



## IDENTITY OF WOMEN IN THE WRITINGS OF MAHASWETA DEVI

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### Abstract

*The present paper focused on identity of women in the writings of Mahasweta Devi is intricately tied to themes of oppression, resistance, and survival. Known for her powerful narratives that shed light on the struggles of marginalized communities, Devi focuses particularly on the plight of women within these groups. Her works explore the intersection of gender, caste, class, and politics, highlighting the complexity of women's lives in a deeply hierarchical and patriarchal society. Through her stories, Devi gives voice to those who are often silenced women from indigenous communities, lower castes, and the working class showing them as multifaceted individuals with resilience, agency, and a deep connection to their surroundings.*

*The present paper focused on the Identity of Women in the writings of Mahasweta Devi with prime objectives are (i) To understand the Identity of Women in the writings of Mahasweta Devi. (ii) To discuss the Resistance and Agency of Women in the writings of Mahasweta Devi. (iii) To know the importances of Women in the writings of Mahasweta Devi.*

*The research methodology of the study is a different type involving an interpretative, conversation, classroom observation and study secondary sources, like books, articles, journals, thesis, university news, expert opinion, and websites, etc.*

**Key Words:** Identity of Women, Mahasweta Devi

### Introduction:

The identity of women in the writings of Mahasweta Devi is intricately tied to themes of oppression, resistance, and survival. Known for her powerful narratives that shed light on the struggles of marginalized communities, Devi focuses particularly on the plight of women within these groups. Her works explore the intersection of gender, caste, class, and politics, highlighting the complexity of women's lives in a deeply hierarchical and patriarchal society. Through her stories, Devi gives voice to those who are often silenced women from indigenous communities, lower castes, and the working class showing them as multifaceted individuals with resilience, agency, and a deep connection to their surroundings.

Devi's female characters are not defined merely by their victimhood, despite the severe oppression they face. Rather, they are depicted as active agents who resist and navigate the challenges imposed upon them. Whether it is through acts of silent defiance or direct confrontation, her women embody strength and resilience. A prime example of this is found in her short story "Draupadi", where the protagonist, Draupadi, refuses to be humiliated by her captors after being subjected to brutal violence. In her refusal to cover herself, Draupadi defies not just her oppressors but the patriarchal expectations of female modesty, asserting her autonomy and reclaiming her body as a symbol of resistance.

In Devi's works, women are often positioned at the intersection of various forms of oppression, particularly caste and class. Many of her protagonists belong to the Adivasi communities or lower-caste groups, which makes their struggles even more complex. These women face not only gender-based discrimination but also the harsh realities of caste-based exclusion and the economic exploitation of their labor. 'Mother of 1084' presents the plight of women whose sons are involved in political movements, highlighting how the women's grief, loss, and suffering go unnoticed in a society that values the political struggles of men but disregards the emotional labor of women. This intersectionality of oppression is a recurrent theme in Devi's writing, underlining how gender cannot be understood in isolation but must be considered alongside social and economic marginalization.

Devi also challenges conventional representations of female sexuality and agency. In a society that often seeks to control and repress female desire, Devi's characters are shown as sexually autonomous or as victims of sexual violence who reclaim their power through acts of resistance. This is evident in 'Rudaali', where the protagonist, a professional mourner, uses her performance to reclaim her voice and resist the suffering imposed by both patriarchal and societal expectations.

Furthermore, Devi's portrayal of women is deeply tied to their relationship with nature. Many of her female characters live in rural or forested areas, with their identities intertwined with the land and its survival. This connection emphasizes women's role as nurturers and caretakers of the environment, even as they endure systemic hardships. Devi uses this link to nature as a metaphor for their endurance and the often invisible labor that sustains life.

rise of digital culture, reflecting the changing ways in which people interact with technology. In addition, computers have led to the creation of new slang and abbreviations, particularly in the realm of instant messaging and social media. Acronyms like laugh out loud, be right back,

and direct message have become staples of digital communication, often replacing their full verbal counterparts.

This digital lexicon has led to an overall simplification of language. Shorter, more direct expressions have gained popularity due to the character limits on platforms like Twitter and the need for efficiency in texting. As a result, language has become more concise and immediate, with fewer formalities and a greater reliance on symbols, emojis, and even visual elements.

### **Objectives of the Research:**

1. To understand the Identity of Women in the writings of Mahasweta Devi.
2. To discuss the Resistance and Agency of Women in the writings of Mahasweta Devi.
3. To know the importances of Women in the writings of Mahasweta Devi.

Mahasweta Devi, a renowned Bengali writer, is known for her powerful and often controversial portrayals of marginalized communities, particularly women, in Indian society. Her writings explore themes of gender, social injustice, caste discrimination, and the oppression of indigenous people. The identity of women in Mahasweta Devi's works is multifaceted, reflecting both the complexity of their roles within society and the systemic forces that shape their lives.

### **Key aspects of how women's identities are portrayed in Mahasweta Devi's writings:**

#### **1. Resistance and Agency:**

Mahasweta Devi's female characters are often depicted as strong, resilient figures who, despite being oppressed by patriarchal structures, demonstrate immense courage and agency. These women actively resist their exploitation, whether through direct action, subtle defiance, or survival in hostile conditions. In works like 'Rudaali' and 'Draupadi', female characters defy conventional gender norms and challenge the social order.

Draupadi is one of her most iconic stories, where the protagonist, Draupadi, refuses to be humiliated by the forces of authority, even when faced with severe violence. Her defiance represents a powerful assertion of her identity and autonomy, challenging the dehumanizing processes of war and colonialism.

#### **2. Victims of Patriarchy and Oppression:**

Many of Devi's female characters are oppressed by patriarchal structures, social norms, and the caste system. These women are often subjected to violence, exploitation, and subjugation. However, Devi's portrayal is not of passive victims but of women who, though oppressed, find ways to fight back or reclaim their dignity in an unjust world.

For example, in 'The Hunt' (Kali), the female characters struggle with societal norms but reveal deep emotional strength and the capacity to challenge their circumstances.

### **3. Caste and Class Struggles:**

Women in Mahasweta Devi's writings are often caught in the intersecting struggles of caste, class, and gender. Many of her female characters belong to the Adivasi (indigenous) communities or lower-caste groups, reflecting the intersection of marginalization based on both gender and social identity.

In 'Mother of 1084', the focus is on the experiences of women whose sons have been politically active during the Naxalite movement, showing how caste and political identity contribute to the struggles faced by women. The women in this novel are often seen coping with loss, displacement, and the silencing of their voices in a deeply divided society.

### **4. The Reclamation of Sexuality:**

Mahasweta Devi challenges conventional portrayals of female sexuality in a society that seeks to suppress it. Her female protagonists are often portrayed as sexually autonomous or are sexually violated in ways that highlight the power structures they are up against.

In 'Draupadi', Draupadi's decision to bare her body in front of her captors can be seen as reclaiming her sexuality and autonomy, rejecting the idea of her as a passive victim. Through such acts, Devi uses women's bodies as sites of resistance and defiance.

### **5. Marginalization and Silence:**

Many of Mahasweta Devi's female characters exist on the margins of society whether because of caste, class, ethnicity, or gender. These women are often unheard, nameless, or reduced to stereotypes in dominant narratives. Devi, however, gives these women a voice, allowing their stories to be heard. Through her writing, Devi not only gives these women an identity but also highlights their strength, intelligence, and emotional depth.

In stories like 'The Hunt' and 'Rudaali', women are often ignored or oppressed by both mainstream society and their own families, yet Devi highlights their humanity and struggle, giving them a voice and visibility.

### **6. Empathy and Connection to Nature:**

Mahasweta Devi's writing often associates her female characters with nature, showing the connection between women and the land they live on. This connection highlights the nurturing role women play in sustaining life and the environment, even as they endure hardship. The land also serves as a metaphor for their marginalized status.

For example, the women in 'The Hunt' are closely tied to the forest and its survival, representing the deep connection between marginalized women and nature.

### **7. Feminist Perspective:**

While not always using the language of feminism, Devi's work often critiques the way that patriarchal structures both at home and in society seek to silence or subordinate women. Her stories are deeply feminist in the sense that they shed light on women's experiences, their suffering, and their acts of defiance, challenging traditional notions of femininity and the roles that women are expected to play.

### **Contribution of Women in the writings of Mahasweta Devi:**

Mahasweta Devi's writings provide an insightful and powerful portrayal of the contribution of women in the face of oppression, injustice, and societal marginalization. Known for highlighting the experiences of marginalized communities, especially indigenous and lower-caste women, Devi's works illuminate their resilience, agency, and the significant roles they play in both their communities and broader social struggles. Through her nuanced characters, Devi challenges traditional gender roles and offers a fresh perspective on the contributions of women who are often overlooked in mainstream narratives.

One of the key contributions of women in Devi's writings is their active resistance against oppressive systems. Devi's female characters are not passive victims of their circumstances; instead, they demonstrate immense strength, courage, and determination in the face of patriarchal, caste-based, and political systems designed to oppress them. These women often take matters into their own hands, challenging both their societal roles and the forces that seek to control them. For example, in "Draupadi", the protagonist Draupadi's refusal to be subjugated or humiliated after being brutally attacked by soldiers becomes a powerful statement of resistance. Her act of defiance, in which she refuses to cover her naked body, challenges the traditional concept of femininity and demonstrates the strength of a woman asserting her autonomy even in the most extreme circumstances.

Another significant contribution of women in Mahasweta Devi's writings is their role in the preservation of culture, traditions, and community. Many of Devi's female characters are deeply connected to their cultural and familial roots, and they play a central role in maintaining these traditions despite external pressures. In stories like 'Rudaali', the protagonist, a professional mourner, finds herself in a position of societal rejection but remains resolute in her duty to mourn for the dead, providing an essential service to her community. Through

characters like this, Devi emphasizes how women, often in subtle and overlooked ways, uphold the emotional and social fabric of their communities.

Women in Devi's works also contribute to the economic survival of their families and communities. The economic struggles faced by women in these marginalized communities are often explored in the context of labor, where they perform physically demanding work under harsh conditions. Despite the exploitation they face, these women demonstrate a remarkable ability to adapt, survive, and sometimes even challenge the systems that oppress them. In stories such as 'The Hunt', the women of the Adivasi community are shown participating in the struggles for survival, where they must fight for their rights to land and livelihood, often at the cost of their own well-being.

In addition to their roles as resisters and nurturers, Devi's female characters contribute intellectually and politically to the social movements they are part of. These women are often at the heart of revolutionary movements, whether fighting for land rights, political freedoms, or gender equality. For instance, in 'Mother of 1084', the female characters, particularly the mother of a deceased revolutionary, represent the emotional and intellectual labor behind political struggles. They are not merely passive bystanders to the male-dominated political movements but play crucial roles in keeping alive the spirit of resistance and ensuring the continuity of the struggle for justice.

Furthermore, Devi's portrayal of female sexuality adds another layer to their contribution. Women in her writings are often depicted as owning and reclaiming their sexuality, defying the societal repression and moral codes that restrict them. This reclaiming of agency over their bodies becomes a crucial aspect of their personal and collective resistance.

### **Conclusion:**

The contribution of women in Mahasweta Devi's writings is multifaceted and profound. Devi presents women as resilient, resourceful, and crucial to the survival of both their families and communities. Through her portrayal of women's resistance, economic contributions, cultural preservation, and political activism, Devi emphasizes the significance of their roles in challenging and subverting the oppressive systems that seek to marginalize them. Her female characters are not just survivors; they are active agents shaping their destinies and contributing to the ongoing struggles for justice and equality.

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