

Victimization in Mahaswetha Devi's *Douloti The Bountiful*

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Abstract

Victimization, a pervasive and multifaceted element of human society, manifests through systemic structures that enable the oppression of the marginalized by the powerful. This persistent dynamic the tyranny of the wealthy over the poor and the powerful over the weak has historically been presented as an unchangeable condition. Through the lens of critical theory, this paper argues that Mahaswetha Devi's "Douloti The Bountiful" exposes the brutal mechanisms of this system, moving beyond mere portrayal to a powerful indictment. The narrative meticulously charts the protagonist's journey from initial exploitation to complete dehumanization, highlighting how systemic oppression is perpetuated through economic coercion and social marginalization. Furthermore, the story reveals a critical paradox: the complicity and jealousy that can fester among the victimized class itself, internalizing the logic of their oppressors and hindering collective solidarity. Ultimately, Devi's committed literature does not just scream against heinousness; it illuminates the path toward a nascent victim consciousness. This awakening, the paper contends, is the essential catalyst for challenging and dismantling the very foundations of such oppression.

Keywords: Victimization, Dehumanization, Oppression, Exploitation, Coercion, Marginalization, Complicity, Victim Consciousness

Introduction

Mahaswetha Devi conveys and exposes the injustice, agony, pain, and persecution that the oppressed face at the hands of the powerful and affluent. She brings to light areas of people's suffering that are often overlooked and ignored. She sympathizes with the victims and fights tirelessly against oppression. She instills in them pity for the victims who are constantly suffering, as well as a sense of disgust. B. Charanya observes that even educated and employed women face offense and limitations in both traditional and democratic societies like India, reflecting the plight of countless uneducated women globally (Charanya 9). This paper argues that in "Douloti The Bountiful," Devi meticulously charts this systemic victimization by exposing the interconnected mechanisms of feudal, patriarchal, and economic oppression that reduce the tribal body to a disposable commodity. Through a close reading of the text, this analysis will

trace the protagonist's brutal journey from bonded labour to bonded prostitution, examining the roles of her specific oppressors—the feudal moneylender Munabar, the brahmin intermediary Paramananda, and the capitalist manager Baijnath—in her complete dehumanization. Ultimately, the study contends that Devi's narrative serves as a profound critique of a social system that not only permits such exploitation but actively fosters complicity and lateral jealousy among the oppressed themselves, thereby illustrating Gayatri Spivak's concept of the silenced subaltern.

Victimization

Mahaswetha Devi shows the veracity of the assertion by presenting us with people who have suffered unduly for no fault of their own. She uses literature not only to examine the tortured consciousness of the oppressed and exploited, but also to highlight the indifference of those in positions of power and wealth toward these groups. Mahaswetha Devi's focus on the theme of victimization in her works has become the most respected duty she has undertaken to precisely capture everything in order to inform the public. Her excellent rendering of the struggling poor has earned her high praise. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak emphasizes that globally marginalized women are doubly burdened—not only are they unable to voice their suffering, but they are also obscured in both speech and visibility (Spivak 289).

In *Douloti The Bountiful*, Mahaswetha Devi depicts the plight of bonded workers. The National Human Rights Commission of India defines bonded labour as labour compelled due to debt, either unpaid or underpaid, often amounting to enslavement (National Human Rights Commission 2).

The short story sheds light on the feudal mechanism's exploitation of the poor and demonstrates how the bonded labour system operates outside of the law. Mahasweta illustrates the oppression and cruelty of landlords and the affluent, who crush slaves. The feudal lords' authority and monstrosity are unquestionable. Slaves are subjected to inhumane conditions, including torture. Because of their plight, slaves are constantly repulsed by the betrayal of the feudal system. *Douloti The Bountiful* also exposes bonded prostitution and contract labour, which destroy the lives of underprivileged girls.

Douloti The Bountiful is set in a West Bengal village. They concentrate on bonded labour that exists in rural regions and is operated through the feudal system. This exploitation is entirely focused on the money lender and debtor relationship. The moneylenders are part of the feudal process. In villages, feudal mechanisms use invincible strength and assertion to subjugate and victimize the impoverished. This demonstrates the feudal society's harshness and the plight of the impoverished. Munabar Chandela, Paramananda, and Baijnath in *Douloti The Bountiful* depict feudal society and its exploitative mechanisms. All of these studies shed light on the psychology of those who exploit the impoverished.

Douloti The Bountiful is about Douloti, who bears her father Ganori's bound enslavement on her shoulders. The bonded slavery she engages in is known as 'bonded prostitution'. Douloti's sorrow and endurance have no bounds. Through her, light is shed on the suffering of bonded prostitutes in a whorehouse. Douloti is finally relieved of her miseries, only to collapse with venereal infections and die vomiting blood. The first part of *Douloti The Bountiful* focuses on the awful mind of the malik mahajan, Munabar Chandela. He is the monarch of Seora. He lends money to the poor and makes them his lifelong slaves. By this, the majority of the townspeople are his slaves. The entire community is under his authority. The narrative makes it clear that Munabar has lent money to so many villagers that nearly all have become his bonded slaves (Devi Imaginary Maps 21). He holds all Dusad, Ghasi, Nagesia, Munda, Lohar, Oraon, Bhuyians, Chamar, and Parhaia caste members as slaves. His exploitation continues indefinitely. The Kamiya women sang of his oppression and dominance. Their folk songs describe how they are trapped in debt from small loans, illustrating the devastating extent of their bondage (22).

The short story portrays his predatory thoughts and terrible personality. He's a jealous man. He never accepts any poor man's success. He wants them to constantly be beneath his feet. He smashes those who are prosperous. People who use metal utensils are even envied by him. He takes everything from them, leaving them penniless, lending them money, and making them his slaves. This is revealed when the author shows that a poor man acquiring even basic goods such as umbrella or cattle leads to retaliation from Munabar, who would have him beaten and stripped of his possessions (24).

Munabar Chandela is envious and will never accept inadequate progress. The poor face a lot of humiliation and desperation, and there is no way out for them because they must rely on him and his mercy to survive in the hamlet. Even Munabar's wife confesses that she envies other people's small improvements in life, like owning new cows or building new rooms (24).

Both the woman and the husband regard other people's property as a terrible intrusion. So everyone is frightened of envy. We learn about Munabar's envy and terrible character when we see Bono Nagesia's dilemma. Bono Nagesia obtains some money by working hard, returns from Dhanbad to his hometown of Seora, plans to build a house, and settles there. Knowing the circumstances in Seora, he seeks Munabar's permission to build his residence. Munabar becomes envious and irritated once he finishes building his house. In wrath, he arrives with his muscular guys, sets fire to the house, and destroys it. He instructs his musclemen to bring Bono to his office. They bind him like a pig and transport him. Munabar forcibly takes his thumbprint on a white paper, gives him twenty-five rupees and declares him a bonded slave for supposedly borrowing money to recover from the fire (28).

This event recalls Mahaswetha Devi's confrontation with Mangru, a man from Semra village in Bihar State who is tormented by Ayodhya Pande and put into bonded labor. She reveals that Mangru, after refusing bondage, was brutally beaten and humiliated, including having his face stomped on and being urinated upon by his master's son (Devi Back to Bondage 4). The maliks believe that their dominance is their inheritance. Their absolute dominance and subordination cause them to behave crudely and cruelly. They treat the poor people like beasts and torment them severely. Munabar tortures several individuals, including Bono Nagesia. Ganori Nagesia becomes a slave in Munabar after borrowing three hundred rupees for her daughters' nuptials. Ganori is responsible for all of Munabar's home chores. Everything is his responsibility. He doesn't distinguish between jobs and feels that becoming a Kamiya is simply his destiny. The story explains that it is written from birth that a Nagesia will remain poor and will never rise above a shanty dwelling, as documented in the landlord's ledger (Devi Imaginary Maps 22–23).

Ganori forgets to get Munabar's steer one day while drunk, and it becomes prey for tigers in the forest. Munabar is furious at the loss of his ox. He summons Ganori, places the yoke of a laden wagon on his shoulders, and lashes him to pull it. Ganori, with no way out, pulls it, falls on his face, and is permanently disabled. He turns crooked and is nicknamed 'crooked Nagesia'. This displays Munabar's vicious nature. Here we are reminded of Mahaswetha Devi's altercation with a Palamau landlord. When asked about using men instead of bullocks for hard labor, the landlord justifies it by saying bullocks are expensive and valuable, unlike human lives (Devi Back to Bondage).

Sexual exploitation is the primary topic discussed in Douloti The Bountiful. It exclusively deals with bonded prostitution. Paramananda, a brahmin and urban exploiter, visits Seora village, sympathizes with Ganori Nagesia, and frees him from bonded slavery by giving Munabar three hundred rupees in exchange for marriage to Douloti. Douloti carries her father's burden. Paramananda captures her and forces her into bonded prostitution in his whorehouse. This is the most serious sexual exploitation. Douloti's pain here is endless. An innocent thirteen-year-old girl carries a great load on her brain and heart. Douloti initially falls victim to Latia, a contractor with

an animal mentality who desires fresh Harijan flesh. He is a horrible individual. He acts like a beast. Douloti falls into his hands immediately and is subjected to extensive torture. Her screams and pleas are ignored as Latia violently violates her, portraying the terror and helplessness of such assaults (Devi Imaginary Maps 58).

Douloti suffers in Latia's hands. When Latia takes up a girl, he continues his vulture behavior until his attraction to her fades. She refers to Latia as a predatory, lust-driven man who causes her constant pain and suffering every day (60).

Many other women at the whorehouse have been subjected to similar abuse at the hands of Latia, as has Douloti. Rampiyari, the caretaker of the whorehouse, provides a few examples. Kalabathi is impregnated by Latia, who violates her even when she is ill and bleeding. Somni bears three children out of such abuse. The cycle of abandonment, pregnancy, and degradation continues for others like Reoti and Gohuman.

Mahasweta Devi, through Douloti The Bountiful, sheds light on the plight of prostitutes. Poverty is what causes them to suffer so much. All of the women in Paramananda's whorehouse are tribal or Adivasi women. Gabrielle Collu explains that these tribal women possess neither ownership of resources nor control over their own bodies (Collu 49).

Devi recounts how extreme poverty drives families to give their daughters into the sex trade under the illusion of marriage, especially in areas targeted by international buyers (Devi Back to Bondage). Douloti and others become commodities on the market after selling themselves into bonded slavery. Paramananda, who has freed Douloti from bonded slavery, lures several females in the name of marriage and forces them to work as bonded prostitutes at his whorehouse. He goes around the villages, pays the obligations of the forced laborers, and starts a rich business of bonded prostitution. Prostitutes' lives at the whorehouse are hellish. They must take on a large number of clients and make a lot of money for their master or they would face torture. Overload causes them to age, wear out, and die. Jaidev notes that brothel owners like Munabar and the Misras exploit these girls like overworked truckspiling on clients until they break down or die (Jaidev 136).

Conclusion

This paper set out to analyze the intricate layers of victimization in Mahasweta Devi's "Douloti The Bountiful," arguing that the text systematically unveils how systemic oppression feudal, patriarchal, and economic converges to reduce tribal individuals to disposable commodities. Through a close reading, we examined the brutal mechanisms of exploitation embodied by three key figures: the feudal moneylender Munabar Chandela, whose enforced debt and violent jealousy perpetuate physical and psychological bondage; the Brahmin intermediary Paramananda, who hypocritically masks sexual exploitation under the guise of marriage and salvation; and Baijnath, the capitalist manager who treats human beings as expendable inputs in a profit-driven enterprise. The journey of Douloti—from taking on her father's debt to her agonizing death as a bonded prostitute vividly illustrates this process of complete dehumanization. Our findings confirm that Devi's narrative not only highlights physical and economic coercion but also exposes the internalized oppression and lateral violence (such as jealousy and complicity) that fracture community solidarity and perpetuate subjugation. Ultimately, Douloti's diseased body, collapsing onto the map of India, serves as Devi's powerful metaphor for a nation built upon the silent suffering of the subaltern a suffering that, as Gayatri Spivak argues, remains systematically erased from public discourse. Mahasweta Devi's "Douloti The Bountiful" endures as a timeless and urgent political act. It is a masterful critique that dissects the very anatomy of oppression, ensuring that figures like Douloti are not merely objects of pity but indelible evidence of a system that demands relentless scrutiny and transformative change.

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