



VARIETY OF HUMAN RELATIONS IN MOTHER OF 1084: AN EXPLORATION

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Abstract

Man is a social animal and to survive, he needs company of others. Without a strong support system, positive relations man cannot achieve great success in life. The human beings develop and maintain so many relations in their life time in which some are blood-relations, some are family relations, some are social, some are professionals etc. The present paper tries to find out the relationship of the protagonist Sujata in the novel Mother of 1084 and how each relationship serves a negative or positive role in her life. It also highlights the oppressive effects of patriarchal social set up, it also presents a critique of famous notion when daughters and mother have a cordial relation as Sujata's relation with her daughters is not strong. The paper also focus on the role and impact of Sujata's bonding with Somu's Mother, Hem and Nandini and the most important her bond with her son Brati and how this bond embarks Sujata's journey towards self-affirmation.

Keywords: *Human Relations, Patriarchal Set Up, Cordial, Critique, Self-Affirmation.*

Human relations are essence of life on this earth. Human is a social animal and he cannot survive without relations among members of the society. The relations between human beings are nurtured in a social structure. Human depends on others for gratification of his social, physical, emotional, psychological needs etc. the blood relations are associated with a person by virtue of his birth in a particular family but the other relations are developed by his interaction with the outer world. Some relations are positive and leave a positive impact on the overall growth of an individual whereas there may be some negative relations which may affect the individual's personality adversely. In good relations a person feels happy, secured, nurtured, loved and blessed whereas bad relations tortures, hurts, weakens a person. It sets certain boundaries for the individuals and limits their capacity to grow. The present paper focuses on handling of human relations in the novel Mother of 1084.

Mahasweta shows interest in bonding between individuals in most of her works. The main objective of this study can be described as identifying different manifestations of human relations in Mahasweta Devi's novel Mother of 1084. This also tries to dig out the wider consequences of such relationships on the lives, communities and self-understandings of the protagonist. The present paper is an attempt to explore the variety of relations in Mother of 1084 and what kind of impact they lay on the personality and life of the protagonist. The writer of the novel under study Mother of 1084 is Mahasweta Devi who is widely known for her passion for the oppressed and marginalized sections of Indian society. Though deeply embedded in the classical Bengali tradition of a deliberately naïve romantic narrative, her writing dissect the experience with her sharp edge of realistic world vision. The cumulative effect of her works has moved mountains of literary hypocrisy and amoral insensitivity of critics. The exposing the plight of India's tribal people is Devi's primary concern. Devi has used journalism as an avenue for expressing her social concerns for the grass root. She is also one of the founders of the Denotified and Notified Tribal Rights Action Group, which works towards improved conditions for India's indigenous people through outreach, education, legal intervention, and community activism. Mahasweta Devi is an extremely prolific writer who has published twenty collections of short stories and close to a hundred novels primarily in her native language of Bengal. The novel under study Mother of 1084 appeared in Bengali as Hajar Chaurashir Ma, in a special autumn festival issue of periodical Prasad in 1973. Later it was translated in English by Samik



Bandyopadhyay. The novel portrays the impact of Naxalite movement on women and young men in its urban phase in 1970s. Through this novel, Mahashweta Devi tries to seek the roots of the revolutionary zeal of urban

Though apparently, the novel charts the emotional struggle of a mother as she tries to understand her son's involvement in the Naxalite Movement, a rebellion that began in 1967 in the village of Naxalbari, northern West Bengal, and soon spread to urban areas in the region until the mid-1970s, the present paper studies role of various characters in novel in the life of Sujata. Sujata is the main women character of the novel *Mother of 1084*. In *Mother of 1084*, Mahasweta Devi exhibits Sujata's position and role as a wife and as a mother. She has a very oppressive relation with her husband. Her husband exercises all control and power on her. He believes in patriarchy and feels himself much superior to her. She is very submissive as a wife and follows every instruction of her husband. Though Sujata is an educated urban woman, she endures and suffers from the patriarchal oppression in the hands of her husband. In the novel *Mother of 1084* Mahasweta Devi through a political, social and historical framework exposes the heterogeneity of Indian women. She portrays the institution of marriage as an oppressive system for women. Dibyanath Chatterjee, husband of Sujata is represented as an honest and true representative of the male dominated society. There are several instances in the text which clearly show Dibyanath's dominance, egoism, superiority and arrogance towards Sujata. Mahasweta has designed Sujata according to the social norms where women's destiny is thought to be marriage – a facile hope to find security in marriage. Being the part of an affluent family doesn't even prevent her from facing the gender-based discrimination. Sujata, at first in the narrative is representing the role assigned to her by her family and society, which mandates silent acceptance of subordination, as Mahasweta Devi writes, "She had never thought of asking questions. She never knew that she had the right to ask questions. She had been hurt at times. Hurt badly, Dibyanath had always fooled around with women" (Devi, *Mother of 1084*: 31). Though she is a sensitive wife and a loving mother, she is a stranger in her own house where she is reduced to a mere cog. She is aware of her husband's infidelity and corrupt practices, but she says nothing to or against him. Walby rightly defines patriarchy "patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Walby 1990:20). Thus, Sujata's relation with her husband was not cordial; she didn't get any love, respect, satisfaction etc. in this relation. Mahasweta depicts Sujata as a victim of patriarchy as her husband being a male doesn't require doing anything to win his wife's respect, love and loyalty. Sujata feels herself smothered in her relationship with her husband.

Further, the paper explores women bonding juxtaposed to women antagonism in the novel. Mahasweta Devi exhibits how women internalizing the patriarchal value system oppress women. In the portrayal of Sujata's mother-in-law the patriarchal machinery works more actively. Dibyanath and she resent Sujata's decision to stick to her job even after the financial crisis is over, "Sujata wanted to be independent that she did not like to share the responsibility of running the household or bringing up children" (Devi, *Mother of 1084*: 24). Thus, she doesn't have a harmonious relation with her mother-in-law. She used to exploit her in many ways and overpowers Sujata.

The character of Mrs. Kapadia also serves a negative role in Sujata's life. Mrs. Kapadia is would be mother-in-law of Sujata's daughter Tuli. She is a minor character, but has an important role to play. She is the model which Dibyanath had wished Sujata could be. As a mother Mrs. Kapadia is least interested in her son and his actions; Mrs. Kapadia's insensitivity hurts Sujata deeply when she doesn't care for grief of Sujata due to death of her son Brati and invites Saroj Pal, Brati's alleged killer to the engagement party. Not only this, Mahasweta also presents a weak mother-daughter bond in case of Sujata. Her daughters Tuli, Neepa never understand their mother and remain apathetic towards their mother's pain. The relationship between Sujata and her daughters subverts the



notion of women bonding in which believes that there is strong mother-daughter bond which provide immense emotional, social, financial, psychological, physical support. Neepa is married and seldom visits the house to console her mother after Brati's sad demise. Tuli is close to her father and is the first to know about her father's illicit relationship with the typist in his office but she holds Sujata responsible for her father's infidelity. She tells others, "it's easy to condemn baba, but people who seek such escape, have some unhappiness in their lives" (Devi, *Mother of 1084*: 98). She doesn't even mind to fix her engagement on the date of Brati's death and claiming the jewellery meant for Brati's wife. Tuli and Neepa are a critique of modern, hypocritical value system of upper middle class families. In contrast to this Somu's sister takes good care of her mother, shares the household responsibilities and supports her mother emotionally as well as financially. Similarly, Somu's mother understands and values the sacrifices of her daughter. She is also concerned about her job and marriage.

Among all her family members, all supposedly her own, Sujata is the 'Other', an outsider in the true sense. It is only with her son Brati with whom she shares a strong bond. It is only after his death, Sujata's journey for self-realization and affirmation begins. Mahasweta Devi has represented that what in western perspective is understood as an Oedipus complex, a fixation, can be a self-enlightening association. In the course of the novel, Sujata tries to interpret and understand her son Brati's association and involvement in the Naxalite movement. His death dejects her completely and she enquires about his death. She visits the police morgue and sees her son's corpse no. 1084. She comes to know the hostility of the government. She understands the callousness of political and legal system as despite her best efforts, she couldn't get body of her son to perform his last rites. Brati's death laid a very drastic impact on Sujata and it embarks her on the journey leading to self-awakening. Further, through the story of Sujata and her dead son, Mahasweta brings miserable life of all other women at the fore front. She also tries a discovery to the roots of the revolt. Mahasweta clearly states, "I set an apolitical mother's quest to know her martyred Naxalite son, to know what he stood for, for she had not known true Brati ever, as long as he had been alive. Death brings him closer to her through her quest"(Qtd. in Savita Goel 2001:118). She vicariously experiences the revolutionary commitment of her son and her own alienation simultaneously after her son dies. The loss of child to a mother is perhaps one of the biggest losses. As an individual and a mother Sujata's emotions are natural. Brati is killed on his birthday and Sujata remains grief-stricken. Her daughter Tuli too states that Sujata has always been possessive about Brati even after his death. The isolation, the loneliness, and the pain of Sujata cannot be concealed. Though Sujata's relationship with her husband, daughters, mother-in-law is depressing, she shares a strong bond with Somu's mother and Nandini which can be termed as women bonding as according to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English in ethology and social science, female bonding is the formation of a close personal relationship and patterns of friendship, attachment and cooperation in females. They share common grief as all three are victims of hypocrisy and corruption prevalent in social and political system of the time. Sujata shares a strong bond with Somu's mother and her husband.

Mahasweta Devi has very beautifully depicted the bonding between two female characters Sujata and Somu's mother. Within the context of human relationships the definition and display of female bonding can be dependent on multiple factors such as age, sexual orientation, culture, race and marital status. In the western context particularly, when one considers female to female bonding, the first thing which comes to mind is perhaps lesbianism and sexual relationships among women, but the bonding between female characters is distinct in Mahasweta Devi's work. These women have suffered common problems in their life, so they come closer to each other. In case of presentation of bonding in Mahasweta Devi's works, the opinion of Sedgwick is significant who believes that any common activity which helps women support each other can be regarded as a



manifestation of female bonding. She asserts that the adjective “homosocial” can be applied to women’s bonds. In the novel *Mother of 1084*, both Sujata and Somu’s mother share the common grief of losing their sons. In her quest, Sujata comes closer to Somu’s mother who enables Sujata to really know her son – his belief, his ideals, his love and the reason for his death. Imprisoned within her loss and her grief, Sujata is forced to re-think the parameters and limits of the mother-child relationship by questioning the very foundation of her relationship with Brati, “Everyone remains a stranger these days to everyone...It’s an obligation these days to know one’s son” (Devi, *Mother of 1084*: 21). Sujata is helpless and confused while Somu’s Mother’s tears exhibit a strong bond of a mother towards her son. The condition of Somu’s mother is even worse than Sujata. She says, “I lost my son, my son’s father, and I, with this tortoise life of mine, shall live on forever, the two funeral pyres burning within” (Devi, *Mother of 1084*: 17). The pain of loss is so intense that the characters start feeling isolated from the rest of the world. Her affiliation to her son’s actions after his death triggers her consciousness and rebellion against the corrupt patriarchal system symbolized by her husband. While the father alienates from the son, Sujata as mother reclaims him. No wonder, therefore Brati is killed on his birthday and Brati’s death anniversary marks the birth of a new Sujata and death of her abjecthood. The novel strengthens women bonding beyond class line in the relation of Sujata and Somu’s mother and the relation of Sujata with her maid-servant Hem. She provides her support and strength in her grief. She expresses her grief openly at the death of Brati. They empathize with each other and support each other forgetting their class differences.

Samson Esudu observes in his paper, “Frequent Socialization with people boosts self-esteem. Exaggerated self-esteem can sometimes lead to intolerance of people who are different. Mixing with other people contributes highly to self-esteem because the relationship with other people influences personality traits” which may be studied in case of Sujata who is developing herself especially through interaction with Somu’s mother and Nandini. Her relationship with Nandini plays a crucial role in her journey towards self-affirmation. Nandini, Brati’s girlfriend can understand Sujata’s pain of losing the loved ones. They feel strongly connected to each other irrespective of their generation gap. Nandini tells her about Brati and his mission. She also tells her about hypocrisy of media, corruption prevalent in society and political system, the tortures of police etc. Nandini gives her strength to be more strong and determined. Thus, the novel presents Sujata’s journey of recognizing her own alienation as a woman and as a wife from the complacent, hypocritical bourgeois society. Death brings Brati closer to his mother through her quest and leads the mother to a journey of self-discovery and discovery of the cause of her son’s rebellion. Bandopadhyay observes that at the end of the story, Sujata is able to locate in Brati’s silent revolt, “an articulation of the silent resentment she has carried within herself against her corrupt-respectable husband and her other children and their spouses and friends” (Devi, *Mother of 1084*:xi)

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