



Familial problems and the self-realization of a woman as a mother expressed by Mahasweta Devi in ‘Mother of 1084’

VIKRANT THAKORBHAI PATEL
Research Scholar

Abstract:

This paper deals with the novel of Mahasweta Devi entitled ‘Mother of 1084’ which is first appeared in Bengali with the title ‘Hazar Chaurasi Ma’. Brati’s father and other members of the family are involved in the world of affluence, drink, prostitution, womanizing etc. They seem to be quite selfish and arrogant people. Brati and his mother are put at one end and the rest of the family is at the other hand. It is not a political work but a familial and cultural work. The work is about a mother who is shocked to find his son dead and his body lied in the morgue. She is even more surprised to find the fact that her son is a Naxalite. She wonders why he has chosen to be the Naxalite. The mother finally realizes that she has been living a false life and finally gets her self- realization. However, the title is symbolic. ‘The Mother of 1084’ is going to be the mother of many such. She is the mother of corpse number 1084.

Keywords: Family, Naxalite, Morgue

‘Mother of 1084’ is a novel written by Mahasweta Devi which is first appeared in Bengali with the title Hazar Chaurasi Ma, in special autumn festival issue of the periodical, Prasad, in October 1973. This work is perhaps the best one by the author and it is unique in terms of its treatment as she does not use rural or even jungle background here. She instead uses the Urban and more real background here. The work is about a mother who is shocked to find his son dead and his body lied in the morgue. She is even more surprised to find the fact that her son is a Naxalite. She wonders why he has chosen to be the Naxalite. However, the title is symbolic. ‘The Mother of 1084’ is going to be the mother of many such. She is the mother of corpse number 1084.

The storyline is clearly distinguished between two contradictory things. Brati and his mother are put at one end and the rest of the family is at the other hand. It is not a political work but a familial and cultural work. Brati’s father and other elders or even juniors seem to belong to some other world, people who are involved in the world of affluence, drink, prostitution, womanizing etc. They seem to be quite selfish and arrogant people. It appears that they belong to the world that would like to protect itself and its value more than anything and that is the reason why Brati’s corpse has not been recognized by his father when it lies in Kantapukur morgue. It is done by him in order to save his reputation as it would bring bad name to the family. As far as Dibyanath Chatterjee’s character is concerned, he is a haughty and self-satisfied man. He is the hypocrite who wants to keep his public stature spotless and for that he can risk his personal emotions. He also knows the tricks of playing cards.

Brati, the son of both Dibyanath and Sujata, believed to have been involved in the activities which are against the society and nation and is dead in one such incident. He is the one who is fed up of his family, especially father. The son is brutally killed because of his ideology of advocating the brutal killings of class enemies, collaborators with the state and counter-revolutionaries within the party. His character is recalled by his mother Sujata on the eve of his death anniversary and the novel actually starts at this point. Sujata tries to meet each and every person who knows Brati and by which tries to justify the actions of Brati. She also wants to get the idea about Brati's revolutionary mindset and reasons behind it. Thus, Sujata is a mother who gets to know that he has been killed in one of the fake encounters that police used to do in 1970s against the Naxalites in Bengal and this novel is set against this backdrop. In order to get information, she meets his comrades. Thus, the novel talks about the victims of the movement in rural as well as Urban localities and also reveals the politics and the suffering of the families of those who had died.

In and all, the novel is more about Sujata than anything else. By the character of Sujata, Devi tries to advocate the fact that the women have eventually revolted against the society and men for their rights. The hypocrisy that is showcased here by Dibyanath and other males are basically opposed by Sujata. As an educated wife she feels humiliated at times and obviously she does not like this. To escape and to avoid her exploitation, Sujata takes a job at the age of 53 in the bank. She wants to live with dignity but no one in her family bothers to know the exact reason for her acceptance of the job and they do not seem to have any kind of happiness when Sujata accepts the job:

Nobody felt it necessary to discover why Sujata wanted a job. And it was not a big event... In the house, only Dibyanath and his mother were the centers of attraction. Sujata existed like a shadow; her existence of that of a follower-invisible and insignificant (17)

She is so angry with her husband Dibyanath that she has removed her husband's name from her consciousness as Dibyanath has refused to identify the corpse of his own son Brati. It is done by Dibyanath because he thinks that the tag of naxalite would bring bad name to the family.

That day Brati's father, along with Brati, died in Sujata's consciousness. The behavior of Brati's father has stunned her entire consciousness; everything was shaken, broken and scattered (15)

Now Sujata wants to have her own identity. It is the day of the engagement of her third child named Tuli. There is a big party thrown by Dibyanath at the house. So many guests are invited. However, Sujata abstains herself from the party and goes to Nandini who tells her that Brati loved Sujata and hated his father because of his ideology. Sujata returns late that night. Dibyanath is angry at her as she has not attended the party. He wants to know why she has not attended the party and was absent and where she has been the whole day. He asks her certain questions but she does not answer. Then Dibyanath forces her to answer, she just asks him to leave the room: "If you, now, do not go from here, I will leave, and will never return" (98). It results into the quarrel which can be best understood by the readers through the following conversation where the voice of protest raised by Sujata against her husband for the first time. It is the symbol of the rebel against the male domination.

"Can't I inquire where you were for the whole day?"

"No"

"What?"

“Did I ever ask where you spent evenings during last thirty years...and why you paid the rent for the house of your form typist? You will not enquire even one thing; you will never ask!”

“Should I Go?”

“Yes Go”. (98)

Thus, she has acquired her self-realization at the end and leaves the house. She then decides to go to her son by dying so that she can meet him in the eternity.

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