have made all-out efforts to know what was the ailment. Nandini had the grievance that 1084 had been killed and thousands were languishing in Jails, yet none tried to know what they had been fighting for:



Nandini explained that youths were rooted in the prison, yet nobody tried to know what their offense was – “the walls raised higher around the prisons, the watch – towers?” were erected. She asked a very pertinent question, “Why does not a single person raise his voice when thousands of young men are still rotting the prisons? And when they do, they keep the interests of their political parties in mind. (56)

Sujata was flabbergasted since she did not know which program Nandini was referring to Nandini explained that they had the program of betraying the youths. She explained that Anindya alone had not betrayed them. There were a host of betrayers:

They had developed a burning faith in the faithlessness of everything that spelled. /establishment, yet had never thought that there could be people who posed as friends, write about them in the press and take part in a deliberate program to betray them. (61)

Betrayal had taken several other forms. Nandini raised the issue as she said “Now I know how betrayal worked, how it works even now. She wanted to say that the conscience was dead. If anybody ever raised the issue, it was tinged with politics. They served their political interests, and the cause for which the young men were fighting and dying was reduced to a nullity. Nalini asked pathetically:

How is it that we who would like to carry on, cannot print a single bulletin? “They were not allowed to put their case before the public, not allowed to awaken the social conscience. (62)

Nandini further lamented that they did not have a printing press yet she had heard the journals were sympathetic to their cause; the society remained in a torpor. She believed that it was also a kind of betrayal. Then she spoke of another form of betrayal – some people talked about the movement, but it was nothing but ‘talking for the sake of talking’, doing nothing. She added that journals were writing about Bangladesh and publishing poems full of sentiments, but not about their movements. It was, in her opinion, also a form of betrayal. Nandini said that the arrests of the young men continued, shooting had not stopped. Nothing was stopped. She said with great sorrow:

Only a generation between sixteen and twenty-four was wiped out. Is being wiped... But the irony was that nobody felt the pain of it, nobody had made any effort to stop this pernicious act of destroying the younger generation. Those who quietly watched the tragedy were no less than betrayers. (62)

Thus, Nandini rues that social conscience was dead; watching the tragedy without reaction amounted to betrayal.

Sujata recalled that Brati looked at her while leaving in the blue shirt perhaps because his mother did not know why he was going away. She imagined that Brati had stopped at the foot of the stairs and looked up back at her with a surprise that she did not try to know even at the moment of the final parting where he was going to Sujata regretted that she remained too busy to know about his activities. If she had the slightest idea about his activities, she would have tried to stop him:



She would rush down the stairs and hug him hard, the body of her body. “She would have persuaded him not to go – “Brati please do not. Just don’t.” But all this weeping and wailing would not have stopped Brati, a committed soldier as he was. The crux of the matter would be that she remained too occupied to know about Brati’s thoughts and activities. Other such mothers did not know what their sons wanted to do. (67)

It was not apathy but parents it, decisive attitude to the great movement which was

picking up fast. Had they sensed the danger lurking ahead, they might have persuaded their wards not to carry on the movement which would bear the fury of the police and hired killers without support from any quarter. The youths died unsung, and their sacrifice had not made any change in the social order. The questions arose unbiddenly, “Was Brati’s death useless?” (70). The tragedy was that the youths were dying but none knew, not even their mothers, what they were after.

Disparity, both financial and intellectual, was the greatest evil of the times. When Sujata set out to meet Somu’s mother, she was stupefied to see that plot of land a few garden plots, several pools, and tanks, and a few small villages were grabbed by the residents and settled down in an unplanned manner. She observed with a sense of dismay that as the colony spread “it had swallowed up the fields, the marshes, the coconut palm orchard, the corn fields, the villages” (78).

It happened so because the government gave priority to the vote-bank over the ecology, and left the coming up colony without roads, a health center, or even a bus route. But the residents were happy in such horrible conditions. The poverty of the people forced them to accept the conditions as fate accomplished.

The novelist is perturbed to see that:

There is no longer unrest or panic. No shops and no market suddenly pulling down shutters, no doors to houses being slammed shut, no rickshaw pullers, stray dogs, and pedestrians running in a mad frenzy. (80)

The residents of the place being cut off from the main current of life had no idea of the ‘exploding bombs, murderous shouts, the groans of the dying, or the cheers of the jubilant killers.

How could poverty-stricken people, living in isolated places, know about communist-sponsored movement coupled with the Naxalite movement would reach the poor through the movements aimed at improving the living conditions of the poor. (82)

When Sujata went to meet Nandini, she had the chance to see the wide gap between the rich and the poor. She was aghast to see the prosperity and poverty placed in the same building. The top of the house was designed after ‘the marquee of the metro cinema in Calcutta’.



This top portion was 'sparklingly new, flushed with its cost of the enameled paint, air-coolers under the windows' but the rest was 'shabby, with peeling plaster, and windows covered with filthy curtains made from tattered saris.... The ground floor facing the street was rented out to several single-room establishments. The room in which Sujata found Nandini living had 'the walls and the ceiling had lost their plaster; the floor was warning to the underlying layer of bricks. (59)

The novelist has brought the sight of poverty and prosperity in one place to make people see the widening gap between the rich and the poor. In the chapter 'Evening' of this novel, as Sujata entered the house, she saw lights and roses arranged to celebrate the birth anniversary of Rabindra Nath Tagore. The lights and roses, Sujata felt were betraying Brati and Nandini as both of them died and suffer for the cause of the poor. The family had forgotten so completely that "it was difficult to find a trace of him anywhere" (109). There was an obnoxious show of wealth in the dining room. The dining table was loaded with boxes of sandesh, rasgullas in eastern bowls, yogurt, etc. Sujata was shocked when she saw Dibyanath looking 'carnal and fleshy' in embroidered kurtas and costly shawls in his middle age. The fellow did not have any traces of sobriety and sadness though he had lost his son.

The greats that arrived on the occasion of Tuli's engagement were unaware of the social problems because their wealth had closed their eyes. Molly Mitter, wife of Jishu was shamelessly 'showing off her diamonds'. Another woman, Mrs. Kapadia said while looking at Moly's diamonds. "Diamonds are a must. The Swami says the diamond is a symbol of the soul Purity" (113). Mrs. Kapadia introduced her Guru as 'God Himself. He is the Almighty. He wants India to have its poverty so that it knows suffering. When He wills, everybody will be rich' (113).

What a Guruji he was! Then Molly Mitter told Sujata that Mr. Chatterji wanted to convert the whole family to Swami's faith. She did not know that Sujata was engrossed in other problems. When Joshu Mitter revealed the truth "It's Brati's death anniversary today", nobody had signs of sadness. On the contrary, Molly Mitter said, "The boy Brati I never trusted him" (119). When she came to know that Brati had a mind to stay with Ronu as if he was Ronu's friend. He had no contact with Ronu after his first year at college, When the Deputy Commissioners asked whether Brati had come to their place, Jishu immediately packed Ronu off to Bombay. When she heard of the burn moil in Calcutta, she rushed from the United States to Bombay, but not to Calcutta because she had heard that rich persons and honest traders were being killed. 'To conceal her wealth, she put on a cotton sari and traveled second class' (108). Molly Mitter could not know the communist uprising, nor could she see the character of Brati and his friends.

Thus, Mahasweta Devi has presented a picture of a society that was blind to the injustice being done to the weaker section despite the fighting and killing going on all around. To create new social order, the novelist has drawn attention to the problems of the disparity between the rich and the poor, the apathy for an atrocity of those who want to cleanse the society of prevailing evils.

#### **Work Cited :**

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