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Ecological Exploitation of Dalitsin Mahasweta Devi's Play *Water*: Crumbling Ecology and Postcolonial Dalit Identity

Vaibhav Pathak

Abstract

Mahasweta Devi's *Water* problematizes the issues of caste exploitation and ecological hegemony. The paper aims to critically engage with the intersection of issues of water scarcity, gender relations and postcolonial Dalit identity. The faultlines in the post-independence rural Bengali society, the landlord-tenant relationship, and the ecological injustice meted out at Dalits are the issues that Devi takes up. The paper analyses the caste oppression faced by Dalits as individuals as well as a community. Postcolonial representation of oppression, issues of ambiguous referentiality, and limitations of language are the issues that the paper takes up during the course of analysis. The paper explores the use of traditional ecological knowledge, the realisation of exploitation and awareness of trauma as a means of liberation.

Keywords: Ecology, Caste trauma, Postcolonial, Dalit Identity, Literature and Ecology

The dramatic integration of issues of water scarcity, caste oppression, ecological hegemony, and gender is portrayed in Mahasweta Devi's play *Water* (1976). This paper attempts to critically engage

with these issues and the intersectionality of postcolonialism, Dalit identity, and deprivation of natural resources. The faultlines in the post-independence rural Bengali society, the landlord-tenant relationship, and the ecological injustice meted out to Dalits are the issues that Devi takes up.

Mahasweta Devi can speak the unspeakable and play is the perfect genreto do so. She has written tales of oppression, conflict, and trauma of the most marginalised communities of India. Theatre and drama provide an excellent medium for representation of exploitation and Mahasweta Devi makes full use of it in her plays *Mother of 1084* (1973), *Aajir* (1976), *Urvashi and Johny* (1977), *Bayen* (1976), and *Water*. Devi's works focus on divisions within the Indian society and tell the tales of those searching endlessly for their identities along the faultlines of these divisions. Her work is committed to the dispossessed and the disadvantaged – the slum dwellers, the untouchables, and the tribal. Her work strives to portray the lives of those who continue to live in servitude in an independent India. She was a writer, a political and social activist, and a recipient of the Padma Shri, the Padma Vibhushan, and the Sahitya Akademi Award[7]. She received the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1977 for "her compassionate crusade through art and activism to claim for tribal peoples a just and honourable place in India's national life" (Johri 150). Devi's work provides us with an opportunity to examine caste divisions and the ecological exploitation of Dalits critically.

Accepting her Ramon Magsaysay Award, Devi said that much of our country still resides in a darkness that deprives a part

7 Mahasweta Devi was awarded the SahityaAkademi Award in 1979 for *AranyerAdhikar*(1979). She was awarded Padma Shri in 1986 and Padma Vibhushan in 2006. She won the Jnanpith Award in 1996 and the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1997. She was shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize in 2009 and was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2012.

of our population. Throughout her five-decade-long career as a writer-activist, she strived to raise the curtain so that some light might peep inside the deep dark underbelly of the nation. Her works have put forth the struggle and trauma of the people that make up the most under-represented part of the country. Talking about her inspiration, she said,

> I have always believed that real history is made by ordinary people. I constantly come across the reappearance, in various forms, of folklore, ballads, myths and legends, carried by ordinary people across generations. The reason and inspiration for my writing are those people who are exploited and used and yet do not accept defeat. For me, the endless source of ingredients for writing is in these amazingly noble, suffering human beings. Why should I look for my raw material elsewhere? (Bardhan 24)

As an activist, she worked for the Lodha and the Shabar tribes[8] of West Bengal. The trauma of having seen around sixty tribesmen of Lodha and Shabar communities put to death on charges of either theft or dacoity and the exploitation faced by these communities is penned down in works like *Hajar Churashir Ma* (1974), *Aranyer Adhikar* (1979), *Stanyadayani* (1980), and *Chotti Munda Ebong Tar Tir* (1980) among many others. Apart from novels and short stories, she also wrote a number of plays like *Aajir*, *Urvashi and Johny*, and *Water*in which she dramatised the trauma and exploitation of the subaltern. While *Hajar Churashir Ma* depicts the individual trauma of a mother and her family, *AranyerAdhikar, Stanyadayani,* and *Water*

8 Settled predominantly in West Medinipur district and parts of Orissa, the Lodhas are a scheduled tribe of West Bengal with a population of around 84966. Sabars are ethnically a Munda tribe with populations in west Bengal, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh.

depict the collective trauma of various groups and communities. In her short stories, she takes the aid of imagery to represent human suffering and in her plays , she employs folksongs, folktales and even mythology to tell various aspects of the different tales of suffering. In *AranyerAdhikar*and *Water* we see the portrayal of ecological exploitation of tribal communities and Dalits.

Devi is known predominantly as a storyteller than a playwright unlike her husband Bijon Bhattacharya, who was the founding member of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). Devi is adept at telling the tales of oppression and exploitation and wanted a more reaching medium to spread her word. Theatre provided her with an effective medium for the same. The latter half of the twentieth century saw the rise of people's theatre in India. Theatre established itself as a voice of conscience for the common masses. Devi adapted her short stories *Jal*, *Bayen*, *Aajir*, and *Urvashi and Johnny* in 1966-67. She not only converted these into plays but also added rituals, songs, and evocations of the tribal communities. Theatre has the unique ability to bring emotions to life. Pain, suffering, oppression, and the trauma thereof resonates intensely via the theatrical medium. Talking of the impact of depicting violence on stage, Antonin Artaud writes,"I propose then a theater in which violent physical images crush and hypnotise the sensibility of the spectator seized by the theater as by a whirlwind of higher forces" (83). Principles of Theatre of Cruelty[9] and Grotesque Theatre[10] shed some more light on the relationship between violent and brutal imagery on stage and its psychological impact on the audience. Devi portrays on stage the trauma and exploitation of the Dalits of Bengal and the Doms and Chandals in particular, in the play *Jal*. Along with theatrical tools, Devi makes use of mythology, folksongs and invocations. She directs her didactic thespian effort at highlighting the exploitation faced by landless labourers of a post-independence West-Bengal village.

Agriculture is the largest source of livelihood in India, with around 70 per cent of the rural households depending primarily on their small landholdings.[11] The plot of the play *Water* is set in a post-independence rural village of West Bengal by the river Charsa. The Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 recognised the Zamindars as the owners of the land in exchange for payment of land revenue. These Zamindars usually sold their proprietary rights to middlemen at various levels. With the increasing levels of intermediaries, there was a considerable increase in land revenue which was extracted from the tillers or the farmworkers. The Bengal Rent Act of 1859 sought to limit the power of landlords by placing limits on rent increment and land evictions but only the fixed-rent tenants, which were a minority, came under its purview. The majority "burgadars"or agricultural labourers were unabatedly exploited. The Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 too protected only the settled labourers and therefore, was similarly futile. The Tebhaga Movement in the 1940s did see some positive results, but its impact was limited. Post-independence, the situation did not change much for the farm tillers. Even after Independence, not much changedfor farm workers under the Zamindari system. There were a large number of intermediaries who were a new class of zamindars. Sharecroppers used to cultivate small portions of land and were usually impoverished and were continuously indebted to the zamindars who doubled up as money lenders too. The journey from being a sharecropper to a landless labourer was a short but har-

9 Theatre of Cruelty advocates use of primitive life force and experience to set free our subconscious and to bring us closer to our self. Initially propounded by Antonin Artaud, it influenced many avant-garde playwrights.

10 Developing from the Grotesque Art movement in the eighteenth century, Grotesque Theatre aimed at taking down various conventional standards of aesthetics and decorum.

11 Data from the India at a Glance section of the Food and Agricultural Organisation. http://www.fao.org/india/fao-in-india/india-at-a-glance/en/

rowingly traumatic one. The efficiency of the West Bengal Bargadar Act (1950), the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act (1952), and the West Bengal Land Reforms Act (1955) was portrayed well on paper, and the inefficiency of the state machinery in implementing these acts was characterised well by the unfortunate fate of farmers like Maghai Dome and Dhura, the protagonists of Devi's play[12].

The postcolonial hangover of the administrationis well represented by Devi in the play. After independence, the district magistrates were the new "laat sahibs", a colloquial equivalent of the "lordship" of the erstwhile era. While the official titles were abolished by the Indian Constitution, the unofficial power of these titles remained. It is in this hangover of colonial power that the newly appointed magistrates ruled over their small fiefs. The condition of the landlords was quite similar too. Despite the abolishment of the Zamindari System, the Zamindars or the landlords ruled with impunity. As these landlords were in cohorts with the magistrates, no one could question their power. Devi portrays this power in *Water*, describing Santosh – the landlord's relationship with the SDO, "now he is all vicious, establishing in his very manner the power that the rural rich wielded in 1971 over the SDO and the police administration in several areas"(112). Talking about the landlord, Maghai's son Dhura says, "He goes to the town, collects money for relief, and wouldn't spend a paisa for the stricken village itself. Look at his house, rising from height to height. There are twenty villages bound to him in debt for ever. He'll leave nobody in peace" (107). This presents to us a case of "other within the other". While the colonisers colonised the native population, landlords like Santosh colonised the rural Dalit and tribal population. These communities at the margins of the society were

12 For a comprehensive understanding on the Land Reforms of West Bengal, do read "Land Reforms in West Bengal" by Ratan Ghosh and K Nagraj, published in the *Social Scientist*, 1978,vol. 6.

twice removed or doubly colonised. It is at these margins that the various chains of discourses break down, and the people are left without any social or political agency. Those at the margins are subjected to exploitation, and notwithstanding a lack of agency, they come together to seek a collective identity and face cultural trauma.

In such an exploitative administrative setup, access to various resources is also flawed. The deliberately faulty distribution of resources ensures the hegemony of the exploiters. The Suvarna landlord Santosh, along with the SDO create a false deficit of resources by not giving the villagers their rightful share. The villagers, mostly Doms, Chandals, Keots, and Tiors are not allowed to draw water from the public wells. Explaining the situation to a young man, Dhura says:

> DHURA. My father (*raises his hands to his head*), Maghai Dome, knows all about water. Every year he spots the place, and Santosh digs, and there's a new well.
>
> ONE. Then what's the problem?
>
> DHURA. They wouldn't allow us to touch it. Even at the government wells, we aren't allowed to draw water. That's why we have to go and dig at the sands of Charsa. (107-08)

Despite the abolishment of titles, despite the abolishment of untouchability, it seems that at the underbelly of the nation, exploitation is business is as usual,

> DHURA. When we go to distribute the prasad from the Dharam Puja, in the village, they wouldn't let us stand under the ledges of their huts – we're untouchables.

ONE. We've gone over all that, Dhura. The castes, upper and lower, don't mean a thing. They are labels designed by men. The Constitution's clear on that. But who cares to uphold the Constitution? (108)

It's not just the access to resources that is stolen from the villagers by Santosh. By colluding with the SDO and the police machinery, Santosh also steals the villager's access to Constitutional remedies and the justice system. Cycles after cycles of exploitation are faced by the villagers, because of their Dalit identity as the ones who are supposed to "uphold the constitution"are themselves involved in flagrantly violating it. It would be an injustice to say that it is their Dalit identity that creates trouble for them. The Dalit identity of the villagers is an ambivalent phenomenon, and it requires a more in-depth analysis.

Maghai is a water diviner and belongs to the Dom caste. The issue of caste and exploitation is central to Devi's play. Santosh Babu, the Suvarna landlord, acts as the sole source of all power in the village. He is the de-facto head of the village, the representative of the village to the authorities and the sole recipient of all aid and supplies meant for the whole village. Caste discrimination and untouchability are practised rampantly, and the Doms, Chandals, Keots, Tiors and other untouchables are not even allowed to draw water from the wells for drinking, even during the famine. Santosh and his family own all these wells, and they have made it their duty to ensure that not a single drop should come in contact with the untouchables. Whenever a new well is sanctioned for the village, it is dug in the fields of Santosh or his compound. Commenting on the role of water in the region of Bengal, Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt writes that water is,"subjectively constructed, or 'produced' like any other element of nature; a part of the cultural landscape, rooted in history, both the producer and product of the material culture through which human agency is enacted" (404).

In the case of Doms of Charsa, this agency is used to exploit them. Lamenting the fate of the Dalits, Dhura says, "What a shame for us to burn our hearts to cinder to divine water, then to raise it from the bowels of the Earth, and then they'd refuse us a drop of water, not a drop of water for the Domes and Chandals. I spit upon fate, if that's our fate" (Devi 124). The altercation between Dhura and Santosh reveals a lot about caste exploitation.

DHURA. You don't give us water, yet you ask, Don't you get water? That's good enough to shut him up. We never get water, you never give us water. Why talk rubbish, thakur?

SANTOSH. Whom have I refused water?

DHURA. The Domes, the Chamars, the Chandals go without water.

SANTOSH. The smallest insect needs water to survive. But it seems you can do without water, Dhura!

DHURA. No. We scrape holes in the sandy bed of the Charsa in the night, and by the early dawn it gathers a little water. At the slightest delay in collecting it, it evaporates. The Panchayat wells are supposed to be for the public, yet we're denied access to them. In the daytime, they're for washing your cattle, in the night we try to steal water, and you set your dogs loose on us. It's the government's well, yet stealing's the only way we can get water from it. It was my father who had located every one of them. (129)

Notwithstanding the exploitation and inhumane treatment meted out to Dalits of the village, Santosh cannot dig a well without their aid. The Dom community's Maghai is a gifted water diviner, and not even the babus from the hydrological department can do what he can. Aided by traditional knowledge, handed down from one generation to another in the form of folklore, rituals and songs, Maghai helps Santosh dig wells from which he and his brethren will not be allowed to drink as they are untouchables. Just being from the "lower caste"is enough for the administration and the police to view them as troublemakers just as being from the "upper caste" is enough for them to grant all the privileges to Santosh. During famines, Santosh Babu receives the aid for the entire village and seldom does anything reach the villagers as Suvarna owner of the village must have his share first. Violence meets the rebellious villagers who have the option either of starvation and thirst or rebel. The yoke of caste oppression and violence is passed on from one generation to the other, just like the folk songs of the Doms. Dalit women suffer the worst kind of exploitation. Their trauma is unspoken, perennial and collective. Women being twice subalternised, are twice removed from the mainstream and have to face the worst.Through the character of Phulamani, Maghai'swife, Devi, takes up the case of Dalit women.

> PHULMANI. For water. Evening's the time when women gather at the river and dig holes in the sand with their bare hands. In the night water trickles into the holes, and we have to fetch it before the sun rises, for then the hole will dry up.
>
> JITEN. But why? The Panchayati well belongs to you all.

> PHULMANI. All the wells were dug with money from the government for drought relief. If you go by the law, all the public wells belong to the public. But there's Santosh. The great Santosh-Babu. (135)

Discrimination, humiliation and penury are the everyday truth of their ugly existence. As individuals and as a community, on the whole, they are subjected to continual and incessant oppression. SurajYengde, in his recent critically acclaimed work, *Caste Matters* (2019) writes,

> Caste is understood through various prisms, thus making it the most misunderstood topic of dialogue on/in India. Caste is thought of as synonymous with reservations, Dalits, Adivasis, manual scavenging, poverty, Dalit capitalism, daily wage labourers, heinous violence, criminality, imprisonment, Rajputs, Brahmins, Baniyas, Kayasthas, OBCs, etc. These are some of the many variations that bear witness to the everyday nakedness of caste. However, what remains undiscussed and therefore invisible is the multiple forms in which the caste maintains its sanctity and pushes its agenda through every aspect of human life in India. (3)

Yengde'stake on the hidden sanctity of the caste system and its agency to exploit resonates in Devi's work. The comradery exhibited by the landlord Santosh Pujari, his contractor brother-in-law, and the SDO to exploit the Dalit villagers is remarkable. It serves as a telling example of Caste-capital ownership of resources in cohort with administrative corruption that leads to deprivation in the case of Dalits.

Santosh Pujari, the exploitative landlord, identifies himself as a saviour of the villagers. He presents to us a typical case of the Jehovah complex[13] according to Jungian analysis. The Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung laid down the principles of analytical psychology and Jehovah complex is one of its components which describes a condition of self inflation combined with neurotic egotism. While talking to Phulmani, he says, "The government knows that you do not know what's good for you. And that's why they entrust me with all the rations and relief."Santosh or "the devil eater"as Phulmani calls him, despite being the exploiter of the whole village, thinks of himself as their saviour. While Santosh identifies himself as the saviour, the Dalit villagers continually face acrisis of identity. Their identity is linked to Santosh's. As long as he is the saviour, the villagers have to be the exploited lot so that he can save them. The Dalits do not identify themselves as Santosh's fellow villagers but as landless labour who are bound to work at Santosh's farm, who are forced to beg Santosh for water, and who are dependent on alms from Santosh. Santosh exists to exploit the Dalit villagers – the Dalits exist to be exploited by Santosh – Santosh exists to play the role of their saviour. Such is the never-ending cycle of identity crisisand caste exploitation.

While the Dalits are the last beneficiaries of natural resources, they are the first victims of natural calamities. Due to their socio-economic position, they face starvation every year. Drought is the way of their miserable life and starvation due to food shortages is the order of the day. Phulmani'srant for Maghai is apt for illustration. She says,

> And I've never had the simple pleasure of feeling the water pouring down my body till it went cool. Will you tell me, for I've never known it myself, how it feels to be free to drink as much water as you'd like to, till your thirst is really quenched? When I lost the child I had after Dhura, you the great water-diviner had to pour sand on the burning pyre for you had no water to wash it down. (122-23)

13 According to Jungian Psychoanalysis, Jehovah Complex is a form of megalomania in with a delusional individual acts out a made-up reality of grandeur and feels oneself to be all powerful.

When the Charsa river floods every monsoon, it overflows its banks and floods the fields and houses of these Dalits living on the periphery. While the river cannot even provide the villagers with drinking water during the summer droughts, it does flood their homes every rainy season. The landlords and their ilk are comfortably safe in their palatial bungalows, but it is the Dalit on the banks of Charsa who face the river's might.The psychological burden faced by the Dalit villagers shapes their individual and cultural identity, and the same finds its voice in this thespian effort of Mahasweta Devi. Their traumatic experiences distort their everyday reality and rupture the narratives of the ruling classes. Devi provides the villagers with a narrative representation that is otherwise fragmented by the oppression faced by them as an individual as well as a cla**ss:**Prolonged exploitation due to exclusionforces them to reconcile with their everyday reality in different manners. While Maghai and Phulmani silently accept their fate, Dhura chooses to rebel against the oppression. Every now and then Maghai falls on mythology to rationalise his trauma.

The political machinery not only enables the antagonists to inflict trauma which is aggravated by the apathy and the inability of the system but also alienates the Dalits from the state machinery. Apart from using the administrative machinery to alienate the Dalits, Santosh also coerces the Dalit villagers economically, politically, and socially. Still, if some rebel soul like Dhuradares raise his voice against injustice, it will not be long before Santosh brands him as a Naxal. All Dalits are viewed as troublemakers, and those who ask for

what is theirs are quickly branded as Naxals[14]. Water becomes the medium to suppress dissent by denying ecological citizenship and by branding the dissenters as Naxals. In times of drought, these wells are used by the upper caste men to exploit the Dalits strategically and to force them to accept their diktats. At the slightest hint of disobedience, Santosh "will run to the town and the police that the lower castes of Charsa have all turned Naxals"(116-17). Keep them hungry, keep them thirsty, keep them frightened – seems to be the motto of the ruling class to make sure the Dalits live in continuous trauma. Santosh extorts labour from the helpless villages at the rates of his choosing as a refusal will mean being branded as a Naxal.

> MAGHAI. It's from 1971 that he raised the plea that all the Domes and low castes of Charsa are treacherous. This year it was we cast the first seeds. But he warned, no fifty paise per head for you people. Thirty paise would be more than enough for you. Take it or leave it. I'll bring in dawals to work in my fields.
>
> PHULMANI. Dawal!
>
> MAGHAI. Once the people penetrated into the inner villages in the Naxalitedays, people fled the villages in terror, and ever since then, like unwelcome pests they go about offering to work at a pittance. Can't you see how it happens, Dhura's mother? And this drought! There'll be swarms of labourers for fifteen paise a day and a snack. We had an argument with Santosh over the wages. And I had to pay for that, scorching in the sun. With the drought and the heat and an empty stomach, my head went reeling. (137)

14 *The Naxalite Movement*(1996) by former IPS officer Prakash Singh is suitable for understanding the history of the Naxal movement, its beginnings and the history of time period discussed in this paper. This book is however, not up-to-date with the current situation of the movement.

Maghai Dom tries to rationalise his oppression due to subjugation, by the administrative machinery, by falling back to mythology and by trying to link himself with the mythological figure of "Bhagirath" or the harbinger of water. He says,

> The work we were born to may not provide us with food, but was left to us by our ancestors, my grandfather, his father, his father, for ages it has been our work. When the King Bhagirath brought the holy Ganga down from the heavens, Basumati, the mother Earth, asked Ganga: Give me little bit of it, sister, to keep hidden in my bowels…So the nether ganga flowed into the secret depths of the mother Earth. My earliest ancestor had come all prepared to offer puja to the holy river at her advent. (124-25).

It is not just Maghai Dom who uses mythology to rationalise the situation. Santosh uses mythology to his benefit to ensure compliance from Maghai. More often than not he invokes Bhagirath and reminds Maghai that it is his duty to divine water for him without asking for anything in return and that the Dalits have themselves to blame for the natural calamities as they have given up the old religion and old rituals. The ancient rituals entail that the Doms and Chandals work gratis on the Thakurs land. While Maghai uses mythology and folklore to rationalise the psychological trauma inflicted upon him, Santosh uses them to justify his atrocities. It seems that mythology exists to aid the Suvarna exploitation of Dalits.

The economic exploitation of the farmers is magnified by ecological exploitation. A village serves as a perfect example of a socio-ecological unit with its various components and integrated hierarchies. Maghai Dom and his fellow villagers are entirely dependent on the wells of Santosh Babu, the landlord. River Charsa that passes through the village is not a perennial river. It floods during the rains and its banks run dry in the summer season. Overexploitation of natural resources and their unequal distribution causes frequent famines in the region. Tensions rise when this Socio-Ecological Unit is faced with a famine. The political ecology of this unit is worth studying for its violent ramifications in the play. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) is a power wielded by the Dom community in general and Maghai Dom in particular but is hegemonically used against them. The idea of "native knowledge for native ecosystems" as used by Robin Wall Kimmerer states that the use of the age-old handed-down knowledge of the ecosystem and the surrounding is essential for not only sustainable use of resources but also for the survival of all species.[15] Defending Maghai's traditional knowledge of water diving, Jiten the school teacher says to the officer from the hydrological department, "You blast the Earth to divine water. He draws on the knowledge that he has inherited from his ancestors to divine water. Why should it be mumbo-jumbo in his case and knowledge in yours" (132)?

Traditional knowledge has been passed to Maghai Dom in the form of folk songs and folklores which romanticise the relation of the Dom with the river in songs like these:

The water won't be easy to get,

15 Robin Wall Kimmerer in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*(2020), talks about the use of traditional knowledge in tandem with scientific knowledge for a sustainable use of resources.

I've kept the water hidden deep under,

You've to scratch at my breasts

Before I let it loose,

Not to you,

But to your wife and daughters. (141)

Such romanticising provides the Doms with a coping mechanism to deal with ecological exploitation. They use these folk songs, along with mythology to rationalise the ecological trauma due to a fragile ecosystem of which they are at a periphery. While Dalits are the first ones to bear the brunt of natural calamity, at the same time, nature also acts as a liberator for them.

When the Dalits make up their mind to end their dependence on the wells controlled by Santosh, they decide to make a check dam to store some water from the flooding river. Motivated by the vision of Jiten, the school teacher, the villagers come together to pile up boulders to block the flow of water. Maghai Dom, the human repository of the traditional knowledge of water divining, finds a new way to honour the profession of his forefathers. Once the Dalits choose to end their problem using a native approach to the native ecosystem, the same river that unleashed natural calamities on them becomes their liberator. Liberation for the Dalits of Charsa comes from the conventional use of natural resources in tandem with native knowledge when the subaltern rise to the occasion, realising their role in their subjugation. Natural calamities have a long term impact on the human psyche. Senseless exploitation of the ecosystem inadvertently results in environmental calamities, natural or otherwise. Recurrent calamities like chronic drought and floods adversely affect the psyche of the victims. The long-term exploitation of the entire community

and its impact on their collective identity is visible on the Dalits of Charsa. Striving for liberation does come at a price for the Dalits. As soon as the dam is built, the villagers rejoice at the sight of abundant water as many of them had never seen so much water. Santosh and the SDO declare that the villagers are Naxals who are disrupting the peace of the region and are rebelling against the nation. The SDO orders the police to open fire at the unarmed villagers and to tear down the dam Maghai is killed, the dam breaks and the overflowing Charsa leaps and snatches his body and carries it away.

The subaltern's realisation of their role in their subjugation forms the pivotal point of this play. It is when the Dalits realise that they have "nothing to lose but their chains" that they rise against the oppression. The revolutionary ending of the play is characteristic of Mahasweta Devi and opens to analysis the treatment of exploitation and oppression by authors in their work. India, with its diverse problems, never-ending conflicts, crumbling ecology, and fragmented identities might be home to the largest exploitation-suffering population, and their tale needs to be told for there are many such tales in India. Just like Devi said, "My country, Torn, Tattered, Proud, Beautiful, Hot, Humid, Cold, Sandy, Shining India. My country."

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