

RESEARCH ARTICLE



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA  
2395-2636 (Print); 2321-3108 (online)

**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN THROUGH GENDERED LENS: A STUDY IN THE LIGHT  
OF MAHASWETA DEVI'S NOVEL *PROTI CHUWANNO MINUTE*  
(IN EVERY FIFTY-FOUR MINUTES)**

**Dr. GARGEE CHAKRABORTY**

Associate Professor, Department of English, D. K .College, Mirza, Assam



Article Received: 30/08/2021

Article Accepted: 9/10/2021

Published online: 11/10/2021

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.9.4.13](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.9.4.13)

**Abstract**

The novel *Proti Chuwanno Minute* (in every fifty-four minutes) by renowned Bengali novelist Mahasweta Devi starts on an alarming note referring to the rape of a woman called Mala Mondal and statistics related to rape in India. Its central character Putli is also raped and the novelist tries to capture the agony and the helplessness of the rape victim. Most of the criminals go scot free in the absence of proper police investigation and lack of witnesses. People who are working for these suffering women are themselves not sure about the result of protests they organize in the aftermath of such heinous crimes from time to time. They are sceptical about the role of police, family members, and witnesses turning violent, society's outlook towards rape victim and the social stigma and mental harassment.

Keywords: rape, violence, gender, stigma, harassment.

**Introduction**

'Violence against women' a phrase used in various day to day conducts to confine the activities of women and to quickly suggest that the various choices made by women are the causes of violence. Rape as a form of violence in Mahasweta Devi's fiction can be read allegorically as an appraisal from within of nationalism and decolonization. By creating the female subaltern as a composite symbol of femininity whose body is not simply the place of exploitation and torment, but a transformative figure of resistance. Devi's fiction radically destabilizes the basic premise of female susceptibility and the violent objectification of women in the context of rape as well as expected traumatic aftermath. Her protagonists gesture towards defiance and agency in the face of trauma, thereby calling for justice and social change. Rape functions at two levels: firstly as a critique of the

stark reality and extent of the violence perpetuated daily on the bodies of women; secondly it works as a commonplace in which the violation of the women's body becomes suggestive of the violation of the land and its beleaguered people by the ruling elite under decolonization.

**Objective:** The paper attempts to study how the novelist looks into rape as a form of violence and the pain, trauma, societal stigma and mental harassment associated with it.

**About the Novelist**

Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016) was an Indian writer in Bengal and an activist. Her outstanding literary works include *Hazar Churashir Maa*, *Rudali* and *Aranyer Adhikar*. She was a self-proclaimed leftist who worked for the rights and empowerment of the tribal people of West Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh states of India. She was a

achiever par excellence. Devi was one of India's leading literary figures from the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century and early 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries and her literary legacy includes novels, plays, essays, and short stories. Devi is remembered for immersing herself in the lives of India's underprivileged and side-lined as she narrated the discrimination against them in her works. She received Jnanpith Award, India's highest literary award, in 1996. She was also the recipient of Ramon Magsaysay award in 1997. From British Colonialism to post Independence India, Bengali writer and social activist Mahasweta Devi has observed decades of political change that have climaxed in India's crucial presence on the global stage. Inspiring both young and old with her strong position, Devi was a constant crusader against the oppression of India's tribal populations. Devi has been a tireless advocate for the socio-economic protection, security, and political well-being of the Adivasis, also known as the Scheduled Tribes. Described as a political anthropologist for her keen ethnographic observation, Devi captures an ethnographic realism in her writing and a social conscience that have influenced all phases of her political career. As a writer Devi became a voice of marginalized communities. Long before Devi started capturing miseries of her fellow citizens, she had been herself at the receiving end. She had to do several odd jobs starting from selling dye power to supplying monkeys for research to the US, so that she can supplement her husband's income, especially after the birth of their son. Even though she could manage a govt. job at the Post and Telegraph department, she was targeted as a communist and terminated from her job. She also overcame a broken marriage and a period of acute depression to establish herself as a people's writer.

### **The plot**

The novel starts with a striking statistics- in India a girl is raped in every 54 minutes, quoting National Crime Research Bureau, 1991 with reference to a rape of a woman called Mala Mondal. Putli, the central character of the novel lived in a small township with her parents. Her parents were Professors in the town. Sujata, a spinster and also friend of Putli's parents, is Putli's mentor and guide in the cultural and cultural and social engagements.

She is one of the member of *Poribeshdudun protirudh* (Environmental Pollution Protection) Club and very active and enthusiastic member of it. Putli's parents are representatives of the middle class who wants a secure life for themselves without giving attention to whatever is happening in and around them. They maintain a safe distance from any kind of protest or raising concern or voicing out their displeasure. Putli's siblings are ambitious and the small town to pursue success and to achieve what they want. Putli stayed back with her parents. Her parents were very emotional about their abode 'Purbasha', the symbol of their love, taste, faith and much more.

Putli visits cultural club, environment awareness meeting, and also an active member organizing programmes against exploitation, oppression against women by their own family and society at large. However, Putli does not understand the complexities of these issues though she believes in the cause. Somu was another hand to join Sujata in her fight against injustice. He said that rapes used to happen earlier also. But it did not get the attention it deserved. Putli was surprised to know that Mala Mondal's rapist might come out of jail due to lack of evidence. The poor soul was thrown out of her house by her husband. Staying at her father's house, she used to sell vegetables in front of the bridge and while returning she was raped. There are suspects like Chand but nobody dares to come out openly against him.

Putli was in love with Somu. Though her parents were not happy about her choice, they believed in giving freedom to their children. They realized that life in this small township and the choices it offer are very limited. Putli was fairly good-looking, bright and intelligent.

Sujata's octogenarian mother expired. Putli stayed with her as a solid mental support. On the day of the cremation, when the male friends of her group are yet to return from cremation, Putli decided to return home. It was getting dark in the evening. But she thought that she can manage. All of a sudden darkness engulfed her due to load shedding. She still decided to walk ahead, though a bit afraid. She heard the sound of a car stopping by

her. Some people hurriedly got down from the car. While she was thinking of crossing them quickly, some unknown faces with professional skill put hands over her mouth and some greedy eyes caught hold of her hands. She could sense that all of them are drunk. Pulling her inside the car they left the place.

After four days, Putli's body was found lying naked under a culvert. She was still alive. Gang-raped Putli was admitted in Civil Hospital after eight days. The girl's body was a witness to the amount of physical and mental torture she had gone through. She was lying in the hospital bed-broken, blank and beaten. After her gang rape Putli was thrown out of the car, resulting in grievous injuries in her body.

The small town of Putli, Somu, Sujata, Nihar and Ashrukona could not bear the hurt. In big cities like Calcutta rape is not uncommon. There were protests at times, but most of the times the city is too busy to take notice. Only a statement of half minute is issued in the assembly and forgotten. Purbasha is broken. Putli's parents blamed Sujata for this entire incident. Till then they felt so safe and contended in their close-knit home Purbasha. Again there is no evidence Putli was lying reactionless. Police is yet to take her statement.

Somu was shocked; he could not accept the fact that the girl lying on the hospital was his Putli. Finally when he saw the lifeless, pale Putli having wounds all over her body, he vomited and cried with pain and despair. Pressure built on police because Putli belonged to an affluent family unlike Maya Mondal. The news got published in popular newspaper. Memorandum was sent to DM and SP demanding punishment for the culprit. Meeting and protests continued. In between Putli's mother died out of shock. People who did not face calamity of this nature blamed the parents for giving unrealistic freedom to their daughter. Some people went to the extent of character assassination of the victim. Sujata said that in our country a girl is blamed for rape, no matter what. Even if the culprits are nabbed, they come out taking advantage of lack of witness. To continue with life sustaining the scandal is not easy at all in a small town. Question rose as to

whether Somu would be able to marry a rape victim and lead a normal and healthy life?

For a rape victim, the scar remains. Family in most cases does not provide shelter, society does not allow her to forget, and the wound remains fresh. Putli apparently became the reason for the destruction of her family. People who are envious of the family were criticizing them mercilessly. Another rape victim in the novel was Mitali Das. Her offenders also did not get punishment due to lack of witness. Meanwhile Putli was shifted to a Calcutta hospital. Somu and his friends approached a renowned lawyer named Barsha Patel. But the lawyer is cynical herself. It is difficult to prove a rape case. She explained the complexities associated with the rape case. The law regarding rape is very inhuman. Rape victims turn out to be only statistics in police diary. Not even one per cent cases is registered and followed up for further processing.

Trauma of rape completely demoralized and broken Putli deep inside. Getting justice in rape case is nearly impossible. Her father wants to settle in some religious dormitory after selling their home as he believes that in the changed situation it won't be possible for them to stay. Putli refused to accompany her father to the religious dormitory because she is not a sinner who needs purgation. Highly educated, modern and liberal people like her brother, sisters too have reservation against a rape victim. Nobody has ever thought about the fact that even a rape victim has the right to live with her head held high.

But Putli was inspired by women like Malabika, Archana Guhaniyogi who were actively involved in Naxalite movement and raped by police. But they did not give up. Rather they continued their fight against the system. Putli joined WIN- for women in need where she can work for the betterment of the exploited, tortured and subjugated women. There are women who are termed non-criminal Lunatic (NCL) and sent to jail. Inhuman torture was meted against them. Such ten women were rescued and were given a normal and safe life in WIN. Putli realized one thing- there were women who faced worst situation than her and looking at them she forgets her own scar and insult.

Putli whose good name is Pallabi finally married Nishit who remained her constant companion throughout her days of struggle and pain and also rehabilitated her in a meaningful way. She finally got the support of the man who understands her values and mind too.

### Violence against women

In a July 2014, United Nations report establishes that India faces a crisis over the dwindling number of girls, and claims that the reduction in female birth rates has reached emergency proportion (p.6). The report attributes the drop in birth rates to sex detection technology, and the preference for sons, which according to the United Nations has fuelled in the increase in rape, abduction and sex trafficking. Lakshmi Puri, Deputy Executive Director of United Nations Women, launched a new study on "sex ratios and gender-biased sex selection", which said, "It is tragically ironic that the one who creates life is herself denied the right to be born?" (Bhalla, 2014). The first articulation of concern over violence against women are found in colonial writing, argues Chakravarti, which went to great lengths to demonstrate the 'peculiarities of Hindu civilization and the barbaric practices pertaining to women' (Chakravarti, 1989:34). Basis of patriarchy is a sexual contract signed by man with another man, no woman signatory. In case of conflict like war, that sexual contract is broken. Damaging woman happens from time immemorial. Women were considered as property. Duty of protecting women rests with men. Men typically failed to do so. Thus the question of violence against women is related to men as signatory of the sexual contract. Chakravarti said that the image of womanhood became more important than the reality (Chakravarti, 1989). In this novel too the family and the society is more concerned about the image of Putli and the family post rape. 'Violence against Women' is used in various everyday ways to restrict the movements of women and to quickly suggest that the various freedoms being claimed by women are the cause of violence, observed Shilpa Phadke in *The Unruly Margins- Reflections on Violence in Public in Mumbai*. People even posed questions like why Putli was raped. Other girls come out too, why she was

raped? While asking such insensitive questions and criticizing the rape victim, people remain totally oblivious to her physical and mental trauma. The image conscious mother of Putli could not survive this trauma. Violence is regarded as a legitimate response to disorder and threatened loss of control. This use of violence by state in this novel can be seen in the case of Malabika and Archana Guhaniyogi who were involved in Naxalite movement and raped by police. No case was registered against police.

### Conclusion

Rape as a form of violence is closely dealt in this novel. The novelist narrates the pain and trauma of the victim as well as the reaction of the family to the victim. How attitude of the society changes towards the victim is also reflected here. The novelist tries to question the role of the police and the criminal justice system. Moreover it also reflects on the psychological wound of the victim. Putli, initially devastated by the gang-rape could overcome the trauma with active support from Nishit though left alone by her family. She convinced herself that she should not feel ashamed of the rape. It is not her fault at all. So why should she hide away? Her resolution and moral strength became an inspiration for other helpless victims. Rape victims become homeless unless some NGOs come forward to their rescue. The novel ends on a positive note- Putli, the rape victim is now helping other victims along with Nishit in the NGO-WIN.

### References.

- Chakravarti, Uma. "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism, and a Script for the Past" in *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, ed. By Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, New Delhi. Kali for Women: 1989.
- Kannabiran, K.(ed.). *Violence Studies*. OUP: 2016
- Bhalla, N. *India Faces Crisis over Dwindling Number of Girls*. Thomas Reuters Foundation:2014
- Devi. M. *Imaginary Maps*. G.C.Spivak (Trans.). Routledge, New York: 1994.

---

Mies, M. *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*. Zed Books, London: 1999.

Sen, N, & Yadav, N. ( eds.).*Mahasweta Devi: An Anthology of Recent Criticism*. Pen craft International, New Delhi: 2008.

---