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Explosive Repression: A Psychoanalytic Study of Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084*

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Man is the product of his milieu. His immediate milieu plays a decisive role in shaping the workings of his mind and characterizing his behaviour. Art reflects society of which the artist is a part and society appeals differently to different artists who receive and react to things and happenings according to their sensitive sensibilities. People behave differently under almost the same circumstances and conditions depending on their sensibility which is determined by their surroundings and upbringing. This sensibility is moulded by the workings of the mind termed as psychology and psychoanalysis is an approach to study literature. Literature and psychology are interdependent. Psychoanalytic study makes any art all the more interesting and easily comprehensible as it helps us enter the labyrinth of the mind of the characters and their creator i.e. the artist. The present paper aims at unearthing the workings of the different layers of mind as defined and illustrated by Sigmund Freud-the Austrian medical practitioner. In the light of Freudian theory the present study illustrates the workings of the mind of two middle-class grownup boys who find themselves in almost similar familial repressing ambience. Repression features as the most illustrated aspect of his theory as repression of emotions, desires and cravings because of propriety and morality reasons generate diverse negative feelings which affect behaviour of the individuals. Brati and Sujata, mother and son from a middle class family in the award winning novel *Mother of 1084* by Mahasweta Devi, later translated into a play, find themselves in almost similar familial repressing ambience. Brati –the protagonist – gives voice to his repressed emotions and cravings by joining a revolutionary move but unfortunately succumbs to the unjustifiable wrath of government officials and hostile locals whereas Sujata turns to her inner world just to explode towards the end of the play.

Man as a human being is the outcome of his milieu which is created by various forces of society and his immediate milieu plays a decisive role in shaping his mind and thereby characterising his behaviour and temperament. Art reflects society of which artist is a part. Society, a unit of enumerable institutions, affects and appeals differently to different people who, too, react differently depending on their sensibility which is determined by their upbringing and environment. His sensibility reveals his psychology which studies human mind and behaviour and psychoanalysis is an alluring approach to study literature as it drives us to the labyrinths of the mind of the artist and characters created by him. The critical move to explore the nature of human psyche by delving deep into the workings of the mind brings to the fore the hidden meanings of the texts and the uncommon behaviour and dealings of the characters and the move is termed as psychoanalytic study. The present paper aims at revealing the workings of the different layers of mind as are defined and illustrated by Sigmund Freud who propounded this theory.

In the light of Freudian theory this project attempts at illustrating the routes to which the mind leads when certain desires are repressed of a mother who bears the afflictions of

double marginalisation from her hostile family and from society at large and of her youngest son whose existence does mean nothing either to his complacent father or self-indulged siblings. Repressed desires lead these two characters victimised by corrupt and callous system to different routes –for the mother this route is circumscribed to her ‘inner self’ to give voice to her repression quite late only when all was almost over for her and for the son this route is widened to lead him to the outer world away from his smothering house to find an outlet for his pent-up emotions intending that they may normalise the things at odds. The play taken for the study is *Mother of 1084* originally a novel by the noted and prolific Bengali writer and a committed social activist Mahasweta Devi. The novel is translated into English and also scripted as a play by Samik Bandyopdhyay.

Before the analysis it is worthwhile to lay the foundation of this theory as propounded by S. Freud so that a well organised and comprehensive structure of the project may be raised. Freud, basically a medical practitioner, is credited with his innovative new discipline of psychoanalysis as a medical mode and for generating new concepts and ideas which immensely affected literary criticism. The notion of Oedipus complex forms the basis of psychoanalysis and his interpretations of literary texts by William Shakespeare and Dostoevsky are perennial sources of inspiration for psychoanalysts to study literature with a thoroughly new perspective. M. H. Abrams giving an outline of this theory writes “Freud had developed the dynamic form of psychology that he called “psychoanalysis” as a means of procedure for the analysis and therapy of neuroses, but soon expanded it to account for many developments and practices in the history of civilization, including warfare, mythology, and religion, as well literature and other arts” (264). Freud finds man tamed by his mind which is a storehouse for many desires, aspirations, anxieties, and fears which lie hidden or concealed whether forcibly or voluntarily due to social, cultural, and moral control as they find them taboo.

Freud explains mental structures, dynamics, and processes which together constitute human psyche which with its working at various layers makes it a complex mechanism. He categorises these layers as *ego*, *super ego* and *id*. The *ego* is the conscious mind with which man works and as it is driven by reality principle it enables man to be rational and logical in his activities. It mediates between the *id* and *super ego*. The *super ego* may be termed as inner-voice or conscience of man which regulates and directs man’s actions which are socially, morally, and culturally acceptable. The *id*, driven by pleasure principle, forms the unconscious part of the psyche and it stores all those secret desires, darkest wishes, forbidden fantasies and fears that cannot be openly and frankly exposed or revealed because of being taboo. Three layered functioning of the human psyche compartmentalizes the mind into two components—conscious mind and unconscious mind. The conscious mind works for what is culturally and socially acceptable. The unconscious being dynamic is always at work storing all those desires and cravings which are not acceptable because of propriety related ethics and the process through which certain desires are pushed into the unconscious is called repression. Freud himself described the conception of repression as the ‘cornerstand’ of psychoanalytical theory. Repression is hiding away of something in the unconscious and we are unaware of it as these are guilt inducing secrets, forbidden desires, traumatic past events, suppression of painful or disagreeable ideas, memories, feelings and impulses. These are quickly shunted out of the conscious and relegated to the unconscious, to emerge involuntarily, only in particular

moments because repressed always finds an outlet in one way or the other. The otherwise inaccessible unconscious mind has some indirect channels from which sometimes flow out the contents of it acquiring an outlet. These channels may be termed as dreams or parapraxes or slips of tongue, jokes as analysed by Freud in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. M.H. Abrams opines: “Freud proposes that literature and other arts like dreams and other neurotic symptoms, consist of the imagined, or fantasised fulfilment of wishes that are either denied by society or are prohibited by the social standards of morality and propriety” (264).

The psychoanalyst fathoms deep into the labyrinth of the psyche of both and embarks on unravelling a text to discover unconscious with its repressed desires and fears. Psychoanalytic theories facilitate various interpretations of the text as Michael Ryan puts it: “psychoanalysis studies the oftentimes skewed ways in which the mind expresses feelings. Psychoanalysis is also concerned with the dynamics of the interpersonal relations and with the way the self is formed through interactions with its familial and sociocultural environment”(35). The play chosen for the study shows how people around the mother and son affect their psyche and how their repressed desires and reactions against these autocratic people and compelling conditions lead them to their fatal terminus.

The play *Mother of 1084* is written against the backdrop of Naxalite agitation that was brutally repressed by the Indian government along with its callous and hostile agencies resulting in the wide spread killing of young rebels either in the name of encounters or on other pretexts. The drama portrays pathetically the pangs of a mother whose Naxalite son is brutally killed and mother is asked by the police to identify the body reduced to a mere number 1084. Totally shattered after the identification mother is now on an arduous and traumatic journey to know her son and comprehend his revolutionary activities. During the course of this tormenting but enlightening journey various characters of the family and others related to the dead give us a peep into the psyche of the son who chose this ideal but fatal path jeopardising his very life. In Freudian language Oedipus complex derived him to tread this path as he wanted to make a better world for his mother who bore ‘a lot for’ him and used to ‘get bullied over him’. On being asked by Brati for her mute forbearance for this recurrent humiliation she affectionately replies: “It hurts once, doesn’t hurt any longer. It has not hurt from the time you came, because you are there”(692). Before going deep into the psyche of Brati to fathom his repression it would be appropriate to bring to light that repression of the mother which in turn caused repression in Brati also.

Irrespective of her socioeconomic independence women are still treated as marginalized and given a back seat not only in society at large but within the family of which she is supposed to be the centre. Placed in this paradoxical state by patriarchy she suffers as an outcast and servile. Mahasweta Devi, an author who documented history artistically and aesthetically in her fictional world is also a dedicated writer sensitizing readers to social issues which urge sincere concern and this aspect of the author is realistically highlighted by M. Kovilpillai: “Mahasweta Devi’s works concentrate on the issues of exploitation and marginalization as long continuing socio-historical process embedded in social and cultural practices, a focus on the interlocking structures of oppression, the criss-cross of multiple hierarchies of class, caste and gender.” Through the course of story we experience the marginalized plight of Sujata to which she was forced not only by her chauvinist husband and his authoritative mother but also by her own invulnerable, self-indulgent children and

resultantly the smothering surroundings of the house treat her as a non-entity. Her repression may be categorised in two time periods – first when negligently she internalised her repression because Brati was there and secondly when she externalised her repression which was struggling hard to come out as Brati was no more there this time for surreptitious support of which she was unaware earlier. When the story starts she recalls the time of Brati's birth when she reaches a hospital 'all by herself' for her delivery without being accompanied either by her husband or mother-in-law. Serious condition of mother and unborn baby during the process makes the bond stronger between the two and this intensity of infancy turns for the boy into a sense of anxiety, annoyance and concern when grown up and he started feeling how miserable is the plight of his mother in the authoritative, self-centred and suffocating environment of the house though for the feminists and social reformers she is an independent woman enjoying the privileges of a working woman. Dibyanath, her husband, is a braggart and pleasure seeker who never considers a woman's needs, his prime concern being keeping his body fit and fine and his lusty desires gratified within and without the house. He is emotionally attached neither with his wife nor with his children. He never shouldered the responsibilities of running the house, rearing the children or taking care of family members being the head of the family. He used to get annoyed at his own children crying. As a dictator he made his wife work in a bank during his financial crisis. Sujata regarded all these atrocities meaningless as Brati was there as a life support providing her sustenance and purpose to live for and she endured all the wrongs valiantly but mutely.

Externalization of her repression by Sujata starts with the traumatic death of Brati when Dibyanath, the callous father, assumes the shape of a demon when on receiving the call from the police morgue to identify the body of Brati does not evince the slightest sign of grief but denies straightway saying that neither he nor his car is going to morgue lest the world should know the Naxal nexus of his son, "No, Not our car"...My car, at Kantapukur? No" (683-684). Apprehensive of a scandal he does not want to have any connection with his dead son as it may damage his image. Unable to understand all this Sujata looks quizzically at Dibyanath and Jyoti who without showing any concern for her 'look at each other, with a clear understanding of what has happened.' Their rushing about the place to hush up the news makes her feel 'all alone' and Brati a stranger not only to the family but to the official record which counts him as mere a number. This hypocrite and double faced monster replies to Mrs. Kapadia who asks about Brati's joining the rebellion, 'Bad company, bad friends, the mother influence,' and to win the favour of hers sheds crocodile tears, 'It broke my heart when I heard the news,' and that they were very 'close' to each other, 'the two of us! Like babies'.

Sujata is aware of the distance among siblings and it becomes more conspicuous after Brati's death when she notices no moaning, no feeling of loss rather no approval of his reactionary activities. Acute pain makes itself felt in the words of Sujata, 'Brati was dead to all of you long before' To her utter astonishment Sujata comes to know that her son got his long felt hunger of familial love and affection satiated at Somu's house, a penury-stricken house but abundant with warm feelings of hospitality, oneness, and sharing. Somu's mother recalls: '... He'd come and call out, Mashima, a cup of tea please, a glass of water! Sweet words,' her piercing question to Sujata speaks volumes of the undercurrent of distance between mother and son despite their avowals of mutual love and affection: "You are a

working woman, you have a rich home, I wonder why Brati chose such a course! Didn't you ever realize what your son was up to?"(691).

Tuli, her younger daughter, who should have been attached with her brother, is immune to her brother's callous death. How could she be so insensitive to the atrocities done to her brother, to the acute pain of her bereaved mother for whom there are no soothing words? On the contrary she makes her mother's sufferings more pressing by fixing the date of her engagement –the date of Brati's dastardly death which happens to be his birth date also. The following conversation between mother and daughter reveals dissentaneous relations in the family:

TULI: Are we not worthy enough to pronounce his name?

SUJATA: The way you pronounce it! To hurt me!

TULI: Hurt?

SUJATA: To Tony and his crowd, to the others, you, your father, Jyoti, Neepa, the way you all speak his name , as if, as if Brati was a criminal.

TULI: Still harping on it...

SUJATA: Stop it, Tuli. (688)

On another occasion, during a discordant contention with her mother, Tuli, though, has 'nothing to do with father' finds her father's hushing up the death of Brati as 'natural' and with a threat in her voice says to her mother 'to behave normally with Tony's friends' thwarting all the moral values and social conduct and crushing the spirit of her mother.

Her invitation to Saroj Pal, a promotion seeker police officer responsible for the inhuman killings of hundreds of youths including her own brother Brati whom he considers as, 'A cancerous growth on the body of democracy' (688), and a sadist as is manifested in his ruthless tortures given to Nandini, makes Sujata outrageously bitter and angry.

Somu's mother, her house is a foil to Sujata and her house. Emotions run free without any constraint in Somu's house while in Sujata's house emotions expressed are phoney and artificial. Sujata has internalised her repression so much that even while at police morgue she is unable to express her grief while Somu's mother's wailings pierce the whole atmosphere with grief. Even during their interaction it is Sujata who is unable to let her emotions flow freely while Somu's mother moans intermittently, and her moaning reminds Sharmila Maitra of the heartrending moaning of Maurya and comments: "In the morgue, Somu's mother's lamentations form the background. She has already identified her son's body. The scene is reminiscent of Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, where Maurya sits bereft of speech at the loss of the male member of her family as the other mourners come into join the keening. Uncontrolled, almost hysteric, she forms a strong contrast to the taut Sujata who stands with her hands tightly pressed to her mouth, a look of disbelief in her eyes."

Sujata is now able to find the cause of Brati's deviation and notices that it is deprivation of fatherly affection and familial warmth which pained him a lot and this distance existed even after Brati's death and Sujata grudges before Tuli who herself cares a damn for her father: 'A father gets the news on the telephone and does not even think of rushing to have a look?' While on the other hand when mob had taken Brati and his friends out of the house Somu's father was on the hunt for police station for help. Somu's mother, an eye witness to this gruesome massacre, poignantly narrates: "...They'll ... still be alive if the police come.

I'm sure they'll come" but all her hopes were shattered and her words clearly demark the fatherly love and affection' '... They didn't do a thing. That was more than he could bear, and he died of the shock. O god! Is there no justice in this country?...He went on and on asking till he was dead' (696).

After her painful attempt to know about Brati as a son, as a friend, Sujata desperate to know more about her son approaches Nandini who portrays Brati before her as a visionary and a committed ideologist revealing the bright and dark shades of the ideology and Ashok Mohapatra aptly summarises Nandini's revelations which troubled the time and these revelations form the themes of the play: 'majors being moral bankruptcy of the society, the oppressiveness of state apparatuses, tyranny of public opinion and futility of the radical idealism of the youth.' She aggressively reveals the bitter truth of society making Sujata terribly conscious of her spiritual aloofness from her son: 'It is a deadly time when people do not belong to one another by virtue of kinship or ties of blood. Everyone remains a stranger these days to everyone. It is a crime to allow this to persist. It's an obligation these days to know one's son' (700).

Mother-son bond is vital and invigorating with the spontaneous flow of loving affection as Brati never parts with the shawl gifted him by his mother though now tattered as if for him it is a symbol of the tattered condition of Sujata in these hostile conditions and Brati is keen to transform them. Though for Sujata 'Brati was the soul' of her life, yet she knew him very little as if her motherly love for her son has blocked her insight to read/ understand the conscious and unconscious mind, his soul and its cravings. Her own repressions, apprehensions, excessive affection appear to render her helpless in reading her son in his totality. Exploited, tortured, humiliated, subjugated, 'othered', Sujata is happy only in nestling her son to her hurt and wronged bosom as if to feel some solace. Earlier she recognised her son through his features and body structure. It is through her interaction with Nandini and Somu's mother that she is able to read the mind of her son, to know him. She gets her son only in fragments from Nandini and Somu's mother and it was very painful for her to piece them together to have and understand the whole image of her son and it is only towards the end of the play that she succeeds in creating and understanding the whole image of her son and the unpardonable damage done to this image by the hostile and despotic forces, hypocrites and masqueraders of family and society. It is ironical that Sujata is bereft of the blessings of knowing her son thoroughly his body and mind as a whole for brutally mutilated face of Brati after being slain is beyond recognition and it leaves a permanent scar on her soul reminding her of her failings and this mutilated image stimulates her to give a vehement voice to her stifled and suppressed feelings and cravings demanding justice for the wronged son and a youth and wronged mother and a woman.

Though broken and alienated is Sujata still she is aware of her motherly duties and is back home for the ring ceremony of Tuli. Everybody is celebrating the occasion in their own way and Sujata tries to hide the terrible pain which has been gnawing her heart day in day out for the last two years, today it got aggravated to the maximum but she tames it. Bini noticed this pain in the face of Sujata whom she found 'drinking ice water' and who 'had a cold bath' may be in an attempt to subdue the flames of acute agony, anger, helplessness, grief all combustibles burning within so that the celebration may continue uninterruptedly. She recalls: 'Brati's fingers, his eyelids, how cold they are to the touch. Nothing can be colder. I was with

Brati that day.’ She listens to the scandalous gossips from the guests present there including her husband, daughters, and sons-in-law accusing Brati as ‘a misguided youth’, and criticising his ideology the way they were talking sometimes loosely, drinking, sozzling, dancing without bothering a bit about the grieved mother and she tolerates and controls herself. But her attempt to keep herself cool and controlled goes futile when she finds Saroj Pal there, she tolerates this also, somehow, but when she happens to listen to him informing Bini of his being unable to join the celebration saying: ‘No. I’m on duty. Mass action begins in Baranagar and Kashipur today’, and these words add fuel to her subsiding repressions and for the first time she does what Brati craved so desperately for her to do is to raise her voice against injustice, and wrongs. In an uncontrolled fit of fury and helplessness she voices forth heartrendingly not only her repressions but that of Brati’s also:

SUJATA: ... (*Addressing the audience*). Why don’t you speak? Speak, for heaven’s sake, speak, speak, speak! How long will you endure it in silence? Where is the place where there is no killer, no bullets, no prison, no vans?... Brati. Brati, come back. I found you today, Brati. ... (pointing to the audience, and the dancers) ... Did Brati die so you could carry on in your cadaverous existence, enjoying and indulging in all the images of the world, ... for ever, till infinity? Do the living die, only to leave the world to the dead to enjoy? No! Never! ... Let this No of mine pierce the heart of this city, rise to the skies, be borne on the winds over the whole state to every nook and corner.... Let it tear down the happiness of everyone cooped up in his own happy happiness.... (711)

And the grieved mother collapses as the burden was too heavy to bear. She echoes P. B. Shelley, a revolutionary Romantic poet invoking *The West Wind* to spread his rebellious thoughts all over the universe:

Make me thy lyre, ... Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit ! Be thou me...
And, by the incantation of this verse,
Scatter... my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawakened earth
The trumpet of a prophecy! (Poetical Works 577)

And both of them- Brati and Sujata envision Shelley’s *utopia*, his dream world which he tries to create in the fantasised world of *Prometheus Unbound*:

..., the man remains
Sceptreless, free, unsubscribed, but man
Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
Over himself; just, gentle, wise ... ((Poetical Works 253)

So far *ego*-the conscious mind driven by reality principle was regulating Sujata’s thinking and activities under the supervision of *super ego* relegating to the unconscious mind her fears, apprehensions and desires which *id* was desperate to bring forth/entertain. It is towards the end of the play that her repressions now beyond her control find a voice. Sharmila Maitra peeping into the psyche of Sujata sums up: ‘The tortured psyche of the wounded mother finds release here. The rhetoric outburst is a part of the disintegrated sensibility that cries out for the general welfare of thousands of young men similarly affected.’

Now coming to Brati's repression much has already been noticed through the inimicable environment of his house. Just to recap the things it should be kept in the mind that her mother's subservient position, her demeaning exploitation by her own people left the tender boy, the adolescent and the grown-up Brati craving for the justice for his mother but despotic forces of the house suppressed the voice at every stage. This repression of his desires started at an early stage when he saw that neither the husband nor other children sense the injustice being done to her. They do not take cognizance of her mute sufferings. Not only this he never felt himself close to her father rather he has developed a strong sense of antagonism for his wayward and licentious daring since his very tender age. Father-son relationship is strewn with stances of discordant ties which aggravate the repression in Brati and this adverse repression becomes more acute making the chasm bigger and bigger between the two. Nandini tells Sujata openly that Brati 'hated his father' and hints at the degenerated scenario of the society which is suffering from the onslaught of the decaying moral values deadened sensibilities of the already decadent society which deject people like Brati, Nandini and their associates and says that Brati and his mates, 'all shared one common feature: the children and parents were strangers to one another.'

Absence of mutual affection and feeling of togetherness among siblings caused a feeling of alienation and loneliness which played havoc with the psyche of Brati. Psychological wellbeing which is sustained by harmonious ambience ascertains right path. Deprived of fatherly love and emotional satiation the child turns to the expected cosy shelter of his siblings to seek for the fulfilment of the desired dreams but to his utter bewilderment Brati finds no place for him in their confined world, no casement open in the tight compartments of their hearts occupied by other worldly and selfish affairs and he along with his mother is cast into the opposite camp as they do not share their world which is described by Gautam Sen Gupta in his article *The Mother of 1084: Political Drama Redefined*, '... a world of affluence, of pseudo-religion ...,drinks, prostitution, abnormal relations-in a word, of petty selfish interests'(251). Resultantly Brati cannot help going again and again to Somu's house for the fulfilment of his desperately desired but hitherto insatiate yearnings.

Totally shattered and dejected Brati turns to a then uprising rebellious group with a hope to bring a change with the hope that the change in macrocosm will assuredly bring a change in microcosm. An ideal start for him! Thus these repressed instincts, emotions, and feelings led Brati to a road which was undoubtedly ideal but fatal. He tried to fight his inner turmoil with the help of outer forces so that he may bring the desired and aspired change not only in the familial ambience of his own house and rightful regard and dignity in the life of his mother but justifiable rights for all the oppressed and wronged people whose predicament he comes across the moment he stepped out of the four walls of his house and it stirred his sensibilities terribly. His visionary utopia could not usher in as he loses his life tragically in the middle of his fight.

Thus this journey through the labyrinth of the inner world of Sujata and Brati justifiably explicates the complicated workings of the human psyche at various levels and bears the testimony that along with being a versatile writer, a committed social activist Mahasweta Devi is also a true psychologist and A. Mohapatra's words aptly sum up: '... Mother of 1084 is known for its realism, physical and psychological, that consists not only in an accurate representation of the quotidian world in its physicality but also in the

objectification of the states of Sujata,s consciousness, feelings of loneliness, alienation and anger.’

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