

Roles of Humanitarians in Mahasweta's *The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh and Water*

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Abstract: *Mahasweta Devi has delineated the roles of the major characters elaborately along with the discussions of the social and political perspectives, but she has not ignored the roles of minor characters who try to apply balm to the wounds of the most neglected tribals who are stigmatized as untouchable in the society and in doing so they do not hesitate to resist the tyrannies of the powerful jotedars and money lenders. In *The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh and Water* there are Pallavi, Abhay, and Jiten who work like humanitarians to the disinherited tribals. They do try to provide primary needs of life to the poorest people, uplift living-standards, teach what is Indian Constitution, educate the children, solve the problem of untouchability.*

Key Words : *untouchable, humanitarian, jotedars, tribals.*

The world of the tribals was not only filled with the maliks-mahajans, there were also some people who had struggled hard against these very powerful jotedars to bring some relief to the life of the tortured and evicted tribals. Although, the main emphasis is laid on the major characters and main themes, the roles of the minor characters cannot be underestimated. The minor characters who ceaselessly work as humanitarians take the plot or development of story forward, reveal more about the major characters, play crucial roles and help readers understand the story better. The humanitarians in Mahasweta's *The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh and Water* do not only stand by the wretched ones in weal and woes, they also fight with the corrupt oppressors for the rights of these people. Dr. Anjani Sharma writes: 'Devi's writings act as an eye opener for everyone as she records and criticizes the far-reaching consequences of the politics and the pathetic conditions of the tribal, dalits, bonded labourers, landless peasants and women.....Her extensive research work shows the actual state of affairs in which the poorest in India survive. These are tales of poignant misery, and at the same time of admirable courage' (Sharma, 171). The deprived and exploited people of the state of West Bengal participated voluntarily in the naxalite movement around 1970 to snatch away their minimum rights to life from the jotedars and money-lenders.

Pallavi Shah in *The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh*, a twenty three year pampered daughter of a rich, Mumbai-based business man, Tejlal Shah, reached Barha to serve the bhangis who were the lowest of the low. It was the consequence of an advice by Edwin Krishnatma who introduced her to Gandhi Mission and told 'Go amongst those who are the most deprived, the lowest of the low. Serve society.' The local administration and organizations tried desperately to make Pallavi understand the real threats she was going to face. The SDO told several times-'If you go, you might get into some trouble, then my job will be on the line.' She stuck to her goal-'You're trying to scare me off. I'm telling you, I'm dedicating one year to the poor and the oppressed. A few bhanga families here live in inhuman conditions. I shall serve them.' Finally she reached Barha and experienced the poorest living conditions of the bhangis. When the SDO asked her what she planned to do there, she said-'Find out what they need. I can tell right away that they don't have proper houses, health centres, schools, drinking water facilities. They must be very, very poor.'

Pallavi reached Barha in a Jeep and Abhay Mahato accompanied her. He left her in the bhanga locality and returned. Mahasweta writes-'The Bhanga *toli*, so foul-smelling and filthy, the dirt-poor Bhangis, gave Pallavi a sensuous pleasure.' Pallavi ate boiled corn in dirty plates, slept on bamboo platform, made notes with notebook and pencil what the Bhangis needed. She sincerely explained Indian Constitution to Mangalal's wife and told 'There was no such thing as a malik, because in independent india, Mangalal and his malik were considered equals.' Ganesh felt an another kind of hunger at the sight of Pallavi and when she did not act according to Ganesh's order, Ganesh put the bhanga *toli* on fire. The bhangis looked at Pallavi with hatred because she was only responsible for that. She wanted to help them with money, but it seemed useless. Mohan said-'No land, no savings, if you rebuild your huts in the village, they'll only burn them down again.' Pallavi met the SDO and informed him everything about the damage caused by Ganesh, but the SDO did not take any action. When Abhay met her, she burst into tears as she knew that the bhangis were extremely scared of the malik and their huts were put on fire for her independent attitude. She told Abhay-'I still have a lot of money. Money. I couldn't give anything else. Will you give it to them? To rebuild their houses?' Pallavi's mission was great, but because of the lawlessness at Barha, she could not do anything.

Abhay Mahato who read till class six and was a lower caste himself tried ceaselessly to help the people of Barha under the umbrella of Harijan Sangh. When Abhay was a child, his father was killed by Zamindar's men and he had to leave

the village with his mother. When Mori's son told him that his mother became a beggar, carried a bowl, and slept under a tree, Abhay replied- 'Yes she begs, but she stays and sleeps on my office verandah. Snores peacefully all night. Don't worry. Your mother wears eyeglasses too. We'd called in an eye doctor and held a *camp*. Then I got her glasses made. Now she can see much better.'

Abhay was such a good fellow that he arranged for permits for the people of Barha that enabled them collect wood from the forest at the payment of twenty paise per day. He had to work hard and face threats to make it a success. It was Abhay who informed the SDO about Ganesh's shooting of Haroa and as a result Police raided Ganesh's house and seized his illegal weapon.

The SDO was a humanitarian because like the previous ones he did not accept any bribe from the maliks and did not use the law only in their favour. He allowed Abhay get close to him because he wanted to implement the rule of law in the village like Barha. He also helped Abhay get permits for the poor people of Barha to collect wood in the forest. Regarding him Abhay told Bikhari Ganju 'The new SDO is not too bad. Hasn't yet begun to accept the ghee-mutton-rice sent by the maliks-mahajans.' He told Abhay 'Why should that be? If the maliks object to this, I shan't pay heed. Your duty is to bring courage and confidence into the minds of the *acchuts*.' When he was reported, he went to Ganesh's house, seized the illegal gun, put two police men on guard and ordered Ganesh not to go out of the house. He told Ganesh 'You threatened me. I'll get an arrest warrant and take you in tomorrow. I'm taking your gun today.'

In the play *Water*, Jiten, a primary school teacher, played the role of a kind-hearted person. He was concerned with the education of the poor tribal children and wanted them attend school instead of going to work in the fields. He encouraged the local people to send their sons and daughters to schools and they would get books, pencils, slates etc free of cost. He also heard the problems of drinking water faced by the lower caste during drought as the landowners and moneylenders would not allow them to fetch water from their tubewells. Jiten told the villagers - 'Boys don't come to my school- can't run the school if you don't send your boys to school.' When Dhura asked- 'Don't you get boys from the brahman community?' Jiten replied- 'They must be going to Patul. I've seen them going by bullock cart. I don't know why they have to go to Patul when there's a school in the village already.' The true reason came out with Maghai's life-long realization- 'In Charsa, the brahman boys won't come to school for they won't be in the same school with doms and chandals.' Finally the poor villagers decided to send their children to school being inspired by the teacher and Maghai expressed his concerns- 'I don't know what to say, what to do. Santosh threatens if the children of doms and chandals go to school. (Shakes his head with finality) But no! Teacher, you've given us medicine, you've carried water to Maatang's mother from the well and you won't be with us any longer if the school's gone. (To the villagers) Send your children to school.' This teacher also met the SDO in the town to inform him about the problem of drinking water acutely faced by the poor people. Mahasweta writes - 'Rural India has the appearance of an enormous graveyard. In summer and in times of drought the adivasis and the so-called low-caste communities have to dig into the dry riverbeds in search of water, and live on the waste water drained out of cooked rice or on seeds of shrubs.' Santosh also was present in SDO's office. He suspected that Jiten came here to incite the SDO against him. Being scared of Jiten's meeting with the SDO he offered him - 'Sir, Sir Teacher, you wear handspun, you're a disciple of Gandhi, for heaven's sake please don't try to turn the SDO against us. It'll be our death. Now, I can guess why you're on it. Well, let's make a deal. From the next relief grant let's split sixty-forty, big amount for you!' But Jiten was a humanitarian and instantly informed the SDO that Santosh was trying to give him forty percent share of relief. It was Jiten who met Aghorilal at Kasunda and witnessed how the people made a dam with the help of the land owner and solved the problem of water. Returning from Kasunda he told Maghai- 'But once I saw what they have done for water, I threw up everything, the celebrations, the dinner, I wouldn't have any of it. I got into a bus straight-away, and came running to you.' When the dam was finally made and the people were celebrating, they were attacked suddenly by armed police at the order of the SDO because Santosh had informed the SDO about the programme. The dream of the exploited tribals was demolished at last by the state power. Richa Gupta writes 'It is only the widespread humanitarian concern in the novels, plays and short stories of Mahasweta Devi that they have been translated into English' (Gupta, 23).

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