

## MALE CHAUVINISM IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S *MOTHER OF 1084*

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### Abstract

*Mahasweta Devi describes the basic and essential complexities of human nature. In most of her works, she deals with different aspects of the human characters. Exploration of man-woman relationships, social vs. individual tensions, and alienation of the modern individual are the major themes of his plays. The female protagonist becomes the victim of the cruelty of his male counterparts. Mother 1084 one of Mahasweta Devi's finest dramatic works, is a play originally written in Bengali and later translated into English by Samik Bandyopadhyay and published in 2010. . In the play, Mahasweta Devi presents the futile struggle of a woman in the male-dominated society of post-Independence, India. In this play, the hypocrisy of the male-dominated middle-class society and its brutal hostility against women is exposed. She exposes the hypocrisy of the male chauvinists and severely attacks the sham moral standards of the so-called civilized urban middle-class society of post-Independence India. The frustrated male members try to subjugate women to prove their power in the social hierarchy. The play Mother of 1084 spans just over twenty –four hours in terms of time frame, but this single day symbolizes an entire journey and process of evolution in the life of the protagonist Sujata. It is the rising of an apolitical mother, it is a rebirth of a new person with social and political understandings and conflict, and it is the death of the suppressed, unrecognized voice and birth of a bold, politically conscious, socially determined mother. The novel Mother of 1084 moves around the main character Sujata, who lived in Calcutta. She belonged to a rich family. She was born in an affluent and conservative family. It was suggested that she should complete her Bachelor Degree so that it could help her marriage. Sujata was married to Dibyananta Chatterjee, who was a Chartered Accountant. Sujata gave birth to two sons and two daughters in her thirty-four years of her married life. Brati was closest to her among all her children as well as with whom she shared a special relationship. One morning Sujata heard the news of her son Brati's death and police were enquiring about a dead body of a Naxalite with dead-body Number 1084, her son's mysterious death made sujata shocked. Police asked Dibyanath to ask him to identify the dead body but the father of Brati, refused to go there. He also stopped his other family members from doing so, but Brati's mother Sujata decided to go there, throwing all the false social constraints, which were made by the patriarchal system.*

**Keywords:** motherhood, empowerment, selfhood, respect, sympathetic and values.

Indian literature always reflects the hopes and aspirations of people. Most of these woman novelists are known for the bold views that are reflected in their novels. The last two decades have witnessed phenomenal success in feminist writings of Indian English Literature. Her novels consist of the latest burning issues related to women as well as those issues that have existed in society for a long. The title of the proposed article is **Male Chauvinism in**

**Mahasweta Devi's Mother of 1084.** It makes a modest attempt to explain that the female characters' sufferings, plight, despair, agony, and discrimination are due to the result of their desire to conform to the expectations of Indian society. Most Indian women living in orthodox and conservative families feel inhibited to raise their voices against the aggressive dominance of men owing to their inferiority complex and the rigid code of conduct imposed on them. It is

wrong to assume now that women know only their homes. It is wrong to say that being ignorant of the ways of the world, women experience untold and intolerable hardships if they come out of their homes. However, a vast majority of women, even now, continue to lose their identity, independence, and self-respect. Women are pawns in the hands of their husbands. They should realize how important they are not only at home but also in the society in which they live.

Mahasweta Devi focuses on the social and domestic problems of women in her novels. She raises her voice against female oppression and spells out the problems of women with such a clear conviction through her characters that the readers should pause and ponder over it. She voices her objection to male chauvinism as well as men's irresponsible behavior which leads to disastrous consequences. Women generally bear the heaviest burden of marginalization and exploitation by society as a whole. Inequality, discrimination, harassment, atrocities, and shame have become the way of women's life and increased manifold in Indian society. Mahasweta Devi in her play *Mother of 1084* takes a view on a complex issue, conflict in human heart whether to go with intense human feelings or to go with much trodden path of pragmatic wisdom which kills human feelings in the name of discipline, peace and order. Mahasweta Devi aptly presents the picture of dilemma way of life and basic human kindness. Mahasweta Devi, a social activist, is one of the most noted Bengali writers of this century. Mahasweta Devi and her writings stand as a distinct category in Indian literature. Feminism for such women is certainly very different from the Western ideals of feminism. Swami Vivekananda said: As for feminism, we need not copy the west, "it is very difficult to understand why in this country so much difference is made between men and women,

whereas the Vedanta declares that the same conscious self is present in all beings. Educate your women first and leave them to themselves; then they tell you what reforms are necessary for them. Men's right to interference is limited entirely to giving education. Women must be put in a position to solve their problems in their way. No one can or ought to do this for them. And our Indian women are as capable of doing it as any in the world. Liberty is the first condition of growth. It is wrong, a thousand times wrong if any of you dares to say, "I will work out the salvation of this woman." I asked again and again. What I think of the widow problem and what I think of the woman's question? Let me answer once and for all. Am I a widow that you ask me that, nonsense, am I a woman that you ask again and again who are you to solve women's problems? Are you the lord that you should rule every widow and every woman? Hands of them will solve their problems. (76) Education is the tool that can break the pattern of gender discrimination and bring lasting change for women. Women can gain status which transforms into power to influence their families and societies.

Mahasweta Devi's Bengali short fiction *Hajar Churashir Ma*, translated by SamikBandyopadhyay as *Mother of 1084* is a moving story of an apolitical mother and published in 2010. The entire story unfolds within the time frame of a day. The chapters are divided into the four phases of a day: "morning", "afternoon", "late afternoon" and "evening". It opens on the morning of January 17, when Sujata broods back on the day when Brati' was to be born. One morning Sujata heard the news of her son Brati's death and police were enquiring about a dead body of Naxalite with Dead-Body Number 1084. Her son's mysterious death made Sujata shocked. The family was ruled by two people Dibyanath and Dibyanath's mother. Sujata never raised her voice against Dibyanath, because she was simply a victim of

patriarch society, which suppressed women and their feelings. Sujata, like many other women from similar layer of society has remained blissfully unaware of the political happenings around her. She has never taken any personal interest in understanding it nor had anyone tried to make her understand the conditions or discuss about it. That is one of the reasons why she does not understand why her husband and elder son get so perturbed and upset at being asked to go to Kantapukur. Kantapukur is a government morgue, where the corpses of all those killed by the state machinery are kept for identification. She is shocked to learn that, her youngest son, and the one whom she had always held close to her heart, Brati was also involved in such movements and had got brutally killed by the state machinery. The first shock for Sujata was that, Brati was an active part of this movement about which she did not know, since she felt that Brati had kept no secrets from her. Now two years later, from that fateful day, when Brati and his comrades were killed, paradoxically also Brati's birthday (17th January), Sujata stands at crossroads in her life. It is evident that the mother child relationship with her other three children –Jyoti, Nipa and Tuli are extremely flimsy. All are caught up in their own worlds of disingenuousness and insincerity to have any sensitivity around them. Perhaps it is their way of pretending that everything is all right. But Mahasweta Devi has been able to locate the distanced relationship between Sujata and her other three children within the structures of the patriarchal society. Dibyanath, Sujata's husband had no interest in her physically, except when he wanted another child. Having done his 'job', he would play no further part as a parent.

The opening of the novel, *Mother of 1084*, is very charming. Sujata at the age of fifty-three was back on a morning of twenty-two years ago in dream

remembering packing her bag with towel, blouse, sari, toothbrush, and other necessary things to go to be admitted to nursing home because she had been experiencing waves of labor pain before the birth of the youngest member in the family- Brati. Mahasweta writes : 'The first pain came in the bathroom, and trembled all over. The sight of blood frightened her. She packed up all her things, herself, and asked the cook to call a taxi' (2). When Sujata was admitted to Nursing home before Brati's birth, Jyoti was ten, Neepa eight and Tuli six. But what was pathetic was that during the delivery Sujata not only used to be deserted by her mother-in-law, but also by her husband, Dibyanath – a womanizer. Dibyanath was only interested in Sujata's recovery of health after each delivery: 'Are you taking your tonic regularly ? Dibyanath's voice sounded deep and phlegmy. When a restless lust stirred him, Dibyanath's throat seemed to secrete phlegm till his voice labored under a viscous load' (3). The paper "Sexual Violence" is dedicated to a detailed analysis of sexual abuse of the rape. Violence against women is one of the commonest crimes in the world, which most often goes unnoticed and unpunished. Men use violence to control and subjugate women. It forces women to toe the line and accept their inferior position. Wife battering, rape, and other forms of violence bring home to us the terrifying conviction of male power in its unquestioned right to control women or children, vulnerable to it. Sandra Butler, a sociologist concerned with the traumatic effects of incestuous assaults, emphasizes the crucial role of the early stage of psychological development of children who are sexually abused by a male relative (42). While sex is a biological phenomenon, the attributes of the masculine and feminine are constructed through gender paradigms which are to give a sense of identity to the individual in a society. Gender politics is a universal problem. He shows in his plays the

instinct of his heroines to rebel when suppressed or exploited.

Dibyanath is the bloody wretch, bereft of all graces of humanism. Dibyanath being the only son had been pampered with a vengeance. He had four children, but his wife recollects that he had never helped during pregnancy or at the time of the childbirth. Sujata could not forget his uncaring attitude. He had made his wife depressed. This is evident from the words of Sujata when she goes to the hospital on her own for Brati's birth and the hospital authorities ask her,

"Why did you come by yourself?

My husband's out of town.

Sujata was surprised. She had not expected her husband to come with

her even if he had been in town. Why should the doctor expect it? Dibyanath

never came with her, never accompanied her when it was time. He slept in a

room on the second floor lest the cries of the newborn disturbed his sleep. He

would never come down to ask about the children when they were ill. But he

noticed things, he noticed Sujata, he had to be sure that Sujata was fit enough

to bear a child again". (pg 3)

Dibyanath did not love children, not even his own. He did not care for the sick children, but so great a slave of carnality he was that he would try to see whether his wife was in a state to bear the next child. He was so great a duffer that he cared not in violating or defiling a wife whether during pregnancy or otherwise, that it amounted to marital rape. He did not care that an intercourse done perforce was a culpable offence. The rogue did not care for the law. He could force himself upon his wife without caring that he was inflicting pain on a woman who was in the delicate state of pregnancy, a beastly fellow he

was. Poor Sujata suffered silently all the indignities perpetrated on her. He treated her like a door mat. Dibyanath's carnality made his very selfish and dominating. He would not like to be disturbed by the cries of a new born child, nor would he care if his own child was ill. He slept in the room on the second floor lest the cries of the new born disturbed his sleep. He would never come down to ask about the children when they were ill. She loved her children so much that she asked the doctor to save the child it was not possible to save both of them. She had no grief when he got the news of his son's death. He did not allow Sujata to take his car to the morgue lest it should be spotted by anybody. He ordered that Brati's photo be removed from the corridor; he was in a way trying to wipe off Brati and his memories completely. Dibyanath did not feel that celebration on the birthday of his deceased son would in a way be invidious. He after all a businessman was devoid of emotions and feelings. In spite of being so worthless, he was always arrogant to his wife. He had not allowed her the most common rights of a wife. He did not have any saving grace in his character. He was diabolic. None in his family or outside chided him for his carnality except Brati. From birth to the upbringing of her children, Sujata was left alone. But, she had a deep relation with Brati. Brati, born six years after the birth of Sujata and Dibyanath's third child Tuli, was the one child born out of Sujata's own desire to have a child. So when Brati died, no one was as affected as Sujata. No good husband will leave his wife alone at such critical times, more contemptible it was that he supported his mother who had like him left her daughter-in-law every time she was to give birth to a child. Mother and son were the chips of the same block.

The play dwells on an extremely sensitive social and political issue, namely, the conflict between the male chauvinists and an individual woman. The

dramatist highlights the view that discrimination and gender politics at any level are evil and that everyone has an equal right to peaceful life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The male chauvinists of Indian society are of the view that everyone has equal rights to peaceful life, individual liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But the male chauvinists of the Indian middle-class society's establishment do not grant these goals and thereby perpetuate discrimination and gender politics. Unable to free herself from the clutches of the male dominated society, Sujata fails to realize her own being. But after her discovery of Brati through the confrontation with people outside her respectable existence, Sujata does not remain a passive sufferer. She feels punished for not knowing her son, Brati. She decides to carry out what he left unfulfilled..

Mahesweta Devi in her novel *Mother of 1084* portrayed the woman, who suffered throughout her life for her children's happiness but on the other hand her husband Dibyanath never cared about her feelings. He considered himself superior in the house and did not give importance to other's feelings. His superiority impacted his children and they were nurtured and influenced by their father's qualities. Mahasweta Devi proves that male is the root cause of female suffering. A woman has never been considered equal to a man. Man has always looked down upon women as the weaker sex. The ruling of the male in the family can be considered patriarchal. All the decisions about women, children, and property are taken by the head of the family. Sometimes this authority creates a feeling of superiority over the male head of the family. The head considers him superior to women. This type of attitude begins to create a problem for female existence. Mahasweta Devi 's female characters are struggling and suffering in all her novels. They confront several hardships and their life is one of endless suffering. They all suffer at

the hands of their chauvinistic husbands and their family members.

But his wife Sujata could not change her children's way of life and her husband's superiority and domination over her. She also thought that everything must be done only after her husband Dibyanath's approval and nothing should go without her husband's notice. Sujata had only her physical presence in her family. She could not say even a single word against her torments and oppressions. She never raised her voice against Dibyanath because she was simply a victim of patriarchal society, which suppressed women and their feelings. Mahesweta Devi portrayed women as objects of pleasure. The main character of this novel Sujata is shown as a victim in the male dominated society. Dibyanath negated her wife Sujata's motherly love and even he tried to hide the matter of his son's death and warned sujata to close to matter about Brati's death and stopped to talk about Brati. He only focused on his reputation in society. He had no interest in sujata's physical condition after she gave birth to her first child and he would not play the role of a father. Sujata knew about her husband Dibyanath's extra marital affair but she could not raise her voice. Sujata lived in a patriarchal society, where woman is considered as a sex object and as an object for reproduction. Women are not expected to express their own concern. Even Sujata could not express her grief and love her son Brati after the death of her son in Naxalite Movement. She had to hide her grief in front of her husband Dibyanath, who only thought about his reputation in the society. Throughout the novel Mahesweta Devi portrayed the suffering of Sujata under her husband Dibyanath's dominant character. She had lost her hope, her other self. His death did not create destruction or shock for the other family members as it was for Sujata. The other members of his family had suitably forgotten his

very existence. As she relives the spirit frightening and dastard killing of her son, Sujata searches for an explanation, but fails to find any authority for his death. But at the same time, Sujata gains a new insight into the society and realizes that the cancer of illegitimacy has spread throughout the society –in the “administration, in the cultural-intellectual establishment, in politics, in the existence of a whole anti-social fringe of killers prepared to serve the interests of any organized police force anywhere.” And the play ends with Sujata exhorting the audience that is people, not to be silent sufferers, but respond actively to the reality and the cause. She knows it is a common cause in which she has merged her ‘self’: Why don’t you speak? Speak, for heaven’s sake, speak, speak, speak! How long will you endure it in silence? Where is the place where there’s no killer, no bullets, no prison, no vans? Where can you escape it all . . . in Calcutta, in West Bengal, from north to south, from east to west? (35. Here it is the voice of a universal protest against the seemingly immovable and heartless society in which we live. And, by the time she makes this stirring appeal to the audience, Sujata shakes herself off the shackles of the patriarchal values enjoined on woman. Enlightened, she takes up cudgels against the society itself. /Symbolically, Sujata moves from the world of innocence to the world of experience. As a result, she discovers inside herself a wish for self-realization has been so far suppressed due to the lack of courage. **Nivedita sen and Nikhil Yadav** rightly say, “Devi’s oeuvre largely comprises stories around contemporary social and

political stories, a majority of which span a reasonably free time range in independent India” (14). Brati’s death is a moment of self-discovery for the mother. She journeys into the past to look back into her personal life too, her daily humiliation as a woman and her silent, determined struggle for self-autonomy and freedom which ironically gathers momentum from her son’s death. Sujata was Mother of 1084 declared loudly and clearly that the movement had taken a heavy toll of 1084 young lives and Sujata felt the same torment as she did when her and son was killed. Brati was the 1084<sup>th</sup> youth who was killed. It was for this that Sujata became “Mother of 1084”.

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