

PICTURE OF SOCIAL LIFE IN THE POETRY OF MAHASHWETA CHATURVEDI

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Our motherland India is amid radical transformations. A social order based on sustenance agriculture and authoritarian feudalism is being reshaped into the technologically progressive economy in agriculture and also in a modern egalitarian democracy. The transformation involves changes in the Political, Social and Psychological processes and even in science and technology. Poverty, Illiteracy, Unemployment, Underemployment, widening gap rural and urban developments, Social tensions arising out of Castism, Communalism and all other sorts of parochialism have assumed, aggressive, demonic and disastrous form in modern society. The supremacy of matter, loss of values and the dogma of commercialism have snapped the social fabric. Modern civilisation has become a complicated affair, in which man has lost his identity.

Today when the future of India is marching ahead on her path of evolution and development, the human values of 'Truth', 'Love', 'Peace' and 'Righteousness' are nowhere found. So, the present literature is in the scarcity of values and sacred teachings. The so-called intellectuals have been debased and immoral, speaking volumes of pornography and sex importing it to the society with the deliberate intention of propagating the doctrine of 'ART FOR ART'S SAKE'. Every root and branch of society is withered and blushed. Religion, Morality, Intelligence, Simplicity Culture, Love, Peace, Friendship, Thoughts, Truth and Brotherhood, have lost its meaning. Karl Marx says, "The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and material intercourse of men- the language of real-life".(On Literature and Art 42) But poets do not peep into the tragedy of average Indian life and point out the plague spots in a commoners life. Authors do not watch the mounting failures and frustrations of life, nor they are aware of even of social-political dilemmas, conflicts and challenges of present scenario. Writers have blinded themselves to the pains of humankind and dreams of the future generation. Defining a true poet, Dr A.N. Dwivedi says, "The poet is a dreamer in one way or the other. He may dream of local reform, a social change, a national revolution, a new form of Government, a new order of things to be at the International level of beauty and truth."(Considerations 1)

In this regard, Dr O.P. Bhatnagar, a socially conscious poet and critic remarks, "The contemporary Indian English poetry in English begins with no borrowed stances of the crisis of Identity, alienation or exile instead it begins in concern and the exploration of possibilities of the interrelationship between different levels of human existence."(Bhatnagar, New Directions to Indian Poetry in English)

The poetry of Mahashweta abounds with the idea of social awakening and social awareness of humanity at large, which is groaning its future in the abysmal darkness of ignorance. Not only she marks the terror of bloodshed and holocaust, the futility and wastefulness of war arising in the society on the issues of communalism and casteism. The agony of weeping hungry children, naked mothers and helpless fathers make her poetry sarcastic sometimes. Sometimes she feels so weak that she marks out her life reduced to gestures merely, no lively happening there. She feels herself a very positive, forceful, spirited and sparkling with hope and devotion to God. Her poetry captures the vision of reality. Lakshmi Kanan remarks on what type of poetry should be penned by poets of our country, “After a point, a woman should not write only to appeal women readers of poetry in whom she may readily strike a chord of sympathy or empathy.” Again she says, “It is hoped that the persona in her poetry or writer’s personality will arouse the interest of intelligent men as well as women.” (Contemporary Indo-English Verse 9)

Mahashweta does not come in the range of those narrow-minded poets. Her poetry covers a wide range of themes such as ‘God’, ‘Society’, ‘Philosophy’, ‘Love’, ‘Universal Brotherhood’, ‘Politics’, ‘Values’, ‘Religion’ and even mythological themes. Her poetry has already stepped out her skin within the circumscribed world of womanhood. She writes with alertness to our modern age and its challenges. Mahashweta is quite aware of the present social scenario and the duties of a true poet. She says clearly, “The world creates a reign of terror and violence and erecting the walls between man and man, he becomes satanic.” (Chaturvedi, Throbbing Lyre) The poet guides in the darkness of ignorance and preaches the lesson of love, peace and brotherhood. Dr O.P. Bhatnagar says, “The new poetry is a kind of anamnesis of something loved not satirised or mocked in a cheap humour. It is self-nourished because of its social awareness and concerns.” (Bhatnagar, Future Directions XIII)

Mahashweta Chaturvedi is a poetess of social concern. She attacks mildly on the customs and rituals of the society, which leads a man to nowhere. She chides useless worshipping of idols and materialistic outlook of the man. In the poem ‘Ask Yourself’ she puts up a question:

Amid rituals and rites
 You are distraught with distress
 He tortures you

Yet you call him your ‘God.’
 He leaves you in lurch

And you call him your protector.” (Voice of Agony 42)

Man has thwarted at the rigid meaning of customs and tradition Devbrat Joshi says, “If a custom is dynamic, it is much alike to the current of an ever-flowing river which makes life lively and happy.” (‘Bujh Gayee Hai Lau Pratha Ki’ 30) In the poem ‘Indian Womanhood’, she rebukes Indian women:

Unable to fight with yourself
 You have proved yourself false
 To you, Sita. (Roaming Aroma 10)

‘Do Not Bring Kerosene for Me’ is a beautiful satirical poem in which Mahashweta mirrors the detestable condition of the bride who is continuously exploited by her in-laws for dowry. To her, a bride is a sincere partner of life who stands by her husbands in day and night

without a hitch. Mahashweta is sorrowful at the reign of injustice, torture, tribulations, helplessness and poor conditions of her countrymen and children. 'In Fly My Songs' She says.

Children

Begging from door to door

Misted by block guards

Fly my songs. (Chaturvedi, Throbbing Lyre 13)

There is a hue and cry in the air that we are advancing and ushering into the 21st century. But what type of progress is this when people are not only economically weak, but also they are suffering from mental illness and disease. Today man is mounting up to the moon and going deep into the valueless motherland. People are leading to nowhere. In the poem 'Veritable Time Bomb' echoes the same idea:

Poverty and illiteracy

Is seen everywhere

What kind of motions

The leaders are going to rear. (Back to The Vedas 19)

Men are running after material objects forgetting the inner wealth. She says-

Hearing your inner voice

Realise that your riches are passing you.

Why do you passers your riches. (Stone God 9)

Mahashweta mirrors the moral destitution, which is responsible for the present condition. In 'The Rose of Hope' she says:

The Sweet Home is wrecked

By earthquake of misconduct. (Stone God 5)

Imposters who suck the blood of the poor for their ill gains mislead people. Discarding horoscope Mahashweta makes a difference between the poor and the rich. In the poem 'Do Not Believe' she says-

For the rich

The stars are auspicious

For the poor

These are vicious. (Back to The Vedas 8)

In the poem 'Do Not Bring Kerosene for Me' She gives a picturesque description of an Indian bride who is fermented for money in our society. Detachment from sensual pleasures and objective pursuit helps the growth of love towards God and Godly. It is the opinion of Mahashweta that most of the problems of the world are due to the rise of selfishness. People are running after a wild-goose-chase forgetting the fount of joy hidden within.

No doubt, the poetry of Mahashweta echoes moral degradation of human values. She looks at the world and says, "Today's man is peaceless, he hankers after fugitive things. He snatches from others to get happiness. His greed increases and ruins him. Hatred, Corruption, Violence and 'Fear' is seen everywhere in the world." (Back to The Vedas 2) She looks at the world with a grim eye and presents the things as it is. She adequately reflects the variegated colours of Indian life and style. Her vision is mature, which encompasses a wide range of themes. She is preeminently occupied with a wide range of themes. Though she is preeminently held with a broken man with his values under fire, and his alienation from society and himself etc. yet the true poet is there, like Ulysses to explore to be brave and to drink life to the last drop. She has solutions for all problems of moral degeneration. In the present society, only Vedas can solve the riddle. She says, "On the age of moral degeneration, the Vedic thought can inspire us for self-

improvement.”(Back to The Vedas 2) Like a living volcano, her hunger erupts, but it also solidifies into creative lava for humanity. Her approach to life is mostly affirmative and spiritual. Sri Satya Sai Baba Says, “Now man is devalued into a machine. Man too has forgotten his worth. He is demeaning himself into a beast and not realising that there is divinity in him.”(Satya Sai Speaks 34)Mahashweta herself commits:

Humanity is the real wealth of man
 You are here on this earth
 For ‘*Satyam*’ ‘*Shivam*’, ‘*Sundaram*’
 Do-not create malice
 Between man and man.(Eternal Pilgrim 6)

In the poem ‘On the Threshold’ Mahashweta defines moral code and gives the importance of its enhancement.

Indissolubly linked to the values
 Is called moral code
 One has to enhance these Values.
 Under which sprits reach full flowering.(Back to The Vedas 25)

If we do not adhere to the divine path, we will certainly extinct. She pens:

Following not the divine words
 We are intent on
 Killing ourselves.(Roaming Aroma 5)

She feels sad at the moral decline of man and finds herself unable to get the manna dewdrops of divinity:

Living with loads of desires
 Ego, hatred, and jealousy
 Peaceless and bewildered
 Disappointed and dejected
 We are unable to get
 Absolute bliss.(Eternal Pilgrim 19)

The whole fabric of society has fallen victim of moral turpitude. The qualities of Uprightness, Honesty, Truth, Love and Non-Violence are missing in the present society. Man is reduced and lost today. The human Values of man have vanished into thin air. He has merely become a machine.

In the hurly-burly of today’s
 Man is machine
 Devoid of patience.(Throbbing Lyre 39)

In the poem ‘Man’s Stubborn Strength’ she imagines a lifeless person full of fruitful shrewdness and wickedness.

Discarding human values
 He is lifeless and rigid.(Back to The Vedas 12)

The man is an epitome of materialism. He is unholy and passing through the Zigzag path of life. He is leading the civilization to destruction.

Busy in temporary comforts
 Of the body
 Unsteady with attention
 Shifting from object to object
 Leading to peacelessness.(Waves of Joy 11)

She makes us aware of such persons who mislead us:
 Beware of chameleon
 Changing colours
 Each and every moment
 To conceal his real identity.(Roaming Aroma 28)
 Man is always grinding his own axe-like '*Mareecha.*'
 Hoodwinking and cheating
 For his selfish motive
Maricha in Human form
 Alluring the innocent Sitas,(Roaming Aroma 28)

Mahashweta is right when she says, "Moral sense in modern society is neither recognised nor respected, criminals prosper unobjected, priests nationalize religion. Such social atmosphere completes man to become either fools or criminals." (Waves of Joy 1)

The poetry of Mahashweta is a fount of motivation to the degenerated society. Bernard M. Jackson aptly remarks, "In an age when the traditional values and the sanctity of the individual are being constantly denigrated and, in so many cases largely ignored, the exemplary poetry of this highly acclaimed lady poet, shines out like the brilliant star in the firmament." ('Flight Path of the Lyre Bird' 66) Poetry helps a man to comprehend the web of social relationships. Dr O.P. Bhatnagar says, "Poetry is not different from life nor should it make a man feel different." (Future Directions 17) At another place, Mahashweta writes, "Poetry in the real sense of term interprets life, rather it is a criticism of human life." (Immortal Wings 1) Mahashweta looks at the men sadly:

Everyday and every morning
 Confused and bewildered
 Pitiably and powerless
 Man approaches man
 For help.(Eternal Pilgrim 1)

She finds it worthless to celebrate the festival of independence,
 Why to celebrate the year of independence
 When there is no nice occurrence
 It is a time to mourn
 Rather than to adorn.(Chaturvedi, P.K. Majumdar 49)

Mahashweta is dejected to see the greed and hypocrisy of man.
 Man snatches morsels
 An irony, a taunt
 On heartless frugals
 Feeding the beast.
 And starving the beast.(Back to The Vedas 14)

In 'fleeting Dream' she laments –
 Gone is the past
 So long-cherished
 That sacred period,
 All have perished.(Voice of Agony 34)

Man is confused and bewildered and at a loss to understand the situation. The poem 'We Are in A Pretty Pass.' vibrates the same idea.

We are in a pretty pass

Never knowing what to do
 Each and every moment.(Stone God 2)

Man is creating hell on earth. Although he is a unique creation on earth, he forgets his glorious past and kills animals and innocents for pleasures mercilessly.

Man is a dangerous sum
 Of endless sins
 Who is intent on
 Converting the earth
 Into a hellish sight.(Waves of Joy 18)

Mahashweta is grim to see the predicament of the children, the youth and the old persons of our country. She says-

Old persons who are known to be
 Parasites and
 Fly my songs to those
 Who are dreaming.(Throbbing Lyre 3)

The heart of Mahashweta grieves much more to see what man has made of man. She puts up a question –

Valiant men of my country
 Why have you made
 This holy *Aryabarta*
 A slaughter-house.(Throbbing Lyre 41)

She again questions:

Stabbing the innocent
 Looting the shops
 Humiliating the women and girls
 Killing the humanity
 Spreading violence.
 Creating terrorism
 Dividing the hearts
 Forming the conspiracies
 Can you be called brave successful?(Voice of Agony 50)

People are searching for the right place outside, which is hidden in their hearts. They are unable to chase the real path for their moral upliftment. They are dull woeful and meaningless. Their minds are contaminated, filthy and defiled:

They are going away
 With their tail between their legs
 No outlet for healthy air
 Of noble thoughts.(Waves of Joy 4)

It is nothing but the irony of time that man who is the pink of perfection and the eternal pilgrim is sobbing continuously and finding himself helpless:

Time's irony
 Man, the excellence of eternity
 Making himself powerless
 Is weeping constantly.(Throbbing Lyre 9)

She hates ungrateful and aimless life:

If one forgets one's blessing

All the joys prove depressing
Aimless life is sad and dull
Nothing seems to fill the lull.(DrH0362)

Her poetry is a vocalisation of the frustration of contemporary society, which is teeming with moral degradation and degeneration in every walk of life. According to Mahashweta, the culture of India represents the endless varieties which are unaffected by the ravages of time or the vicissitudes of history. We should realise that if we cherish 'truth' and 'righteousness', the nation will get automatically protected. Success seeks truth, righteousness, wealth and possessions.

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