POST- COLONIAL CRITICISM & ‘MAMATVA’ (MOTHERHOOD) IN MAHASWETA DEVI’S “DOULOTI, THE BOUNTIFUL”

Introduction to the Author:

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ABSTRACT:

I will dissect the short Bengali novella “Douloti, the bountiful” and discuss how the meanings of nation, nationalism, national identity and citizen would tend to change once the social location and meanings of this body alter. I will be dealing with both the discourses of nation and of motherhood and portray whether this body is marked explicitly as non-Hindu outcaste, or as associated to an “unacceptable” or “un-Indian” ethnic community or as low-caste or as sexually vigorous or sexually “perversion” or “irrational”. But, if the protagonist is marked as non-Hindu or lower caste or unchaste-licentious or diseased or destitute, wouldn’t it challenge the sense of national allegiance that this allegorical body-scape allegedly evokes? On her dying
gesture, Ramaswamy elucidates with his wonderful commentary on Douloti, by interpolating Douloti’s disease-ridden-dying body into the Indian traced map, “Mahasweta’s story mocks a century of popular cartographical practice in which the female body has been used to produce a possessive male-centred sense of territory”. The semiotics of hierarchy, imbuing the iconography of Mother India was made topsy-turvy by Douloti’s bodyscape and gesture. Douloti’s body, as an “improper” ethnically asphyxiated, tribal and subaltern body that has been sexually ‘immoral’ even lecherous by most social standards, as a body that has been destroyed by mistreat, period, history, nation and civilization, comes to manifest the exact divergent of what the reverence Bharat Mata does. It works to question and supersede the traditional symbolic with the sociality inherent in iconography, replacing fabled with the social, the allegoric with the literal, the physical with the material. Since the author’s Douloti is featured as a tribal girl sold into bonded prostitution, Spivak’s reading of the same is in a sense arising at the other extreme, the identity or subject or affect end of the “Other” or oppressed.

**INTRODUCTION:**

Mahasweta Devi’s fiction primarily focuses on the metaphor of body dismemberment. The tribal and the ‘subalterns’ are metaphorically & physically dismembered by the system. Her descriptions of dismembered bodies are haunting & unforgettable. The author lingers in post-coloniality in the area of clash, in decolonized land. Her writings are not meant for international audience; rather she doesn’t write for her own people, people of her nation. Douloti, the protagonist and the name is the only member of the group of bonded-labour prostitutes who does not share the commitment of a mother. She has never been a mother, but a child only. This sacred relationship between Douloti and her mother, who is still in the village, is filled with affect. Douloti accepts bond-slavery as per nature’s law, similar to the unresisting majority of the male outcastes, and finally comes to terms with her existence.
Douloti, here is not portrayed as an intending subject of resistance by the author. During her first rape, there is a split of Douloti’s ego which remains split throughout the end. At the end, everyone will notice that Douloti is not even constituted as the intending subject of victimization. The way in which objectification is coded into opposition and the opposing acceptance of victimization animates the male militants and the ferocious bonded prostitutes, for whom collective resistance serves least opportunities.

**POST-COLONIAL CRITICISMS IN DOULOTI:**

By definition, post-colonialism is a period of time after colonialism, and postcolonial literature is typically characterized by its opposition to the colonial. Though, according to the manifestation of some critics, any literature that expresses a resistance to colonialism, even if it is fabricated during a colonial period, may be defined as postcolonial, primarily due to its antagonistic nature. Parallels of race and the effects of discrimination are often emphasized by postcolonial literature, indicting white and/or colonial societies. Gayatri Spivak’s catering interest in postcolonial affect appears to come out of a confluence of ideological and methodological orientations: out of her Poststructuralist-Marxist bent in re theorization of Marx on worth in terms of desire, on the one hand, and her feminist temptation in the female subjugated body on the other. Spivak’s “Woman in Difference,” the 1989/1990 essay originally published in Cultural Critique and reprinted in Outside in the Teaching Machine treads Spivak’s own English translation of Mahasweta Devi’s Bengali novella “Douloti the Bountiful.” Spivak’s aim is to give an extensive coherent galvanisation of affect in her work to date, and her most determined attempt to thematise the subaltern “Other” not just as a binary effect of discourse but as an affective subjectivity.

Since the positive ideal of decolonization replaces “empire” with “nation,” Spivak opines that Mahasweta designates subaltern communities, entitles and so “emancipates” them, allowing the
reader “to grasp that the word ‘India’—signifier of ‘nation’—is sometimes a lid on a profound and equally unacknowledged subaltern heterogeneity”. She adds that the novella’s bond-servants and other major characters are converted into a “broad collaboration” or ‘shomaj’, the Bengali meaning of “society.” These two opinions clear the pedestal for the fact that without avoiding this, though the story is read by the broadest possible grid: in modern “India,” there is a “society” of slavery, where the only means of reimbursing a loan at exorbitant rates of interest is hereditary bond-slavery.

“MAMATVA”: MOTHERHOOD

One of the key elements present throughout the novella could be named as ‘mamatva’, a maternal, protective regard. Irrespective of gender bias this element of ‘mamatva’ is invariably associated with the victims. The rapist-goon in Dhanbad was killed in Bono’s hands, as his ‘mamatva’ isn’t aroused by the goon, because his appearance is not typical of any mother’s son. Since, in the house of the ruthless landlord, Bono is being held captive, he notices that even Munavar arouses no soft feelings in him. Munavar, too, does not strike as any mother’s son to him. Every night Douloti is raped, molested, tortured repeatedly by Latia Sahib, and he makes grunting noises like a pig & keeps devouring her, while the girl faints. Douloti, later on doubts in vain if there was a heart of a man that existed in him! Contrastingly, in the brothel scene, she goes very maternal while caressing Bono’s calloused feet. This is so because of her unrealized maternal affection that similarly makes her donate part of her secret savings so Somni can buy some bread for her beggar-children. Such low characters such as Douloti & Bono are contrasted with the landlord Munavar’s enormous wife, by one’s attempt. In such instance, one, who quite candidly says that she cannot identify with anyone except herself, anyone in this case including her son and his wife. Although in the given order it doesn’t have any, ‘Mamatva’ is a value; a treasure, a virtue, this is how Mahasweta actually reinforces her call for an alternative
structure, a structure in which ‘mamatva’, together with the tender poetry it propagates, would have value!

One ought not to assume that Mahasweta is indifferent to the form and technique, though she mostly prioritizes her urgent human themes over form and technique. In its subversive parodies, Douloti is brilliant, because motifs like liberty, oppression of freedom, and the liberty to deny all others freedom are carefully used; fantasy versus reality; hands and burdens; contrastive expressions of naturalness between Douloti and Latia; also fine imagery of birds-beasts on one hand and carts-trucks on the other; and also swerving of the narratives. A reference of the seven insets in Douloti, each stylized, and formally isolated from the main narrative can be given, which is an apparent case of alienation technique. Three distinct types of voices are present in the narrative: the exploiter’s, the victim’s, the narrator’s. The author vividly proves her careful discrimination between these three distinct kinds of voices.

Mahasweta, being a non-Dalit writer, and for her acute concern about the facts whether she has the right to pen down a Dalit story, and if so how should she go about it, is the reason why she takes the decision to foreground her own voice.

As an ‘improper’ ethnically smothered, tribal and lower-caste body that has been sexually ‘immoral’ even promiscuous by most social standards, as a body that has been destroyed by abuse, time, history and society, Douloti’s body comes to signify the exact opposite of what the venerated Bharat Mata does. It works to interrogate and supplant the traditional symbolic with the sociality inherent in iconography, replacing the mythic with the social, the symbolic with the literal, the sensual with the material. Its bedrock of social truth is interestingly, what powers this gesture! Douloti’s corpse queries the representativeness and the legitimacy of the Bharat Mata iconography through the nation’s emblematic representation of unacknowledged subaltern heterogeneity. The ramifying tenuousness of rights and privilege, anchors the right to the nation’s political or symbolic representation. It ends up being unrulier, when the ownership-
legitimacy related issues predominate within the themes of rights over the nation’s body and its representation. This is because the national body is a fertile maternal body, producing and reviving the citizen-subjects of the nation. M.F. Hussain’s painting of Bharatmata resembles this novel, in his rejection and re-inscription of some central signifiers of creed and of social decorum.

**DOULOTT’S FATE SYMBOLIZING MOTHER INDIA’S DESTRUCTION:**

Douloti’s misfortune was to end up becoming a prostitute, rather than being prestigious bride of Brahman god! Author’s portrayal of Douloti’s happiness as she is prepped and pampered, is an evidence of her youth and naivety. How Douloti’s virginity and youth brought a high price for Munabar is clearly shown by the author. She is “drugged and left bloodied” by her first client. At the continual abuse of her body, her form of bond labour came. “The boss plows and plows their land and raises the crop”: is Munabar’s one purpose. For profit, there is a constant abuse on Douloti and other women’s body. Through this, Mahasweta points out the injustices done! Douloti will never be able to repay her debt, like her father; until her body is used up, she will work.

By pointing out vividly to the injustices done to the outcasts in India, Mahasweta Devi does a brilliant job. Women, through their bodies, carry the burden of this society. Douloti’s body represents the country & becomes India. The destruction of the land is seen through the rape. Since, the Bounty did not go to Douloti but to Manabar, Mahasweta’s cleverness is seen in the title. In order to show her story and to raise awareness to the injustices done to the tribes, the author allows Douloti to die at the end!

During gestation, how the working out of the inscription of the female body is more economical rather than coded affectively, is shown through Douloti’s pregnancy, as the result of copulation with clients. Mahasweta clearly explains the meaning of “economically rather than affectively coded”: social ideals of maternity don’t determine what happens to the prostitute-
mother’s newborn, else the bond-holder’s economic interests points that. The mother won’t be able to service twenty to thirty clients a day if she cares her newborn infant. Therefore, the infant must be sent away to restrict the cut in the profits!

**THEMATIZING AFFECT:**

Spivak’s aphoretic reading of the ending is powerful and persuasive, where bonded slavery acts as the sole carriers of the “burden of survival,” in the family life: the life of Douloti’s parents’, the life Douloti too ‘exists’ hitherto fourteen, after which she is bought into prostitution. In the story, she thematizes affect as Douloti’s affect, and misses the much ubiquitous and intricate operation of affect in the males, who had liberated themselves from bonded slavery and consolidated with the party of decolonizing nationalists, by absolute augmentation as the authorized body-state of subaltern women. Spivak is numbed at her restriction in thematization of affect to Douloti’s self-indulgent patriotism, to the affective impact on the reader of the concluding aphoristic speech. Mahasweta’s portrayal of Douloti is not just to represent her likeably before us, but she rather creates a situation where we can easily identify ourselves with her. In order to replicate her body-becoming-mind states affectively, the author tries to feel along her, the pain of her progressively ravaged body driven by venereal disease which finally leads her to death! Instead of dying angrily or defiantly, she dies naively, benevolently, so that we are not infected by her death, thereby giving us a vision to see the sentimental approval of her death, and a space in our mind to predict the adversities of the situation and harshness of the system that caused her death. The Indian map that embellishes the festival grounds prepared for the flag- hoisting ceremony is occupied by the subaltern woman’s body. Mahasweta takes a steep curve in the novel two show a dichotomy between the two bodies and throws a challenge before the readers: The borders of national territory offer a single choice between the two- either this or that! This is because during same time, a single space cannot be occupied by both the bodies: the Adivasi corpse and the Indian flag. In such a confluence of
two, the subaltern’s body suddenly lies somewhere, where it should not be: It has reached the zenith of success and seized the place of Indian nation, dominating throughout the country: “all over India”. In order to provide a pedestal for the standard of independence, integrity and modernity, the long expired tribal body can (and probably will) be easily removed! Such an act of planting and hoisting the flag thereby will be presently marked as an invasive colonisation: until the tribal body thrown away, there will be no space for the national flag; to construct India and in order to engrave the Indian map with the nation-configuration, that subaltern rotten piece has to be disposed of the space! This can be done through time-worn conventions of annihilation; else the situation may give rise to a ‘terra nullius’ (A Roman law, meaning ‘land belonging to no one’). This supposition of an empty land is interrogated by the sudden visibility of Douloti’s obsequious tribal body, over which the State’s glorified banner could be superimposed through non-violence, and which could be imagined as uniformly populated and scattered by one homogeneous people of the nation. In fact, what the author infects us with, is not only an aporia, but with a series of inclinations: the absolute opposed directory affects, social normative feelings that direct us to make movements in opposite directions, direct towards activism and towards political quietism, towards the emergence of a utopian world where Douloti could have survived instead of facing a horrible death at her thirties, and towards a capitulation to the status quo! Spivak in this sense is almost correct to say that Mahasweta’s treatment of subalternity is “a representation of decolonization as such”: in Douloti she perceives, and aims that her readers discern the same, feeling the clash of decolonizing establishments.

CONCLUSION:
In a scathing, mordant and ferocious tone, the narrator delivers the inset intervention in an incomplete and menacing way. Mahasweta terminates her sentence abruptly that offers an irony: since it is illegal, she apparently restricts her radical, subversive outburst, until she has
accomplished a total demystification of the nation-state, she hardly stops. These frothing
demystifications can prick some critics’ conscience as un-aesthetic; therefore, it’s high-time that
we modify our aesthetics! In a nutshell, no disjunction between Mahasweta’s art and her
activism exists. She views ‘art’ as an interposition, for visualizing a more humane nation, she
indulges in redeeming corpses from beneath the apparently charming-looking national spots.

Mahasweta negates both the coded nostalgia and the separate space of Douloti at the end of
her story. The movement of negation, destroying the nostalgia and the space of displacement as
well as preserving it, transformed, starts working through a lyrical celebration of the nostalgic
affect. During night, Douloti stumbles with a broken body: body tortured by extreme
exploitation. Two short sentences, a rhetorical question, and a statement which never answers:

"What will Mohan do now? Douloti is all over India." The word ‘doulot’ means wealth or
prosperity. Thus douloti can be made to mean 'trading in affluence.' The last sentence-'Douloti
is all over India' the traffic in wealth ‘douloti’ is throughout the globe. Dissolving even the
proper noun, such a worldwide integration of Douloti is not an overcoming of the gendered
body. In the nonchalance of super utilization, tremendous exploitation, the persevering
agendas of nationalism and sexuality are encrypted.
REFERENCES:


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