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## REPRESENTATION OF CASTE, CLASS AND GENDER: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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**Abstract:** The proposed paper analyses how Mahasweta Devi, the Bengali writer and Bama, the Tamil writer voice against patriarchy and society and thus give potency to the causes of tribals, dalits and women. They throw light on various aspects which are significant but neglected in our society. Their concern for the marginalized can be understood by their meticulous details of the characters and problem/situation they deal with.

**Introduction:** Almost all societies have systems of social hierarchy. India has undoubtedly the most complex and rigid system of social hierarchy in the world. Here we find hierarchies of an astounding variety of social categories: caste, class, ethnicity, estate, lineage and other kin groups, gender, age and more. Though India is officially a secular nation, it is dominated by the social organization, culture and ideology of its Hindu majority. That ideology assigns females a position distinctly subordinate to males: constrained, dependent, exploited and suppressed. Muslim and Christian societies and cultures, the principal minority traditions in India, do the same.

Patriarchy can be understood as a system of control men have over women's labour, fertility, sexuality and mobility in the family, work place and society in general. Within feminist theory, patriarchy refers to the structure of modern cultural and political systems, which are ruled by men. Society as a broader phenomenon consists religion and state which includes bureaucracy and police as its main agencies and the private sector which has builders and moneylenders as its important components. In the works of Mahasweta Devi and Bama one can notice a scathing attack on patriarchy and the exploiting agencies of society. The works of these writers without an underlying and sometimes a direct attack or criticism against patriarchy and society are hardly conceivable. These are the thrust areas of the writings of Mahasweta Devi and Bama. They prefer to talk about these aspects to give expressions to the depriving experiences of exploitation, socio-economic-political-cultural degradation, suffering from poverty, discrimination and social stigma of the marginalized.

These two writers belong to two distinctly different backgrounds like linguistic, societal, cultural and geographical. But the important aspect about them is these two writers have many similarities in their sensibilities while maintaining their own individual distinctions.

Mahasweta Devi uses tribal characters to expose the many faces of the exploiting agencies. Bama makes use of dalit characters to highlight caste and class oppression.

Mahasweta Devi exposes the callous face of patriarchy and society through her works by dealing with the exploitation of the Adivasis by the landed rich or the urban administrative machinery callously perpetuating a legacy of complicity with the colonizers, bonded labour and prostitution, the destitution and misery of city dwellers, the plight of women who are bread winners (some of them are victims of male sexual violence) dependent widows, ill-treated wives and unwanted daughters. Bama writes about the position of dalits, both men and women, who have been trapped not only by patriarchy but also by caste-hatred within the church and outside the church, the upper caste exploitation and the dalits' subjugation to their landlords, the 'ayyas'.

Mahasweta Devi confronts government and its failure, feudalism and its atrocities, and patriarchal set up and its oppression. Government's failure to alleviate the suffering of the tribals, feudalism making the tribals groan under the economic and political influence of the landlords and moneylenders and patriarchal system which exploits the women folk are the significant aspects dealt by Mahasweta Devi. Bama takes on the hierarchal caste system which has many faces and phases of inhuman practices and cruelty. Untouchability, atrocity on dalits, injustice, exploitation, violence, poverty, social degradation are the aspects which Bama encounters.

Mahasweta Devi struggles against the overwhelming power of capitalism and politics that destabilized the tribal culture and social values. Bama, through her writings, exposes the minute forms of exploitation and atrocities, up-rootedness of dalits. She looks at reality and presents literature from sociological point of view.

The works of Mahasweta Devi question the mainstream, policies of government, capitalism, political agendas, values of Marxism and female oppression while Bama's works question dominance of upper castes, established social order, established socio-cultural norms and practices, professed values of the church and male dominance. Mahasweta Devi states in an interview to Samik Bandyopadhyay, which also seem to echo Bama's thoughts,

Life is not arithmetic, and man is not made for the game. For me, all political programmes and creed should aim at the realization of the claims of man to survival and justice. I desire a transformation of the present social system. I do not believe in narrow party politics (viii).

The women in the works of these writers undergo sufferings both at the hands of contractors, their husbands, their own clansmen and sometimes at the hands of police. They are also constantly vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse in the world of work. Within the community the power rests with men. Rules for sexual behaviour are very different for men and women. Hard labour and economic precariousness leads to a culture of violence. Mahasweta Devi brings in her works women who are from different walks of life-tribal (Gangor, Draupadi, Chinta, etc.), poor (Jashoda) and employed (Sujata). Bama's women are exclusively from dalit world.

These writers give their voices to their characters by showing us the struggle, resistance, effort, rebellion, will to retaliate and queer techniques of the unprivileged for the survival in the midst of all deprivation. There is eagerness not to let life crush or shatter them, but to swim vigorously against the tide. In fact, the ethics of these writers consist of breaking the silence around issues of economic, social, caste inequality and the biases of the legal system.

These writers use the language that is suitable for the theme that draw the attention of the readers. Mahasweta Devi's language, especially in "Seeds", "Little Ones" and "Salt" is brutal and lethal at times. One can feel it was needed because they reflect the hideous contemporary realities. Bama overturns received notions of decorum and propriety. She breaks the rules of written grammar and spelling throughout her works. She bridges spoken and written styles consistently. Sometime her language is full of expletives, quite often with explicit sexual references. She suggests several reasons for the violence of this language, and its sexual nature. Sometimes a sharp tongue and obscene words are a woman's only way of shaming men and escaping extreme physical violence.

Their writings are also treated to be parts of economical, political, societal, and to some extent cultural movements leading to the liberation of the marginalized section of society. For them, society and literature are not two different aspects but are closely connected. They treat literature as one of the media to bring out the change in society and their

perspectives. And they use literature as a weapon to raise their voice against society for the sake of the voiceless and thereby making the world aware of the issues raised in their writings.

Mahasweta Devi has seen with her own eyes the brutalities of existing feudal system where as Bama has bitter experience of being a dalit woman. Though Mahasweta Devi is considered as an outsider to talk about the tribals and Bama as an insider to talk about dalits, the responsibility they have towards emancipation of the marginalized is unquestionable. Because to be a voice of the exploited one need not necessarily be a victim of that exploited group. One need not have personal experiences. Those who have a genuine concern and social responsibility towards the unprivileged section of the society can definitely become voices of the section.

These writers do not simply delineate the destitute being exploited by the so-called elite. If they had stopped there itself, it would have been like unveiling only one face of the subaltern life. Anybody could have done that. But their greatness lies in the fact that they penetrate into the minds of these downtrodden and subtly bring out their sentiments, emotions, frustrations, anger, patience, helplessness, cunningness, etc. They unravel the inner layers of these marginalised people's lives. The typical relationship between the different members of community, of family is exhibited vividly. The habits, superstitions, life styles, and beliefs of the tribals and the dalits are drawn very convincingly. The struggle, resistance, effort and queer techniques of the unprivileged for survival in the midst of all the deprivation portrayed in their writings enable one to know more about the caste and class.

Thus this proposed research attempts to analyze these writers' fight for the people who are still groaning under hunger, who do not have land, living in indebtedness and bonded labour. It tries to expose naked brutality, savagery, and caste and class exploitation and place this society, an octopus-tentacled monster, before a people's court, the people being the oppressed millions. The powerful, the elite, the rich, the upper class and caste, the male and the mainstream should understand the plight of the weak, the lower class and caste, the female and the marginalized and should try to bring them to the mainstream. Then only we can see a society with equality, justice and opportunities to every individual irrespective of caste, colour, creed, region, religion, status and gender.

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