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Reclaiming the Past and Reconstructing History: A Saga of Subaltern Representation in the Selected Dramatic Works of Mahasweta Devi

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Abstract

This research manuscript dissects the depiction of subaltern voices in the selected dramatic works of Mahasweta Devi, focusing on how her plays repossess marginalized histories and restructure prevailing historical narratives. Through an analytical investigation of her dramatic texts, the research discovers the practices of tribal communities, subjugated castes, women, and other socially barred groups who have been principally not present from conventional historiography. Drawing upon Subaltern Studies and postcolonial theoretical structures, the document scrutinizes Devi's dramatic approaches in challenging hegemonic discussions and centering the organization, resistance, and intellectual individuality of the marginalized. Her plays provide as substitute historical documentations that unearth constructions of exploitation and societal discrimination while recuperating suppressed memories. The study disputes that Mahasweta Devi's dramaturgy alters literature into an influential channel for historical reconsideration and subaltern empowerment.

Key Words: Subaltern, History, Exploitation, Marginalization, Hegemony, Resistance

The revival of marginalized voices has appeared as one of the most important apprehensions of postcolonial literary studies. Histories created under colonial and elite - nationalist structures have often disregarded the practices of tribal communities, peasants, women, laborers, and other repressed groups. In reaction to such eliminations, Subaltern Studies

scholars required to rewrite history from below by displaying the agency and resistance of oppressed communities. Literature, predominantly drama, has played a decisive role in this enterprise by reimagining the past and taxing leading historical descriptions. Among the major Indian writers engaged in this venture, Mahasweta Devi occupies a distinctive

position. Through her fiction, essays, and dramatic works, she time and again embodied the lives and struggles of tribal communities and other subaltern communities who were refuted visibility within representative histories.

Mahasweta Devi's theatrical works serve as substitute historical narratives that dispute the influence of prevailing historiography. Her plays revisit forgotten happenings, restructure oppressed histories, and showcase the voices of those marginalized by caste, class, gender, and colonial supremacy. Rather than representing history as a fixed documentation of kings, rulers, and political elites, Devi depicts it as a site of disagreement where contending narratives struggle for acknowledgment. Her dramatic demonstrations unearth the cruelty entrenched in official historical discourse while recuperating the group of subaltern communities.

This manuscript scrutinizes the demonstration of subalternity in selected dramatic works of Mahasweta Devi, principally *Mother of 1084*, *Bayen*, and *Water*. It disputes that Devi reclaims the past by restructuring history from the viewpoint of the oppressed and by this means defies principal narratives of state, development, and social development. Through her depiction of tribal resistance, women's coercion, and class exploitation, Devi produces a counter - history that establishes the experiences of marginalized communities and transforms literature into a influential appliance of societal interference.

Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016) was not simply a literary figure but also an activist intensely dedicated to the rights of tribal and marginalized communities. Her involvement with the Lodha, Shabar, and Kheria tribes informed much of her literary creation. Unlike traditional historians who depend on official archives, Devi drew upon verbal traditions, folk memories, and lived practices. As a result, her writings dare the influence of state - sponsored histories and disclose substitute perceptions

deep - rooted in subaltern awareness. "She critiques the 'construction' of the political as well as the socio - religious - economic constitution of the nation. She critiques the political "Constitution of India" as it gives the marginals basic rights and representation only in law, not in application". (Gupta 31)

The advent of Subaltern Studies in the 1980s provided an essential theoretical outline for understanding Devi's work. Ranajit Guha delineates the subaltern as those groups excluded from hegemonic constructions of power and representation (Guha 7). Likewise, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak disputes that the subaltern is often denied the capability to speak within leading systems of knowledge and demonstration (Spivak 287). Mahasweta Devi's dramatic works deal with specifically this difficulty by creating spaces where marginalized voices become audible.

History in Devi's plays is not an impartial account of events. As a substitute, it is a contested landscape shaped by power relations. The official historical documentation often expunges tribal revolutions, peasant movements, and women's resistance. Devi contradicts this removal by restructuring historical experiences from below. Her theatrical accounts unearth how principal groups maneuver historical recollection while concurrently preserving the combined experiences of oppressed communities.

Through this procedure of historical reconstruction, Devi exhibits that subaltern groups are not unreceptive victims but active participants in shaping history. Their struggles, sacrifices, and acts of confrontation become fundamental to her dramatic imagination. Accordingly, her plays function as acts of historical recovery that confront hegemonic construal of the past.

Although extensively known as a novel, *Mother of 1084* has also been adapted for theatrical performance and occupies a momentous place in dialogues of Mahasweta

Devi's dramatic dream. The work discovers the consequences of the Naxalite movement and inspects how state brutality suppresses rebel voices. Through the character of Sujata, Devi restructures the history of a political movement that conventional narratives recurrently condense to cruelty and criminality. The title itself denotes the dehumanization of the subaltern. Brati, the revolutionary son, loses his identity and becomes simply "corpse number 1084." This mathematical designation mirrors the state's endeavor to expunge individual histories and change political resistance into unidentified statistics. Devi exhibits how official institutions depersonalize those who confront established power structures.

Sujata's journey comprises a method of historical recuperation. As she explores her son's life and death, she reveals concealed narratives of exploitation, disparity, and political subjugation. Through her perception, readers and audiences expand access to experiences barred from principal historical discussion. Her search becomes a symbol for reclaiming oppressed and suppressed histories.

The play also underscores class divisions within postcolonial India. Brati's activism appears from his recognition of structural inequalities touching workers, peasants, and the metropolitan poor. Official narratives render the Naxalite movement as a danger to national steadiness, but Devi divulges the socio - economic circumstances that generated radical awareness. By representing the point of views of activists and marginalized communities, she restructures a history missing from mainstream reports. Moreover, Sujata's conversion disputes patriarchal constructions that impound women to household roles. Her involvement with political realities displays how women can become agents of historical perceptive and resistance. Therefore, the work links gendered subjugation with broader questions of subaltern demonstration.

In *Mother of 1084*, history is not merely remembered; it is questioned. Devi forces audiences to question whose stories are conserved and whose experiences are expunged. Through this questioning, the work becomes a influential appraisal of official historiography and a testimony to the pliability of subaltern reminiscence.

Amongst Mahasweta Devi's most celebrated dramatic works, *Bayen* tenders a insightful investigation of gender, caste, and societal elimination. The play centers on Chandidasi, a woman banished by her community and branded a "bayen" or witch. Through her story, Devi unearths the mechanisms through which patriarchal societies marginalize women and obliterate their histories.

Chandidasi's conversion into a societal exile reflects broader patterns of gendered coercion. Her community constructs her individuality through superstition and fear, depriving her of agency and humanity. Consequently, she occupies a transitional condition outside societal structures while concurrently becoming indispensable to the community's performance. The figure of the bayen denotes the historical marginalization of women whose experiences confront principal norms. Conventional histories time and again celebrate male heroes while neglecting women's contributions and anguishes. Devi argues against this propensity by placing Chandidasi at the midpoint of the story. Her voice and experiences become the principal means through which history is understood.

The play also scrutinizes the intersection of caste and gender. Chandidasi belongs to a socially marginalized community, and her coercion cannot be separated from caste - based prejudice. Devi exhibits how several forms of marginalization interrelate to produce subaltern identities. Such an intersectional viewpoint enlarges the range of historical

investigation beyond singular categories of repression.

Extensively, *Bayen* reclaims women's agency by enlightening Chandidasi's guts and pliability. Despite societal segregation, she eventually acts to protect the community that has rejected her. This act destabilizes principal stereotypes and confirms her humanity. Devi by this means restructures history from the perception of a woman whom society seeks to silence. "God, if I'm truly a bayen, then all the creatures of the nether world should follow my orders. Why don't they? Why can't I then stop the train? Why? Why can't I stop the train? Stop the train, don't come any nearer. There's a mountain of bamboo poles here. The train'll jump the track, and it'll be disaster. Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!" (Devi 120-121)

The dramatic construction of *Bayen* more contributes to its subaltern politics. Dialogue, performance, and oral storytelling generate a communal gap where marginalized voices can be heard. The play thus challenges the power of written historical records and stresses substitute forms of remembering the past. Through Chandidasi's narrative, Devi explores the cruelty of patriarchal historical narratives while concurrently recuperating the experiences of women barred from official histories. The play becomes an influential work of feminist historiography that reclaims repressed voices and restructures combined reminiscence.

Another significant dramatic work by Mahasweta Devi is *Water*, which deals with problems of environmental prejudice, dislodgment, and societal discrimination. The play dissects how developmental policies frequently benefit privileged interests at the cost of marginalized communities. Through its depiction of struggles over access to water, the work emphasizes the connection between authority and resource allocation.

In official narratives, progress is recurrently represented as an emblem of

national development. Large - scale schemes such as dams, irrigation systems, and industrial growth are celebrated as accomplishments of rejuvenation. Nonetheless, these narratives time and again disregard the practices of communities displaced or insolvent by such projects. Devi disputes this commemorative discussion by focusing on those who tolerate the costs of progress. "They won't allow us to touch it - we're the untouchables. Even at the government wells, we aren't allowed to draw water. That's why we have to go and dig at the sands of Charsa". (Devi 126). The subaltern characters in *Water* embody communities barred from decision - making processes. Their voices are not present from governmental reports and strategy documents, yet their lives are intensely affected by developmental interferences. Devi restructures history by foregrounding their experiences and revealing the imbalanced share of authority.

The play also exposes the environmental aspects of subalternity. Ecological dilapidation unreasonably influences marginalized populations who depend openly on natural resources for endurance. By connecting environmental apprehensions with societal justice, Devi widens the range of historical investigation and exhibits the interconnectedness of ecological and human resistances.

Resistance occupies a fundamental place in *Water*. The affected communities do not inactively acknowledge exploitation; rather, they categorize, protest, and confront constructions of power. Such acts of resistance contest stereotypes of subaltern tameness and establish the agency of marginalized communities. Through its description of progress discourse, *Water* recreates a substitute history of transformation. Instead of celebrating technological advancement, the play underlines human misery, displacement, and resistance. As a result, it serves as a counter - narrative that inquires dominant suppositions about progress and national development.

The importance of Mahasweta Devi's theatrical works can be better understood through the theoretical lens of Subaltern Studies. Ranajit Guha's evaluation of elitist historiography supplies an essential structure for analyzing Devi's rebuilding of history. According to Guha, conventional histories privilege elite actors while ignoring the political consciousness of subaltern groups (Guha 14). Devi's plays openly defy this propensity by centering marginalized experiences.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's prominent essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" further illuminates Devi's literary project. Spivak argues that subaltern voices are often mediated or distorted by dominant discourses (Spivak 308). Devi's dramatic works react to this dilemma by creating narrative spaces where marginalized subjects coherent their own experiences. While entire demonstration may stay unfeasible, her plays endeavor to condense the distance between subaltern truth and literary expression.

Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony also establishes appropriate. Hegemonic power functions not only through coercion but also through cultural and ideological supremacy. Official histories supply to this procedure by legitimizing existing power structures. Devi resists such supremacy by producing counter - hegemonic narratives that dare acknowledged versions of the past.

Her theatrical works thus function as sites of intellectual resistance. They candidly unearth the ideological basis of historical segregation and tender substitute viewpoints grounded in subaltern practice. In doing so, they supply to broader attempts to democratize historical awareness and illustration. An inveterate subject matter across Mahasweta Devi's dramatic works is the connection between memory and resistance. Official histories frequently depend upon forgetting. Events that defy prevailing narratives are marginalized, vague, or erased. Devi's plays

refuse to accept this procedure by preserving combined memories of coercion and resistance.

Reminiscence in her works is not simply personal; it is combined and political. Communities remember histories of exploitation, dislocation, and confrontation that official records disregard. These memories become sources of individuality and harmony. By dramatizing such memories, Devi transforms literature into documents of subaltern practice. Counter - history appears through this act of commemoration. Rather than accepting principal investigations of the past, Devi recreates history from substitute viewpoints. Her theatrical narratives expose the gaps and silences within official historiography while establishing the historical agency of marginalized communities.

Resistance is indivisible from this procedure. The revival of repressed histories challenges structures of supremacy by revealing their establishments. Thus, Devi's dramatic works do more than embody subaltern communities; they take part in continuing struggles for acknowledgment and justice.

Mahasweta Devi's dramatic works comprise an influential interference in deliberations concerning history, demonstration, and social justice. Through plays such as *Mother of 1084*, *Bayen*, and *Water*, she retrieves the past by reconstructing history from the viewpoint of marginalized communities. Her dramatic narratives dare prevailing historiography, uncover constructions of repression, and recuperate voices barred from official documentations.

The depiction of subaltern groups in Devi's works mirrors a wider dedication to democratizing historical information. Tribal communities, women, laborers, and displaced populations appear not as inactive sufferers but as active agents competent of resistance and alteration. By foregrounding their experiences, Devi creates counter - histories that challenge hegemonic narratives and confirm the

importance of marginalized lives. Her contribution expands beyond literature. Through the amalgamation of activism, historical investigation, and imaginative expression, Devi exhibits how literature can function as an apparatus of societal interference. Her dramatic works encourage audiences to question prevailing descriptions of history and recognize the significance of subaltern perspectives.

While Mahasweta Devi's dramatic works have frequently been examined through the lens of subalternity and resistance, a dramaturgical investigation exhibits that the depiction of oppressed communities is achieved not only through thematic apprehensions but also through dramatic structure. The dramaturgy of Devi's dramas alters the stage into a location where dominant historical narratives are questioned and repressed voices are restored to historical visibility. Rather than presenting history as a permanent documentation, her theatrical skills reveal it as a contested discussion twisted by relations of power.

Drawing upon Ranajit Guha's notion of the subaltern as barred from elite historiography, the dramas expound combined outfit through scenes of confrontation, communal discourse, and ritual performance. Characters who are conventionally not present from official history become lively producers of historical reminiscence. This dramaturgical approach aligns with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's argument that the subaltern cannot merely "speak" within hegemonic structures; as a substitute, Devi restructures theatrical liberty so that marginalized voices come out through performance, combined action, silence, and emblematic resistance.

For instance, in *Mother of 1084*, patchy dialogue, periodic structure, and shifting sequential sequences reflect the fractured recollection of political hostility. Sujata's steady reconstruction of her son's life becomes a

dramaturgical development of recuperating erased histories, thereby challenging official state narratives. Likewise, in *Bayen*, the central character Chandidasi's physical seclusion on stage, emblematic use of space, and repeated motifs of elimination dramatize caste repression while revealing the societal mechanisms that create the "untouchable" as both feared and silenced. The dramatic demonstration of spatial isolation becomes a quintessence of subaltern marginalization.

Similarly, *Water* employs representative stage images and combined characterization to signify the intersection of caste, gender, and financial abuse. The persistent exercise of communal scenes and ritualistic actions exhibits how daily performance itself becomes a means of preserving substitute historical awareness. Devi's dramaturgy consequently declines linear realism in favor of performative approaches that foreground memory, evidence, and united resistance.

This dramaturgical perception may also be understood through Bertolt Brecht's hypothesis of epic theatre. Though Devi writes within a distinct Indian societal - political background, her exercise of episodic creation, decisive distance, and historical reconstruction encourages audiences to inquire rather than simply empathize with the presented realities. The stage functions as a political liberty where viewers critically connect with the processes through which history is produced and oppressed communities are presented.

Accordingly, Mahasweta Devi's theatrical works should be understood not simply as literary depictions of subaltern lives but as performative interferences in historiography. Her dramaturgical skills emphasize the fundamental apprehensions of Subaltern Studies by transforming theatre into an optional documentation that challenges prevailing historical narratives and reconstructs history from the perception of those customarily excluded from official evidences. The

convergence of dramaturgy, subaltern hypothesis, and textual demonstration hence establishes Devi's plays as momentous contributions to postcolonial theatre and historiographical discussion.

The study of Mahasweta Devi's theatrical works unavoidably engages with the implications of translation, as most critical readings outside Bengal rely on English translations. Translation functions not simply as a linguistic transmit but as a cultural and political act that shapes the illustration of subaltern voices. Devi's dramas are intensely rooted in the socio - cultural realities of rural Bengal, integrating aboriginal idioms, dialects, folklore, verbal traditions, and caste - specific expressions that frequently defy entire equivalence in another language. Therefore, translated texts may lose nuances of local speech, performative rhythm, and cultural representation that are fundamental to the theatrical understanding. At the same time, translation permits Devi's evaluation of caste subjugation, gender prejudice, state violence, and historical marginalization to reach a wider national and global readership, in this manner extending the political significance of her theatre. The translator thus presumes the role of a cultural negotiator who negotiates between reliability to the source text and accessibility for varied audiences. This conciliation openly influences how subaltern identities, resistance, and historical recollection are interpreted. Hence, any study of Devi's dramas must distinguish that translation is not an impartial procedure but an interpretative intervention that concurrently broadens the reach of subaltern dialogue while certainly reshaping certain linguistic, cultural, and performative dimensions of the original theatrical texts.

Eventually, Mahasweta Devi's venture of retrieving the past stays intensely significant in current society. In an epoch marked by continuing struggles over reminiscence, identity, and demonstration, her dramatic works continue to remind us that history is

never impartial. It is a contested ground where voices contend for acknowledgment, and the revival of subaltern experiences remains crucial for attaining a more comprehensive consideration of the past.

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