

ECOLOGICAL CRISIS IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S WATER

***DR.N.S.VIJAYALAKSHMI & **R.S.VETRISSELVI**

**Research Supervisor, Asst. Professor of English, Government Arts College for Women, Pudukkottai.*

***Research Scholar, Asst. Professor of English, Arignar Anna Government Arts College, Musiri*

ABSTRACT

Mahasweta Devi, an Indian eco-feminist Writer enthusiastically involved in the uplift of the tribes and she voices out for the oppressed tribes. She uses play as a medium to express her anger against the Indian society. This paper envisages to analyse Devi's play Water. It is a play of social reality and is from Triteertha in Balurghat. Here she clearly points out the problems of the tribes, the Government officials and the class conflict. The exploitation of poor people by the Zamindars is the core issue dealt in. In WaterDevi shows her anger against the upper class. She proclaims equality to all members of the human family – great or small lower or upper, rich or poor, regardless of birth, status, race, colour, sex, language and religion. Maghai the water diviner of Charsa is denied water for his own family. He belongs to the Doms community. The denial of basic necessity for a human being is a painful one. They beg for a single drop of water. The upper class brahamans look down on the poor. They refuse to treat them as their equals. As an eco-feminist writer she relates a bond between nature and the tribes. These tribes have an emotional attachment to nature. She understands that education alone can illuminate them. Through the character of Jiten Devi emphasizes the importance of education. Jiten strongly argues the need for water. When the river overflows during monsoon, they can store water by building boulders. Devi wages war against the monstrous tyranny 'Water'. She understands that our country is an exceptional one. Knowledge and culture go parallel. Some people like Maghai can have both knowledge and culture. His knowledge on nature helps the villagers to quench their thirst.

Keywords: *Ecological Crisis, Mahasweta, Devi's Water*

“Since I haven't ever learnt to do anything more useful, I have gone on writing. I have found authentic documentation to be the best medium for protest against injustice and exploitation (M.S.Devi).

Mahasweta Devi, an Indian eco-feminist writer, enthusiastically involved in the uplift of the tribes and she voices out for the oppressed tribes. She concentrates on the struggles against the exploitation of the downtrodden people of West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Her experience with tribes makes her writing plays for it is the vehicle to communicate with them. Through her play she lights up the darkened life of the untouchables. She can create awareness through her play among the illiterates. She uses play as a medium to express her anger against the Indian society. The excellent theatric versions of her stories have come from small towns far from Calcutta.

This paper envisages to analyse, Mahasweta Devi's Play '*Water*'. It is a play of social reality and is from Triteertha in Balurghat. It is appreciated by the audience of Triteertha. Here she clearly points out the problems of the tribes, the government officials and the class conflict. The exploitation of poor people by the Zamindars is the core issue dealt in.

The pathetic situation continues unchecked in India. The untouchables are oppressed and impoverished further. The welfare schemes put forward by the Government becomes futile. The way to solve their problem is to organize a revolt against the suppression. In this play the various struggles of the lower class people like the Doms, the Chandals the Ketos and the Triors are highlighted. These struggles help to create awareness among various groups of people. She uses her creative energy to awake the illiterates. Their long time suppression needs liberation.

As an eco-feminist writer she relates a bond between nature and the tribes. These tribes have an emotional attachment to nature. The marginalized people live with nature. They are gifted people of mother earth. Though they lead a desperate life they never change their attitude towards God.

DURA: (under the spell of the myth) She spoke?

MAGHAI: yes, son, and ever since, that has been our work. How can we charge for water?.
It's forbidden. And that's why we're fated to go hungry (Five Plays.147).

This play explores the sufferings of a tribal community. It is because of their ignorance they suffered a lot. The oppressions, disparity and disappointments faced by them is the result of illiteracy. The Government SDOs are also shown their disparity. They only support the upper class Brahmans. The bureaucrats never try to accept the pious nature of Maghai. They add fuel to the fire by saying.

SDO: It's no use really, no good to anybody, it's better to keep
people just where they are as they are (Five Plays.191).

It is not only the land lords who exploit the under privileged but also the bureaucrats. They go with them hand in hand. This social discrimination is a power tool for oppression. Law treats every individual as equal.

ONE: We've gone over all that, Dhura. The castes, upper and lower, don't mean a thing. They are labels designed by men. The constitution's clear on that. But who cares to up hold the constitution? (Five Plays. 127)

These people need someone to ignite them, to guide them for a better world. A world where there is no bondage, no suppression and no inequality.

In the play '*Water*', Devi shows her anger against the upper class. She picturises the clash between the upper class and lower class people of Charsa. She hopes to save succeeding generations from annihilation. She proclaims equality to all members of the human family – great or small, lower or upper, rich or poor, regardless of birth, status, race, colour, sex, language and religion.

The hierarchial system of our country never allows the untouchables to lead a life of their own. They suffer in the clutches of the Zamindars. Their rights are violated. The basic amenities in their own villages are restricted to them. They work for the development of their village, but do not receive any subsidiaries from the government in spite of that they clamour for everything. It is the upper class people who strongly establish the social class conscious.

MAGHAI: You've already collected the government relief meant for us. Why haven't we got the money and materials yet? (Five Plays.136).

'Maghai' the water diviner of Charsais denied water for his own family. He belongs to the Doms community. The Doms, the Chandals, the Ketos the Triors are the lower caste people of Charsa. The denial of basic necessity for a human being is a painful one. They beg for a single drop of water. It is because of these people, the family of Santhosh-babu gets two wells in the village. One is for their own use and the other is for their cattle to feed. The capitalist look down on the poor. They refuse to treat them as their equals.

MAGHAI: we have been told that there's no untouchability in our subdivision and yet Santhosh-babu, you, your caste brothers and your relations won't let us draw water from any well (Five Plays 138).

This is the plight of the Doms in Charsa village. The vulnerable stratification destroys the prosperity of a nation and the battle against class divisions is weakened in India. Mahasweta Devi triggers this battle throughout the play. The Doms suffer because of the human rights violations. They are devoid of their fundamental rights. The inhuman injustice meted out to them is vehemently condemned by Mahasweta Devi. She pathetically lights on the painful condition of the Doms women in 'Water'.

PHULMANI: This man here will run to the town and tell the police that the lower castes of Charsa have all turned naxals. (Raises her palms before Santhosh). These two hands of mine are full of sores, Santosh, all from scratching about the sands of the Charsa for water (Five Plays 138).

The feudal system of West Bengal clearly paves way to dominate the working class people. Devi attempts to clear the capitalistic approach of Santhosh-babu. She tries to empower the lives of the under privileged tribes. She extends her hands in the struggle. The social injustice has a special role in the establishment of social inequality. So she tries to eradicate the social inequality. Amartiya Sen in his *The Argumentative Indian* clearly points out the disparity that prevails in India. "nevertheless, class disparities are not only important on their own but they also tend to intensify the disadvantages related to the other forms of disparity".

Dhura, Maghai's son is very much affected by this class segregation. He is secretly connected with the naxalites activities. Dhura strives hard to give awareness to his father. He angrily argues (with his father) the exploitations done by Santhosh-babu. Maghai never allows his people to get single drop of water from the well in spite of these protests. As a water diviner he is incapable of giving water to his class.

DHURA: There I don't agree with you I won't accept fate. What a shame, we burn our hearts to cinders to divine water, then to raise it from the bowels of the earth, and then they refuse us a drop of water, not a drop or the Doms and chandals. I spit upon fate, if that's our fate (Five Plays. 146).

The Doms are exploited by the upper class relatives of Santhosh-babu. The society uses the Doms to dig well, without them the people of Charsa won't get water. Even the government officials are not able to find the source of water it is Maghai who serves as the water diviner. He looks up his profession divine. He never likes to get money for digging a well. He is true to his conscience. He has a strong will that his prayers will be heeded by his goddess.

Devi fights for the integration, sustainability, protection of earth and stigma imposed on the untouchables. She understands that education alone can illuminate them. When Jiten, the village teacher tries to educate the children the lords deny it. The upper class Brahman boys won't come to sit with the down trodden. They go to Patul to study.

Jiten explains about the free education scheme of the government. He stresses the importance of education. He forced the people for attending school. Otherwise the Government will close down the school. He asks them to build a dam of their own. Through the voice of Jiten, Phulmaniraises question and give awareness to the people. He strongly argues the need for water. When the river overflows during monsoon they can store water by building boulders.

An ordinary savage man like Maghai has turned asaviour of water by the village teacher, Jiten. The villagers happily say,

ALL TOGETHER : (Without a pause in their work) we're building a dam.

SANTHOSH : At whose behest? Eh?

ALL TOGETHER : (except Jiten). The Teacher's (Five Plays. 183)

The village teacher encourages the tribes to give education to the wards. It helps to mitigate most of the challenges faced in life. When the tribes strive hard to get water Jiten gives an idea to build a dam. When he approaches the SDO for building a school and dam he is discarded by the SDO. He accused Jiten for creating a new problem.

The SDO clearly points out the relief measures taken by them. But Jiten retorts that the block doesn't get any relief, it is Santhosh only gets all the relief materials. The SDO clearly points out that time that the Government entrust only the educated people for releasing the funds.

JITEN : Not the block, it is Santhosh who gets it all.

SDO : The Government has to entrust somebody with the funds for relief, and who could be better for that than Santhosh, the only educated, decent man, in the block? (Five Plays172)

Through these characters she explores the way to liberate the tribes from bondage and stresses the value of education.

Devi wages war against the monstrous tyranny 'Water'. Victory at any cost. She achieves to get water for the people. She advises the people that one can achieve their goal only through education. Our country is an exceptional one. Knowledge and culture go parallel. Some people like Maghai can have both knowledge and culture. He studies nature, and doesn't want to exploit nature. His knowledge on nature helps the villagers to quench their thirst.

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