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A Stream Within: Discourse of a Subaltern in Mahasweta Devi's *Outcast: Four Stories*

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Have we ever sought to perceive the abject plight of outcasts? Have we ever heard the miserable plead of pariah? Very few have felt with the loners, recognize the core of their vulnerability, anguish and protest to find a survival in the mainstream. The relentless struggle for endurance of Dhoulī, a subaltern woman, coerced to become a prostitute in Mahasweta Devi's *Outcast* intensifies a trauma to accept that the pariahs in reality are astounded victims strained by the will of privileged. It's a need to correct the outlook of people that the prostitutes cannot be the outcasts because the people who cross the threshold of their rooms are the men from common homes. The paper is a fervent journey with the outcasts to unfurl the history of the human spirit that has been striving for deliverance and bliss from long back still tries to seek life through buoyancy and fortitude.

Tribal literature represents a prevailing, emerging trend in the Indian literary scene. This literature is by nature oppositional because of its arching preoccupations with the location of Dalits in the caste-based Hindu society, and their struggles for self-esteem, justice and equality. Tribal literature is perched to obtain a national and an international occurrence as well as to pose a key challenge to the established ideas of what constitutes literature and how we read it. Mahasweta Devi's writing offers insight, an asset of perceptive; amass of meaning and a base of discourse. Holding the writer's hand, we can see an entirely diverse world, with her assistance we can seek to comprehend the potential of human accomplishment. Gloom, failure and discontent chiefly in the matter of human relationships do not, however, give rise to complete chaos and anarchy. We perceive the struggles of the protagonists, as gallant efforts that finally bring grandeur to the individual and add dignity to the courage of liberty.

The Dalit/Tribal discourses on human rights in free India based on Ambedkar and Periyar movements infiltrated into literary works of Indian writers and have been gathering momentum. The post-Independence, post-Emergency period witnessed literary works exposing atrocities on Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Though the focus of these writings during the early period was on caste terms, contemporary literary discourse treats it in turns of human rights. Writers in regional languages, especially in leftist states of West Bengal and Kerala, were in the forefront expressing concern for the human rights violations to the oppressed, especially, Dalits and Tribals.

Dhoulī is a short story taken from *Outcast: Four Stories* by Mahasweta. The story is an acute bystander of the reverie, retribution and remonstrance of a tribal woman who is a prey of the unending class, caste and gender exploitation that makes her life a relentless struggle for survival. Dhoulī, the tribal girl from an unknown village Taharr of Jharkhand is

the example how a low caste tribal girl is forced to be a mother and transformed to be a kept woman by the so called owner of her society. We are informed that the 'dushad' tribe is treated as untouchable by the upper caste masters of the village. They are prohibited to lead their lives at their own will. "What does Dhoulis expect? She is an untouchable; did she expect a house or land?" (2)

The Indian socio-economic and political formation is of dominant caste character and hence while exalting foremost values it dismisses the tribal peoples' values, ethnicities and languages as inconsequential and inferior. As a result, the rights over land, right to livelihood, right to education, cultural rights of collectives such as tribal are violated. They are deprived of their rights by the very same system meant to protect them in the name of order, protection, welfare and development. Thus both society and state through hegemonic brutality have attempted to annihilate the life and existence of tribal even to the extent of depriving these groups their right to life. The threat to their endurance is more severe today than ever before with the threat of globalization.

This exploitation is being continued by the high caste land lords of the villages. Dhoulis got married in her early childhood with the help from the Misras, the land lord of the village and became bonded labour for ever. The life was accepted by the helpless widow. She knew that wearing uncouth, slaving on the *mahajan's* farm or the *jotedar's* fields or doing road construction work, barely managing one square meal at the end of the day were her destiny. Physical labour can be acknowledged by a woman but when she is psychologically embittered and when she becomes a mother due to defraud, it can't be accepted by her. When Misrilal tried to molest her, Dhoulis replied, "What can I do? Nothing. Deotas like you always get what you want! Go ahead, take me, dishonour me." (10) Misrilal assured Dhoulis that he would get married with her only because he was least bothered about caste and untouchability but his voice had been silenced.

The physical exploitation of tribal women by the high caste people became a trend in the village. It is evident when Misrilal informed his mother that Dhoulis was carrying his child, she replied, "So what? The men of our family have planted their seed in so many *dushad* and *ganju* girls. You're a hot-blooded young man." (13) It is very surprising to accept that a woman has such a notion against a woman. Moreover, Dhoulis is considered a sinner and becomes a victim in her community for an unbelievable reason. Dushad community informs her if Misrilal had forced her, raped her then it was accepted because "There were several illegitimate Misra children growing up in the dushad-ganju-dhobi quarters" (14) but Dhoulis was willingly involved in conjugal bond. So her sin is unforgivable. She is allowed to get some food daily from the landlord's house as she is carrying the child of landlord's family but her entry into the house of Misrilal was restricted. It's really ironical that a high caste man can involve physically with a tribal lady secretly but she is accepted as untouchable by himself openly. Dhoulis pleaded continuously but when her voice was ignored she started protest in her own ways. She accused Misrilal, "You can get married, get a shop set up for you, all to please others! But to please yourself it seems you can only ruin the poor! My people too have turned against me now all because of you!" (23)

Any sensitive soul can measure up the agony and the privation suffered by outcaste like Dhouli for centuries. She argues for a place in the society because it is her right to protest against social commitment. Dhouli, the mother after being ignored and neglected by her so called lover decides to be a prostitute willingly to lead her and her son's livelihood. She understands "How simple to sell one's body in a loveless exchange for salt, corn, *maroa*. If she had known it was that easy, she would have done it much earlier. Her son too would have been well fed, healthy." (28) Infact Dhouli had learnt to live. Her protest is the release of human soul from all kinds of oppression and exploitation. She proves that even the lowliest human being, who has virtually been denied a place among the inhabitants of main stream life and considered to be a burden of the society, can lead a life by her will. When Misrilal accuses her for becoming a kept woman and asks why she has still not committed suicide, Dhouli dissents, "I tried to kill myself. But then I thought why should I? You can get married, run a shop, see movies with your wife, and I have to kill myself? Why? Why? Why?" (31)

Dhouli is the envoy of so many Dhoulis who offers an astute discourse on how people live under the oppression. The marginalized psyche uncovers the existential anger of the cowed murmur, the unspoken dreamer. She is an exemplar of how a tribal low caste woman lives in cloistered self in the same society where we live. The society is needed to be sensitized to the vindictiveness of some of its traditions which dehumanize social taboos. The frail, poor and pathetic low-birth people like Dhouli are treated as remote and conquered objects. In this social structure, things are decided for both by the patriarchal ideology of an ancient culture which also cultivates the snobbery and violence of the 'high' towards the 'low'. This snobbishness must be protested and Dhoulis should be protected and given their respective honour.

Dhouli is actually a search, an exploration for self, which is lost in the labyrinthine traditions and customs of society. Dhouli is prohibited to live in the village because she has opted prostitution as the source of her livelihood. She is sentenced,

Dhouli cannot practise prostitution in this village. She can go to some town, to Ranchi and do her whoring there. If not, her house will be set on fire and mother, daughter; child will be burned to death. Such sinful activities cannot continue in the heart of this village. This village still has Brahmans living in it. Puja is still done in their homes every day. (31)

The *dushads*, *ganjus* and others can never challenge the verdict of the society but Dhouli cannot accept the judgment. The mother inside her forces her to step out her society, place and people to live freely, to live for the sake of her child. It is heart breaking to hear a mother when she leaves her baby behind and sets out to explore a new world saying her mother, "Keep some *gur* with you. If he cries at night, put some into his mouth." (32) Her life is made by the high caste Misra. She has been gifted this life to bear. But she does not make her life silenced rather she rebels silently and defeats her societal norms by stepping out of the village to lead a unchained life for her son and more for herself too.

Now the question is have we all ever sought to perceive the abject plight of outcasts? Have we ever heard the miserable plead of pariah? Perhaps very few have felt with the loners, recognize the core of their vulnerability, anguish and protest to find a survival in the mainstream. The relentless struggle for endurance of Dhouli, the *dusad* subaltern woman who is coerced to become a prostitute intensifies a trauma to accept that the pariahs in reality are astounded victims strained by the will of privileged. It's a need to correct the outlook of common people. The prostitutes cannot be the outcast because the people who cross the threshold of their rooms are the men from common homes. When the men folk are not accused, why the whores are always to be blamed? Sharing the same periphery with others, why they are so distant? Dhouli's voyage is a fervent journey to unfurl the history of the human spirit that has been striving for deliverance and bliss from long back still tries to seek life through buoyancy and fortitude.

Work Cited:

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