

Understanding Women Subjugation Through Mahasweta Devi's *Bayen* (1976-77)

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Abstract:

Mahasweta Devi continues her fight on the subjugation of women in the patriarchal society. Through the play, *Bayen* explores the hypocritical shades in the community that prioritize superstition more than the human being. The play *Bayen* advocates for the minimum rights of women that are taken away by social forces. These social forces have separated a mother from her son in the patriarchal society is explained with eye-catching attention. One of the striking features of all the plays, chiefly *Bayen*, is the use of mythology by the writer to foreground her views. The Indians have great respect for their mythology, and it helps the writer form a framework for contemporary reality. Mahasweta Devi as a social activist and writer, is insightful in the choice of myths. For her, mythology becomes a vehicle that could reach the common person.

Key Words: Subjugation of women, Patriarchal society, Marginalized sections, etc.

Introduction:

The main character of the play is Bayen Chandidasi, who is the caretaker of the cemeteries. She assumed this duty with pride after her father passed away. They waited for her to destroy her peaceful life by showering affection on the daughter of her deceased sister-in-law. On one occasion, she took the child's body and buried it in the cemetery. Society's anger and envy led to her being labeled as Bayen. She feels that her presence is harmful to her child. While going to Malinder, she heard the conversations of the robber who was planning on looting the passengers. To save the people, she gave up her life. This story talks about the oppression of women in society. The concept of gender subalternity is also emphasized in the patriarchal culture. In rural areas, people tend to believe in superstitions. Chadidasi Gangadasi is a woman who was separated from her family due to the caste system. According to the villagers, Bayen is a woman who can be killed to bring bad fortune to them. Since she is considered a witch, the villagers have displaced her from society and live in a hovel. Mahasweta Devi is accused of being an enemy of the stage. She uses the dramatic device of enacting a happening in the present. (Dictionary of the History of Ideas, 1973, 521). The play then opens with the Bayen reciting a lullaby from her hovel. She looks utterly exhausted and depressed, and she is dragging her reluctant feet like a condemned ghost. Chandidasi, who is a Bayen, doesn't wear

the customary attire. She also doesn't have jewelry, and her hair is messy. Despite this, she still confronts various issues. She is given food and clothes, but the worth of this charity is not known. Why should I take it?"(75).

The root cause of all the evils that women face is gender discrimination. It is the most prevalent form of oppression in the world. Chandidasi has only one sari, and she is expected to survive. She also has a meager amount of food and clothing. Her son asks how her mother got by. She is not allowed to meet her children and husband. She is also not allowed to carry a can of gas to inform the people about the situation in her area. This condition makes her look pathetic. The patriarchal structure of society prevents women from attaining their full potential. It is also very conservative when it comes to education and employment. She is a blessed woman who got married to Malinder and gave birth to a son named Bhagirath. Unfortunately, she is also blamed for the death of her relative's daughter due to the superstitions surrounding her. Chandidasi is accused of murdering Tukni, who was a victim of chickenpox. She is also reluctant to continue her duties as she has a kid at home. She is convinced that she should perform the last rites for her brother-in-law's mother-in-law, Tukni. She indulges in her son's thoughts and talks to herself, making the villagers label her as Bayen. When she goes to the grave of Tukni to guard it, society charges her of being a witch who eats or hurts the body of the child. She tries to convince them otherwise. Malinder asks her why her sari is dripping with milk.

Despite belonging to a reputed community, Chandidasi faces various challenges in her life. She was denied not only her rights but also those which she deserved as a human being. She willingly sacrificed herself for the sake of society. Society rewarded her after her death. This shows how the cults of women are still alive and prevalent in our community. (Chakravorty: 102)

The problem of identity is that society constantly identifies women as individuals and is made to believe that what they are is. This play shows how Chandi, once an independent woman, has become a wife and mother after marrying a man known for his social commitments. She has a dilemma regarding her ancestral job. On the one hand, she would like to continue working with her ancestors, while on the other hand, she would like to minimize the harm to her reputation. When Chandidasi thinks about quitting her job, her father would always tells her to do it. This torment led to her developing a mental condition that was not only absurd but also cognitive. As a result, society boycotted her, branding her as a Bayen. Initially, she opposes this thought but later accepts herself as a Bayen.

Her political theatre, one of the first in the field, is widely believed to have influenced other performances. Her writing can be described as fluidly between fictional and historical works. She tackles the various issues that are commonly ignored in South Asian Studies. In her works, Devi has focused on the unique experiences of subalternity, which she claims are not addressed in other studies. McCall explains that researchers have also treated prostitution and bonded labor as separate constructs. Yet Devi's women characters do not include wives, sisters, and daughters of bonded laborers. (McCall 2002:39).

Bayen is a play that explores the various facets of the gendered subaltern. It features Chandidasi Gangadasi, who is accused of being a Bayen. The villagers fear her and imprison her in a hut by the railroad tracks. The play shows how the working-class woman is turned into a scapegoat. When Chandidasi dies due to a disease, the community refers to her as a Bayen. It is because she is a lactating woman. The play shows how society constructs her subaltern status. The need for a scapegoat and the inherent gender bias in society make her a subaltern (Devi 1998: 75-91). She was unable to manage her life, and her son could not have access to her. At the end of the story, her son reveals her treatment, and the villagers accept her as Bayen.

Although she is dead, this affirmation of her motherhood retains her status as a subaltern. It is also true that her confinement to a village is an elementary construction of her situation. Foucault argued that the idea of being constantly subject to observation is monitored and that this is similar to the idea of a panoptic prison. Her inability to stare at the village shows this idea of punishment. Those around her are aware of her every move, and she has no way of knowing when or if she is being monitored. The play aims to expose how the village's panoptic discipline psychologically alters the people living in it. The play's goal is to uncover how poverty traps the villagers into servitude. Bayen tries to recover the identity of the female subaltern by recovering her personal history and identity. Unfortunately, she is caught in a trap that is laid by specific interests. Witch-hunting is a social evil practiced in India. It is carried out by the vested interests to kill and loot innocent people.

The element of irony works perfectly in Bayen. Chandi feels disgusted with her job of burying dead children, yet she cannot give it up. She pleads time and again to her husband to take her away to a place where she can lead a happier life but soon, she realizes her responsibilities as a gravedigger. Having been the child of outmoded conventions, Chandi has become a part of them unwittingly. She has not had enough courage to denounce them. In the subconscious of her mind, there is still a part that struggles to shake itself off the haunting memories of her great ancestors, who symbolize the victims of discriminatory and unethical values of the feudal society.

Chandi is an illiterate and intellectually inferior woman. Unlike Sujata, she never tries to suppress her inner desire for freedom and resents whatever she thinks might harm her sentiments. The seeds of conflict within herself, between a committed mother and professional gravedigger, as well as the more significant confrontation between womanhood and the forces of a male-dominated society, are sown. The readers find no real anguish in Chandi as long as she is unmarried. She never experiences any inner conflict. She feels proud of being a gravedigger and shows boundless enthusiasm for her work. Nevertheless, she is conscious of her social status among her tribe.

The play criticizes the way the public manages women. It shows how society values her but doesn't allow her to go beyond her limitations. The death of Chandi is a test of how brutality and superstition are in our community.

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