

God's warning from the *Book of Exodus* and Mahasweta Devi in "Rudali": A Comparison

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Abstract

Mahasweta Devi is one of those extraordinary writers who fought for the marginalised tribes of the country for the past six decades. She is a strange mix of an activist and a writer. Through her writings, she often depicts the brutal oppression of the tribal people by the money-lenders, upper class landlords, and government officials. As the crusader of the tribal people, Mahasweta Devi emphasizes on justice, mercy, equality, liberty, love and women empowerment. In this paper, the researcher has thrown light on how Devi warns the society of the dooming consequences of oppression as in the Book of Exodus.

Keywords: Mercy, Liberty, Equality, Justice and Empowerment.

Introduction

Bible, the holy book of the Christians, right from its beginning talks about tribes and their suppression. God sent Moses to rescue his people from the King Pharaoh. Many centuries later, even today, after many rulers and governance, suppression prevails in India. Though the people are educated, and technologically developed, the tribal communities the close associates of nature are still bullied. In this article, the researcher finds similarity of the letter 'M', which refers to Moses in the *Bible* as well as in the work of Mahasweta Devi, the redeemer of the

tribals from suppression. The researcher also expresses her views on oppression by comparing the *Bible* and the work of Mahasweta Devi. In the *Old Testament*, the chapter *Book of Exodus* explains that God turned against King Pharaoh and at present, God forewarns people through the looming Pandemic.

Similarities of “M”: M is an alphabetic letter, which withholds two majestic names. M is a letter associated with two prominent people, who strive for the freedom of their people. They grew up with the oppressed people empathizing with the sufferings of the people. They possess the personality of ‘pro bono publico’, which means common good for the people. Moses, who is chosen by God, tries to rescue the people of Israel from King Pharaoh in the *Book of Exodus*. Likewise, Mahasweta Devi, a subaltern activist also tries to unfetter the oppressed people from the high and mighty. The ideologies of these two prominent personalities who worked for the liberation of the people from proscription are compared here.

In this paper, the researcher compares the situations from the *Bible* with “Rudali” to show how God reprimands when the innocent people are suppressed. In the *Bible*, God raises his hand against the King Pharaoh and his people to extricate the innocent from slavery. God watches the cries of his people and their sufferings in Egypt, as he could not tolerate their cries, he prepares Moses to speak for his people. He expresses his concern for the people and announces that he is going to stand for them and rescue them from their miseries:

The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are

oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt". (Exodus 3:7-10)

God cursed Pharaoh's country in order to bring back his people to the Promised Land, Canaan. God gave his admonition through Moses to the King Pharaoh before punishing them. Pharaoh fails to obey the words of God and becomes a cause for the doom of his country and its riches:

Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he goes out to the river. Confront him on the bank of the Nile, and take in your hand the staff that was changed into a snake. Then say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness. But until now you have not listened. This is what the LORD says: By this you will know that I am the LORD: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood. The fish in the Nile will die, and the river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water.'(Exodus 7:15-18)

Pharaoh's negligence and stubbornness made him lose his country for he did not pay heed to Moses' advice. God asked him to let his people go, but his rude attitude angered God, so he cursed Egypt. Likewise, in the modern world, Mahasweta Devi stands for the marginalised people. She raised her voice for the voiceless and extended her support as an activist. Her writing focuses on the marginalisation of the tribal people, and portrays how cruelly the society manhandles them.

In "Rudali", the protagonist Sanichari is a tribal woman, who suffers a lot to shoulder her family needs. Sanichari grapples against the social class and the religious systems. In the Tahad village, she along with her husband strive hard for their sustenance. "For them, nothing has ever come easy. Just the daily conflict for a little maize gruel and salt is exhausting. While

those people spend huge sums of money on death celebrations, just to gain prestige” (Devi 9). In these lines, the poverty of Sanichari and her family are explained. She and her husband struggled to earn to make both their ends meet.

Sanichari, who lost her whole family, becomes indebted to a landlord for five years. She borrowed twenty rupees to bury her dead husband, but she was forced to become a bonded labour for five years to repay the debt of fifty rupees. “In order to appease Mohanlal, she was forced into debt to Ramavatar; she received Rs 20 and put her thumbprint on a paper stating that she would repay Rs 50 through bonded labour on his fields over the next five years”(Devi 74).

The servitude to which Sanichari has been effectuated is contrasted with the spendthrift ways of the aristocratic society. The downtrodden are susceptible to subjugation in order to borrow money to fulfill the funeral rituals of their dead ones, while the upper caste flaunt their wealth during such ceremonies. Sanichari like any other borrows from Ramavatar Singh for the basic funeral arrangements of her dead husband and is trapped. The sarcasam is that the subalterns are enforced into the stranglehold of bonded labour for years for a flimsy payment, while the elite classes extravagantly spend for their exequies. The novelist Devi has parallely contrasted the cremation ceremonies of the lavish aristocrats and the poor subalterns, for whom even nominal desires like buying bangles and combs remain a long-lost dream. Devi using her detailing techniques has juxtaposed both ends of the Indian communal hierarchy and it enriches the text with a powerful insurgent quality.

“Rudali” also explicates the community and caste kindred affinity in the midst of the subaltern group. The work “Rudali” of Devi manifests the subaltern people to be very solicitous and concerted, notwithstanding the sporadic controversies and contretemps. After the death of Budhua, his wife hands over her infant to Sanichari. The proletariats in the village remain united and shoulder the sine qua non. The better half of Dhatua willingly offers herself to wet

nurse Budhua's child Haroa. While Sanichari worked on a job, she could not afford a meal. The wife of Dulan sends her chappati and pickle through Dhatua. Though, Sanichari overworks and repays the debt of wheat flour that she had borrowed, she has more debts to repay. The following text lines state that, "In order to survive, the poor and oppressed need the support of the other poor and oppressed. Without that support, it is impossible to live in the village even on milk and gee provided by the malik" (Devi 82).

Haroa, fleeing to join the circus haunts Sanichari. He was working as a menial in Luchman Singhs Dukan. She hunts for him in distress hopping from one marketplace to another. Haroa deserts Sanichari because he wanted to escape from repaying the debts of his grandmother. He flees to pursue his dreams. It is during her relentless search for him that she accidentally meet Bikhni, her childhood friend. The condition of Bikhni is as pathetic as Sanichari. She painstakingly searches for a job to stabilize her economic condition. She is forced to abandon her property as a repayment for the loans that she had borrowed from her landlord. Being deserted and distress, she melancholically wandered in a clueless state until she met Sanichari.

In order to repay the debt, Sanichari is forced to indulge in prostitution by her landlord. Sanichari, who was left without any choice, becomes confused and hesitates to be a prostitute, at this time Dulan advises her to become a Rudali. Rudali is a name given to the people, who lament during death. They earn a living by lamenting at the death of the rich people. When she becomes a rudali, she was asked to perform in a rich man's death. The dead man was the one who pushed her to her present state. From a hard working family woman to a rudali, everything in her life was planned by her landlords. Her life becomes a plaything for the dominators who suppressed and destroyed her life. "...the wages of sin is death..." (Romans 6:23). Sanichari was suppressed by the landlord had a chance to see his destruction. The story of "Rudali" by Mahasweta Devi, expresses the cruelty experienced by the marginalised people.

The stories of Mahasweta Devi unveil the cruelty faced by the marginalised people. Mahasweta Devi represented the secluded community and exposed their sufferings to the world. Even though, her works are being delivered to the society, the technologically developed society still treats the marginalised people in partial ways. The text books and the deeds of activists are just treated as news and their efforts are ignored by the people. God is angered by the oppression of these dominating communities. So, he broke his silence and punished the people with Covid Pandemic.

He gives a chance to the people to rectify their mistakes. In the pandemic period, the people continued to suppress other people. The police who are supposed to protect people from miseries become the cause for the death of a father and son during the pandemic period. The world suffers a great loss, when lockdowns were announced; many daily wagers lost their jobs and struggled to make a living.

The sudden changes in the society makes the people endure a lot of hardship, the government also struggles a lot to normalise the situations. Meanwhile, the police and medical advisors become frontline workers during this period. The police who are employed to take care of the people become a curse for the deceased family. A duo of father and son were allegedly murdered in the police custody. In Thoothukudi, near Sathankulam father Jeyaraj (63), who runs a cellphone shop was arrested by the police for opening the shop beyond 9.00 p.m. during the pandemic. When his son Bennix (31) arrived at police station to see his father, he was shocked to witness that his father was being harassed by the police officers. The son rushed in and tries to protect his elderly father, but was also caught and remanded to illegal custody. Both the father and son were beaten brutally and done to death in the police custody. "Father and son duo allegedly killed in police custody for opening shop beyond time in Tamil Nadu" (*The New Indian Express*, 5).

The pandemic itself is an unpredictable disaster while the people who are supposed to save the community turn against their own people. God created this pandemic to make people realize their mistakes and turn to salvation. This can be taken in accordance with the plagues such as darkness, hail, boils, locusts, and the death of first born, which were sent by God over Egypt as a warning to the King Pharaoh, to turn from his sins and set the people free. The people in large numbers are committing crimes against women, caste, and society. The crime rate that is supposed to reduce during the lockdown is rocketing up. Even after all the tragedies, people suffer through the pandemic and they are waiting for the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

God as well as Mahaswetha warn the people that suppression and oppression will only invite the wrath of doom on them and there will be turbulence and existential crises looming large at the end of the day. The high and the mighty must redeem themselves and live and let others live for this world was created to be equally shared by everyone. Both Mahasweta Devi and God in the Book of Exodus, emphasize on love, mercy, equality, freedom, compassion and justice.



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