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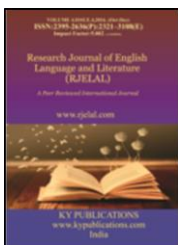
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## An Assessment of the Quest of Identity in *Mother of 1084*

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### ABSTRACT

Bond between a Mother and her Son is unbreakable. Mother who bears the pain of childbirth takes the maximum responsibility of nurturing the tiny toddler, never accepts her son's untimely demise. In *Mother Of 1084* written by Mahasweta Devi also, Sujata, the bereaved mother and chief protagonist is seen struggling to acquire her social status and dignity, and overcome the mental trauma and barriers of family and society to acknowledge and accept her younger son Brati's esteemed ideology of protesting against the selfish, mean minded cult of his own family, a shameless representative of contemporary upper middle class Bengali bourgeois phenomenon, to execute the reverie of forming an exploitation-free Utopian society through Naxalite Revolution. This article is an earnest endeavour to justify Sujata's psychological upliftment from a lamenting, bereaved, sick mother to a true analyzer of contemporary socio-political situation, to uphold Brati's identity as a well-wisher of society and to establish her own social identity in family also. Unlike Maurya in *Riders to the Sea* by J.M. Synge, Sujata's suppressed agony turns into an epiphanic outburst in spontaneous, relentless crying at the end as a vigil of self- realization. Her stoic attitude towards her husband and other children's rotten mentality gets a direct reversal with scorn at them initially and with protest at the end to establish her own identity and to justify her son's ideology as a Naxalite.

**Key Words:** psychological quest, Naxalite movement, bereaved mother, assessment, identity, repressive government, socio-political.

The entire novel *Mother of 1084* like *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand depicts the incidents occurred in a single day (17<sup>th</sup> January, 1970) correlating the past incidents with both flashback and flash-forward technique. Naxalite Brati who like thousands of other contemporary students silently gets involved into the storm of the Naxalite Movement through college politics, decides to leave home after his twenty-first birthday in order to directly join the Naxalite grass-root activity. Gradually his behaviour exhibits certain changes like

opposing his father's illicit relationship and sister's nymphomania, scorning at needless luxury and demoralized aristocracy, helping his alienated mother and showing sympathetic attitude towards a poor, needy and helpless servant Hem. On the eve of his twenty-first birthday, he suddenly leaves home to save his fellow Naxalite partners from impending danger but unfortunately, they all are killed by the police toddies in a fake encounter on that night. Next morning (on 17<sup>th</sup> January, 1968), his family is informed to identify his corpse at

Kantapukur morgue tagged as Corpse no "1084" (15) which symbolizes the exact number of identified Naxalite corpse murdered in police encounter. Instead of being grief-stricken, his family except Sujata expends a lot on the newspaper agency to hide Brati's name as a Naxalite in the fear of losing social dignity. From this day, Sujata's helpless, alienated life starts. But, on 17<sup>th</sup> January, 1970 after meeting with fellow Naxalite Nandini, the girlfriend of Brati and the mother of a fellow Naxalite Somu, her fragmented thoughts assimilate with new divergent information about Brati and his ideology. It transforms her stoic and sadistic attitude into a protesting one puffed with the legal positivity and greatness of Brati's ideology and deeds which helps her to express her own identity in family and society.

After her marriage with Dibyanath, Sujata becomes a puppet housewife, gradually losing her social identity being suffocated by her husband. Though she works in a bank to get rid of needless luxury, a barrier of family prejudice, suffocation and alienation still surrounds her. She is unable to cope with poles apart psychological and philosophical beliefs with other family members. Dibyanath's careless, haughty and savage attitude towards his wife is seen while reading:

He was neither very attached nor indifferent to his wife. The way he saw it, a wife had to love, respect and obey her husband. A husband was not required to do anything to win his wife's respect, love and loyalty. He had built a house of his own, he kept servants, and that was enough he thought. He never tried to make a secret of his affairs with young girls outside the house. He felt it was within his rights. (P.45)

During the time of Sujata's pregnancy or after childbirth, he remains either absent or passive in the excuse of business deals. He feels irritated by crying of new born baby and shifts his bedroom but his interest in women flesh still remains. The novelist artistically describes, "Dibyanath never came with her, never accompanied her when it was time. He slept in a room on the second floor lest the cries of the newborn disturbed his sleep. He would never come down to ask about the children when they

were ill. But he noticed things, he noticed Sujata, he had to be sure that Sujata was fit enough to bear a child again" (3).

This negligence and satyriasis tendency of Dibyanath puffs into Sujata's mind and bursts out when she refuses to become the mother of fifth child rather shifts her attention into gardening and spending time with Brati. Thus, sensitive and imaginative Brati "...became for her the only legitimate excuse for going on living. Sujata had become too possessive about Brati"(31).

Needless luxury, false aristocracy, callous life-style and futility of marital bond in Chatterjee family suffocates Sujata and paves way for her isolation. Her mother-in-law always supports Dibyanath's flirting and enjoying sex with other typist girls as 'virility' (31). Even her younger daughter Tuli happily supplies snacks during Dibyanath's ongoing affairs with different mistresses and often projects him "...as the model of the virile man, and proclaim that if one married, one should marry a man like him. She would say, my elder brother is a coward. He's tied to his wife's apron strings" (97). Within eight months of her grandson Suman's birth, perfectly matched, "loving couple" (21), her elder son Jyoti and his wife Bini "successfully separated a flesh and blood happiness from love" (21). Her elder daughter Neepa carries on extramarital affair with Balai in front of her husband Amit. Sujata has no other option but to separate herself from these mentally rotten people and seek comfort by reminiscing Brati who only need to understand her suppressed agony and pain. However, Sujata breaks down when Tuli fixes her engagement party with Tony Kapadia on 17<sup>th</sup> January (Brati's birth and death anniversary) at her home to wipe out the remaining images of Brati and this turns into extreme outburst after seeing inspector Saroj Pal as one of the invitees, who is directly responsible for killing Brati and thousands of other Naxalites. Sujata's suppressed agony suddenly transformed into "heartrending, poignant" (127) crying for the first time after Brati's death in his remembrance. This provides her epiphanic realization to justify Brati's indomitable Naxalite ideology to fulfill her psychological quest.

Sujata's psychological pursuit can broadly be divided into three different segments- first, her alienated life after Brati's death caused by the lack of companion with whom she can share her emotions in backboneless, rotten aristocratic culture of Chatterjee family; second, her interaction with two people Nandini and Somu's mother. Nandini provides her knowledge about unknown Brati, his ideology, his love for mother and optimistic existence of Naxalite movement whereas Somu's mother gives her realization of pain for deceased son and establishes a relationship other than blood relation; third, her interaction with on-duty inspector Saroj Pal at night, her epiphanic realization and emotional outburst in remembrance of her son. From alienation to analysis of contemporary socio-political situation, Sujata's psychological quest ends in absolution at her son's ideology and deeds.

Sujata's quest to find out Brati's ideology begins only after Brati's untimely demise. The way Brati accompanied Sujata and provided mental support are quite unforgettable to her. When Dibyanath refuses to send his family car at Kantapukur to identify his Naxalite son, he "...was dead for Sujata"(8) as "he had placed his own position and his own security before the dead Brati" (8). Later a bitter argument takes place between them when Dibyanath instructs to remove Brati's photographs, old shoes, raincoat to wipe out his existence and memories from the Chatterjee house. Often, she opens Brati's room, touches his belongings and reminiscences him sitting on window-sill, reading poetry or dangling legs outside until her allusion fades away and reality proclaims. The weak relationship between Sujata and Dibyanath ultimately splits when Dibyanath harshly comments about Brati, "Mother's child! It's you who taught him to be my enemy" (15) about Brati and Sujata wonders in utter confusion by thinking "Why should she tell Brati to be an enemy to his father? Why should she? Was Dibyanath Sujata's enemy? Didn't Sujata share Dibyanath's attachment to respectability, comfort and security?" (15)

Throughout the novel, it is Sujata who correlates past and present incidents before the readers much like of a chorus in classical plays. Throughout her conjugal life, she remains suffocated

and passive. Only Brati gives her new ray of hope by providing his helping hand and by spending time with her. Inner conflict of Sujata is exposed beautifully when she thinks, "Brati belonged to the family. But his cruel murder was an embarrassment for his father, brother and sisters who did not know how they could explain his death to their social circle" (30) but:

Sujata belonged to the other camp, the camp of the enemy. For Sujata was the only one in the family who had never blamed Brati for messing up her neatly organized life. She had never blamed Brati. She had not beat her breast in wild wailing. She had never put her head on the chest of anyone of them and sought consolation. She had made up her mind quite early that she would never seek consolation from those who thought first of themselves while Brati lay dead on the morgue. She had felt closure to Hem than to Brati's father, brother and sisters (30).

After her interaction with Nandini and Somu's mother, her journey of knowing about 'different Brati' begins. Nandini informs her about her beloved son Brati, his cuteness, his hatred for Dibyanath, his love for Sujata, their plan of organizing grass-root activity by leaving their respective home, his ideology of establishing exploitation-free society through Naxalite Revolution and finally how he is betrayed and forced to die. Brati delayed to leave home only to spend his twenty-first birthday with Sujata as he loves his mother very much. Somu's mother informs Sujata about different Brati with 'a complexion of gold' (37) and 'laughing face' (37). Brati used to spend his peaceful time with Somu's family though he had to take low-quality food and sleep on torn mattress. Gradually Sujata understands the burning socio-political issues behind the uprising of Naxalism viz. unemployment, poverty, economic differences, exploitation, and unavailability of government facilities, political turmoil etc. and the impact of Naxalism upon the common mass. Finally, she comes to the conclusion that Brati, Nandini and Somu are right in their demands and she agrees with Nandini's comment, "Has nothing changed? No, nothing has. Why did they die? What has changed? Are men now all

happy? Have the political games ended? Is it a better world?" (86)

In the evening, after meeting with Nandini and Somu's mother, a spirit of defiance arouses in her mind. She begins to hate her family members much more. It seems to her that Tuli's engagement party with its glittering light, branded wine, delicious food, music system, the invitees are mocking at her. She dares to oppose Dibyanath (only the third time in her entire married life after refusing to be a mother of fifth child and to leave bank job) calmly but firmly by saying "if...you...don't leave...this room at once..., I'll...leave...this house...and never come back again"(93; all ellipsis in orig.). She can't bear the opinions of the representatives of rotten aristocracy like Mitter couple, Kapadia family, and hypocrite poet Dhiman Roy about Brati on his birthday as it is one kind of dishonor for Brati's soul and ideology. Her increasing rage reaches its climax after seeing on-duty inspector Saroj Pal (main culprit behind Brati's death) who gives her realization that Naxalite Movement couldn't be suppressed by the repressiveness of government. Her anger, scorn, hatred and disgust assimilates with her epiphanic realization about the righteousness of Brati's ideology and deeds and makes her perplexed and she stumbles on the ground due to dizziness.

One can raise the question how Sujata's falling on the ground at the end of the novel justifies her psychological quest to prove her son's right ideology. To understand Sujata's journey from "Brati remain forever close to her heart as a bitter pain" (96) to "a cry that smelt of blood, protest and grief" (127), the readers has to analyze her mental conflict and contemporary socio-political changes also. Before 17<sup>th</sup> January, 1970, Sujata tries to keep Brati alive by remembering the time spent with him, by touching his remaining useable things or by reminiscing his comments like- "Ma, I'm going to put you aside inside a glass house once I grow up. A house built of magic glass, Ma, where you can see everyone but no one can see you" (98) but on this day, she rediscovers Brati with a revolutionary image, who remains within the heart of thousands of other people as a true well wisher of society. Nandini's remark also accedes it, "That's what I thought then. I still do. They say one forgets about

time. Or that face will grow hazy in my mind. I'm scared when I think of it" (85). Sujata who has seen anarchy pervaded everywhere viz. a generation of youth from sixteen to twenty-four completely wiped, helmeted policemen and gun-tottering soldiers chasing a desperate young boy, police van dragging bodies tied with rope, callous aristocracy is still dominating the society, an apparent tranquility in the disguise of hurly-burly politics and walls were lettered with new slogan to pay tribute to the dead Naxalites, always questions herself, "Why Brati had come to place such absolute faith in the cult of faithlessness? Was Brati's death futile? Did his death stand for a massive NO?" (20) until Nandini awakens her about Naxalite ethics by answering- "How can you? Did any of you ever take a personal loyalty pledge like we did? To everything of everyday life?" (77). Eventually the realization comes to Sujata that Brati is right.

Though Sujata is literate and self-dependent, she can neither overcome the fetters of her conjugal suffocation nor cope with spoilt morality of Chatterjee family. After Brati's death, she become more alienated, disinterested towards family and seeking for social identity. On the other hand, mature Brati would have been accepted among the "weird design" (30) of characters in Chatterjee family if he had anti-Naxalite mentality or "if Brati drank like Jyoti, if he could go about drunk like Neepa's husband, if he could flirt with the slip of a typist the way Brati's father did, if he could be a master swindler like Tony Kapadia, if he could be as loose as his sister Neepa, who lived with a cousin of her husband's, then they could have accepted Brati as one of them" (31).

In spite of all these adversities, Sujata tries to understand about chaotic socio-political contemporary situation, Naxalite ethics and the pain of bereaved mothers. We can't differentiate mothers in the parameter of love, care and having bond with child. Sujata realized this at the end, "Somu's mother, with her little learning, her limited intelligence and her inability to put her ideas into words, thought the same thoughts as she with all her learning, clarity of vision and competence in articulating ideas" (53-54).

This realization transforms her into a bold woman who can oppose family prejudices and vague aristocracy to earn respect from others, to get freedom of speech and to protest against the manipulators of society. Patrolling duty of Saroj Pal at midnight juxtaposes two contradictory things- futility of repressive government's attempt to choke Naxalism nipped in bud and glorification of Brati's indomitable Naxalite ideology. She suddenly finds herself surrounded by Brati's ideology and images which provoked her to cry for the first time after Brati's death from the core of her heart breaking the barriers of shyness. She faints after establishing her own identity in society and justifying her son's ideology and deeds.

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