

## Women Exploitation in Mahasweta Devi's *The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh*

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According to Dr. Satpal Singh, 'The word exploitation means utilization of people for one's own ends and it indicates colonial possessions'.<sup>1</sup> As Dr. Satpal Singh observes:

'Mahasweta Devi is one of those writers who have exerted their creative valour to produce dynamic literature to depict their world. Her works, unlike her other contemporary writers are the result of her direct confrontation with existing social system. She is one of the foremost literary personalities; a prolific and best-selling author in Bengali of short fiction and novels, a deeply political social activist has been working with and for tribal and marginalized communities. She was born in privileged class Bengali family on January 14, 1926 at the city of Dhaka in East

Bengali (modern day Bangladesh). She was born and brought up in a literary ambience, as both of her parents were national intellectuals and literature of standing. It was a family with a long tradition of civic spirit and high literacy'.<sup>2</sup>

*The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh* is considered as one of the most important work of Mahasweta Devi written in 1981, translated by Ipsita Chand. She has written *The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh* with the aim of revealing the stranglehold of feudal lords of the lives of the poor people in villages. The novel is an articulation of the feudal oppression of Medini Singh and his son Sri Ganesh. Medini Singh acquired land from zamindar for which he was a bodyguard. Later he brings more and more land under his control with the help of his power



and authority. Thus, he establishes his dominance over the village. The novel also depicts the evolution of the level of consciousness of the people from generation to generation. The author makes a poignant presentation on how men mortgaged their labour, women and the entire life to the feudal lord and live like slaves. She also focuses on the peasant women who mortgage their bodies under inevitable conditions. The novel describes the lives of women who belong to upper class and caste and how they lead a life of panic. In the feudal family, female child is not accepted. Therefore, they used to invent various cruel methods to kill the female child. If, by chance, the girl child is alive, fathers used to hate to see them. To feed the girl child is only to make her physically suitable to satisfy the sexual need of the would-be-husband. After the marriage, these women are subjected to life imprisonment in the husband's house. The main responsibilities of these women are to satisfy their husbands and give them male children as heir to their property. In this process, the unequal man-women relations became not only unnatural but also inhuman. Consequently, these women became frigid. This has led the dissatisfied husbands seek working class women to satisfy their sexual desires.

As the novel opens, Medini Singh is reported pacing courtyard by wondering whether his third wife would give birth to a girl or a boy. Because his two co-wives, *badki* (the co-wife) and *majhli* (the middle co-wife) were also the mother of daughter but now the boy was born with 'a sharp tooth in his mouth a clump of moles between the cheek and the ear, the big toes unnaturally elongated-----a chubby healthy child'.<sup>3</sup> To see a tooth in his mouth, his mother screamed in terror and passed away. The child got the name Ganesh all the villagers treated him well by satisfying lost their domestic authority. Medini knew that he needed Gulal and Lachhima as long as the child was young, after that he could get rid of them. He also liked the behaviour of Lachhima towards Ganesh as a maid servant. Gulal had thought for ahead. As she thought that when Medini would get kept women and his son's maid servant. Therefore Gulal promised Mohar's wife was dead. Lachhima looked after Medini's son and satisfied Medini by giving him sexual pleasure whenever he desired.

Now the time came for Ganesh's marriage. Lachhima was the virtual mother for the last eighteen years. But she was not allowed even to be present at the time of wedding

of that boy whom she had been taking care of since day one. She lost the hope to marry Mohar now and become a lifeless puppet in the hands of Medini. Lachhima thought that she was to wait another eight years for Medini convince and to fulfil his bodily and homely needs. According to Dr. Satpal Singh:

Mahasweta Devi's stories indict the use of the maternal idea to subjugate women in a patriarchal society. The stories present a large range of responses to the discourse of motherhood, subtly exposing in certain underprivileged section of Indian society hidden behind the tradition envisioning of the role of the mother. She punctures the constructs of an 'ideal' woman and an 'ideal' mother by revising and re-defining the socio-religious discourses that valorise the self-sacrificing image of woman and deny them the right to articulate their individual needs and desires..... Another peculiar feature

of Mahasweta's mother protagonist is that despite all oppression they are infused with womanly virtues of love, care and sacrifice.'<sup>4</sup>

Lachhima showing well that there was no hope of a reward for her selfless services, performed well everything in Ganesh's wedding Gulal asked her why she refused to marriage Mohar Koran with a strange sullenness searing her voice, Lachhima mocked: 'Oh! How your heart is had shattered! You're acting as if it's not Mohar Koran whom we've lost but the malik Medini Singh himself-----When I'm sucked dry, useless as an old cow, then he'll let me go. Why should Mohar sit around waiting? What will he do with me then?''<sup>5</sup>

Haroa started living that house in which Lachhima was made to stay until Ganesh's wedding was over. Now the merriment of the wedding came to an end. Relatives took their lives from there. Again Lachhima was on the bed of Medini Singh. Mohar Koran was ready to marry another girl name Dhanpatiya. The wedding day of Mohar came. Medini Singh came to know that Gulal had gone to attend the marriage of Mohar Koran, he got angry. But Medini didn't want to listen to anyone and for Mohar Koran

become the target of his rage; no one knew what was going inside him, why he created a lot of problems in his marriage. Next day Medini went to Thori, the place where Mohar's wedding was to take place. Suddenly the police came and arrested Mohar accusing him of the theft of Medini Singh utensils. Not only that he was also being blamed that he had Gulal made false promises marriage to Lachhima because his eyes was on the utensils of Medini Singh and When once he got them, he had broken off the relationship and rain away utensils, trying to protest he was broken mercilessly and throw into a police lock up, later realised but never return to village again. No one knew where he had gone, everyone knew that this was an unlawful act of Medini and that Mohar was incorrect yet none dared stood up to him.

On the other hand Gulal was under heavy stress of shame and guilt. Lachhima blamed herself for the arrest and disappeared of Mohar Koran away and she had also realized that Medini would not leave her until his need of sexually using her was fulfilled. Lachhima was very soft by heart, she had also thought about Dhapatiya, and felt like to kicking herself. For changing her mind she went to her home for a while but there too she did feel peace.

One day wedding songs were heard. Nathu Singh arranged Dhanpatiya's married with Kamta. Kamta was out of jail after one year. He belonged to her caste. Six year passed. Medini got much better. Medini is ready to leave Lachhima now and asked Ganesh whatever Lachhima wanted, 'give her now'. But Lachhima shook her head vehemently and said. 'At this age, I have no desire. My grandfather put me to work in the Malik's house. We are low caste folk...Malik saw me give up my youth, for you. Never gave me a nice sari, money, gold-silver utensil, nothing. Not a thing. Chotta Malik! I brought you up, at least offered! That's enough for me.'<sup>6</sup>

Ganesh's wife delivered a daughter. She pleads Ganesh to bring Ganga from her father's house to work in their house as she had no strength left. Ganga was a keep of Nathu Singh in his youth, now she had become old and sick and a useless 'commodity' as a keep of Nathu Singh. She had given birth to a daughter Rukamani. Ganesh, instead of Ganga, wanted to bring his house her young beautiful daughter Rukamni. She could solve double purpose a maid's as well as keeps. Ganesh was the man who started at Harijan's toli, even after burning that. He hated that place because the

humiliation of Pallavi's fight was still strong in him. Now his eyes lifted towards Rukmani. At night Ganesh ordered Putli to send Rukmani in his room. Putli understood why Ganesh wanted Rukmani in his room, she tried to stop him. But Ganesh threatened her: 'Another word, and you'll out and she'll stay here.'<sup>7</sup>

By chance Rukmani was coming up to the verandah, Ganesh suddenly grabbed her hand. Rukmani could understand what was happening, she cried out of terror: 'Na...na...na, Malik. Gradually her words turned into sobs. Ganesh turned up the lamp. Rukmani's eyes were wide with terror. He was excited, aroused. Rukmani was exhausted with weeping'.<sup>8</sup> Three month passed, Rukmani was desperately waiting for Kamu, but she becomes pregnant one. She expressed her protest through her suicide. Ganesh's wife was insulted and tortured by Ganesh, as he beat her daily, even when she cried Ganesh scolded her: 'How dare you stand out here crying at night! Won't it drive out of our house?''<sup>9</sup>

Pallavi is another character who belongs to the urban rich section. As her father is completely immersed in earning money and power, her mother leaves the house in search of peace. By seeing this type of distrusted family relations she chooses social

service as her activity and is associated with the Gandhi mission which has full government support. In spite of all these favourable conditions, when she enters Badha village to educate Bhangis, she is threatened with sexual harassment by Ganesha. Finally, she is forced to leave the village without doing any service in the village. According to Dr. Satpal Singh:

Still the government machinery does not initiate that in the early days of independence, a unit from Gandhi mission came to Badha village in which a woman sevika was also present. A landlord called Gajamoti Singh has kidnapped and raped her. But the police machinery does not register at least her complaint. Similar incident occurred in the recent history of Rajasthan where a village sevika called Bhanwari Devi is gang raped by upper caste people for the mistake of implementing the government laws against child marriage. This



clearly indicates that over the years there is no palpable change in the patriarchal attitude of the society as well as the state towards women.<sup>10</sup>

She enters in Barkha village thinking that those people didn't have proper house, health centres, drinking water facilities etc. They must be very poor so she could educate them. The foul smelling and filthy, the dirt poor low-caste folk gave Pallavi a sensuous pleasure. She lived there like them, ate like them. But no one could help the poor seeing Pallavi. Pallavi was threatened with sexual harassment by Ganesh by saying that if Ganesh would not get her sunset, he would burn the entire basti on fire. All Dushad and Harijans were aware of Ganesh's anger, they had already run away from there, and thus saved their lives. Pallavi reached Tohri, and described the entire events to the SDO and requested him to take an action against Ganesh. But she too, in spite of all her education, knowledge of law of land, and father's money, power and position had to run away from Ganesh in order to save her life and chastity.

Working class women characters in *Sri Sri Ganesh Mahima* are of three types: Lachhima, Rukmani are of one category while

Mori, wife of Bigulal is another and Gulal and Ganga the third. Feudal class creates such a socio-economic environment where they can increase their property continuously. It becomes inevitable in this context for the working class people to borrow money from the landlords and mortgage their land and ultimately their lives. Thus they forced to enter the vicious circle created by the feudal lords. The working class women characters in *Ganesh Mahima* can be viewed from this angle. Lachhima is a child widow of an agriculture labour family who has a grandmother called Gulal. The old aged Gulal knows from her experience that her grandchild is not possible without the blessing of the village elders. She is the cause for establishing a relation between Medini Singh and Lachhima. When Medini Singh promises to give one and half acres of land, ten rupees per month and a cow at the end of this bond. Thus, the life of Lachhima is mortgaged to Medini Singh. She has to look after his child Ganesha, do all the domestic chores and satisfy his sexual desires. Her desire to own some land is possible only when reduces herself to be a slave. Lachhima, left to her, has a desire to lead a peaceful married life with Mohan Karan. This is possible only when she acquires some land.

Therefore, it appears that she voluntarily comes forward to mortgage her life to Medini Singh. This is an enviable part of feudal social reality. They do not have any other alternative. Once that enters into this web, then they do not get any chance to go out. This becomes clear when Ganesh grows up. When she requests Medini Singh to perform the marriage of Ganesha and liberate her, he kicks her. He makes it clear that he needs her until Gsaanesa's wife enters into the house and till then there was no question of liberation from this domestic slavery. By the time Lachhima becomes forty, She realizes that marriage with Mohan Karan is remote possibility. She is thus stifled by Medini Singh. She advises Mohan Karan to marry another woman. Knowing fully well that she does not have any hope of a reward for her service she performs Ganesha's marriage. She attends Medini Singh when he falls sick and protests his property carefully. Only Ganesha's father-in-law insists that his daughter will be sent only when Lachhima leaves the house. Lachhima gets liberation. At the age of forty, when she is lonely what a change in her life is brought out by Haruva. In fact, he is also a bonded labourer of Medini Singh. He is given only food as reward for his work. There conditions being similar, Haruva understands the

tragic life of Lachhima. He too has the desire to possess a small hut, kitchen garden and cultivates his own land. His effort to grow various useful trees and plants around the hut of Gulal reflects these desires only. The commonality in their desires and hopes makes them marry each other and live together.

The working class women are thus reduced to domestic slaves of the feudal to satisfy their domestic and sexual needs. As she experienced this ordeal in her own life Lachhima is very sympathetic towards similar women. When Rukmani attempts suicide, Lachhima saves her and invites her to stay with her. Lachhima remains an alien in Medini Singh's household though she is involved in the maintenance of his house for many years and rears his son Ganesha. Though she brings up Ganesha she has to call him master. That is the real relationship between them. She cannot dream of ever becoming a member of that family in spite of her youth and life for them. As she stays in the owner's house she is alienated from her own people. She is being seen as a culprit for misdeeds of Ganesha. In these circumstances saving Ganga gives her an opportunity to prove that she is one among them and thereby gain their confidence. In later part of her life she

lives with them and for them only, i.e. the people of her class which she comes to appreciate as the real human life. While Lachhima's life and youth were surrendered to Medini Singh, Rukmani's life and youth is sacrificed to his son, Ganesha. She is the daughter of Ganga who is the keep of Nathu Singh, the father-in-law of Ganesh. In fact she wanted to marry Kamu and lead her own life of Ganesh. But by knowing the dissatisfaction of Ganesha with his wife, Putili, Nathu Singh wanted to send Rukmini to Ganesha's house to save his daughter's marriage. He sent her as per the desire of Ganesha. Actually she goes there to help in the domestic chores but becomes a victim of Ganesha's sexual desires. Even when she becomes pregnant she hopes to marry Kamu. She tries to abort the child but fails in the attempt. She finds it insulting and disgusting to bear the child of Ganesha who forces her to yield him. She expresses her protest through her suicide.

Lives of Lachhima and Rukmani are similar. But Lachhima tries to revolt against the individuals and institutions, who are responsible for this oppression and humiliation with the help of people of her class. But Rukmani expresses her protest in the form of suicide. Since it is the first of its kind the peasants organize a

funeral procession. Ganga was a keep to Nathu in her youth. As she became old and sick she becomes a useless commodity. When she lost her daughter Rukmani, she did not understand as to why she has to serve Nathu Singh's house for her sustenance. She attempts to commit suicide but fails. Lachhima explains her that life is not meant to end one's life but instead one should lead it courageously. Finally she decides to live through begging. Thus, working class women are ultimately converted into beggars in the feudal mode.

Mori is the keep of Barakanda Singh. When her youth ends; she gets the work of leaning his animals and cattle. Rukmani's death makes her understand the tragic life of women of her class. She too expresses her protest by choosing begging as an occupation. She prefers begging to work in the master's house. Ganga and Mori are the two living examples of victimization of the feudal, male-dominated society. Not only the lives of working class women, but also the lives of upper class and caste women are subjected to continuous violence in the feudal-patriarchal family structure. This aspect is subtly touched upon by Mahasweta Devi in this novel. Here she chronicles the sad history of the women of the generations represented by Nathu



Singh's wife and daughter and their response to the situation. Nathu Singh's wife does not accept to send Rukmani into the clutches of Ganesha. She tries her best that to convince her husband against this. She harbours a fear that Ganesha might keep Rukmani and make her a domestic slave in his house permanently as his father did. But her husband does not think that it behoves him well to listen to his wife. She knows the nature and attitude of men of her class and is well aware of the place and position of women in this society. She is anguished by the female infanticide. But she is helpless. Puthili who marries Ganesha is subjected to insult and torture by him. This excruciating routine becomes a part of her life. She develops sympathy for Rukmani as she is a victim of her husband's deeds. She tries to save Haruva from Ganesha. Finally, she declares that she will not live with her husband and goes to her parents' house along with her child. Thus she expresses resentment against her husband's misdeeds.

Medini Singh sent away his two wives from his house on the pretext that they may kill their step-son Ganesha. In the feudal system, the husbands think that they have every right to send out wives at any time with or without showing any cause.

But' in Ganesha's generation women like Puthili who could not bear domestic violence revolted and reached a stage where they themselves left the husband's house to send some women belonging Nizam period, Deshmuks used to send some women belonging to working class women along with their daughters to her In-law's house. These women were called 'Adapapalu'. Adapapa was like a veritable gift to the son-in-law. The life of Adapapa is naturally similar to the lives of Lachhima and Rukmani in the novel *Ganesh Mahima*. 'Adapapa' is expected to do all the domestic chores and satisfy the sexual needs of the 'Dora' without raising any question throughout their lives. Their sufferings and miserable conditions are depicted in Telugu novels like Dasarathi Rangacharya's *Chillara Devullu* and *Gangu*. There appears to be close relationship in the characters of *Sri Sri Ganesh Mahima* has not merely regional relevance but has nation character.

Putli ran away from Ganesh's house to her parents she was subjected to insult and torture by Ganesh. So now she didn't want to live with her husband. She said to the SDO that Ganesh was not human at all that he had turned into a beast. He abused everyone. If he would be in jail, she could lead a peaceful life.

Ganesh wanted to kill Putli, Nathu and all the acchuts. Ganesh entered in the forest with kerosene and matches. The people of the village saw him. The sticks which were in the hands of people seemed him like guns, so he run by the edge of the forest and reached in front of Lachhima's hut. He asked for help. Lachhima said. 'If I help you, why would these people let me live here with them'.<sup>11</sup> How could Lachhima help Ganesh now? Despite of the facts that only because of Ganesh she had lost her husband, only in looking after him she had lost her beauty, her youth, and couldn't marry Mohar Karan whom she loved so much, only because of him she became alienated from her own people, his father used her whole life, not only that Rukmani had committed suicide because of him. Pallavi had run away without doing any help to the low-caste villagers, Putli was beaten by him daily and today all the village was suffering only because of him. So how could even he imagine that she would help him when he was in trouble? Suddenly something blew up in Lachhima's mind. She pretended to help him. Then Lachhima wielded the sickle at him and shouted into the night like an angry kite. People whether they were slept or doing anything, and those who were in jungle, came ith their screame-harrrr!

'A sea of armed people, voice raised, surged around the house in mighty waves. Lachhima moved aside, leaving the door free, and become one with the crowd'.<sup>12</sup> In this way the new era came in the village Bahra.

## WORKS CITED

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<sup>6</sup> ibid., p. 87.

<sup>7</sup> Devi, Mahasweta. *The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh*. Trans. Ipsita Chanda, Seagul Calcutta, 2003, p.108.

<sup>8</sup> ibid., p. 108.

<sup>9</sup> ibid., p. 68-69.

<sup>10</sup> Singh, Dr. Satpal. *Depiction of Protest in the works of Mahasweta Devi*. Jaipur : Yking Books, 2016. ISBN- 978-93-85528-39-2, p. 109-110.

<sup>11</sup> ibid., p. 164 .

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