

Tribhuvan University

Exploitation of Workers and Their Resistance in Mahasweta Devi's *Dhouli*

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Letter of Approval

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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Dhan Bahadur Bam has completed his thesis titled “Exploitation of Workers and Their Resistance in Mahasweta Devi’s *Dhouli*” under my supervision. He has completed his research in July 2024. I hereby recommend this thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

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Assoc. Prof. Toyanath Upadhyay, PhD

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Dhan Bahadur Bam

Exploitation of Workers and Their Resistance in Mahasweta Devi's *Dhouli*

Abstract

*This research studies the portrayal of workers' oppression in Mahasweta Devi's *Dhouli*, particularly focusing on the character Dhouli as a symbol of resistance against societal injustice. Through an analysis of dominant feudal figures like Misrilal Misra, Hanuman Misra, and Kundan Misra, alongside field workers such as Dhouli, Jhalo, and Shanichari, the study explores the dynamics of class struggle within the narrative. Drawing on theoretical frameworks by Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels, it sheds light on the evolving resistance against feudal oppression. The exploration reveals the pervasive exploitation inflicted by feudal lords in contemporary India while highlighting the burgeoning resistance among the proletariat class. Devi's narrative shines a spotlight on the stark realities of feudalism in rural Indian locales like Taharr, untouched by the emancipatory forces of British colonial rule. Through the lens of fictional characters like Dhouli, Shanichari, and others, Devi probes the underlying factors fueling workers' rebellion and their methods of resistance against the entrenched feudal system. The study aims to unravel the suppression of feudal dominance and proposes ways to dismantle this oppressive structure, ultimately striving towards a more just and equitable society.*

Keywords: feudalism, exploitation, unity, resistance, societal transformation

This research entitled 'Exploitation of Workers and Their Resistance in Mahasweta Devi's *Dhouli*' aims to analyze Devi's *Dhouli* for its representation of the oppression of workers. Devi often portrays, in her writings, the brutal oppression of tribal people, *Dalits*, women, the poor, and the like by potent, upper-caste landlords, lenders, and crooked government officials. Dhouli emerges as a resistant poor woman who rejects the social orders that treat her less than other human beings who are wealthier than her. The dominant

characters who belong to landlords, Misrilal Misra, Hanuman Misra, Kundan Misra, *Panchayat*, and others dominate the field workers of their village, Dhouli, Jhalo, Shanichari, Murari, Jhulni, and so on. But their domination does not remain for a long time. Workers resist oppression which is studied through the theoretical insights related to class struggle propounded by Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels to illuminate the dynamics of class struggle.

This exploration unveils the excessive exploitation and subjugation inflicted by feudal lords in contemporary India. Initially, the field laborers appear subservient to the prevailing class ideology, but as the narrative unfolds, a change occurs. Dhouli, once compliant with every decree issued by her superiors Misrilal, Kundan, and the *panchayat*, emerges as a symbol of rebellion, ultimately defying authority by attempting to disobey the societal norms and values that hinder her and make her the proletariat all the time. Her transformation into a revolutionary figure signifies the burgeoning resistance among the workers. This study confronts the oppression perpetrated by feudal masters while highlighting the struggle of the proletarians striving for emancipation.

Within the narrative confines of the novel, Devi shines a spotlight on the stark realities of feudalism, particularly in rural Indian locales like Taharr, Ranchi untouched by the winds of independence from British colonial rule. Through the lens of fictional characters like Dhouli, Jhalo, Shanichari, and others, Devi poses the questions, probing the underlying factors fueling worker rebellion and their methods of resistance against the entrenched feudal system. The research endeavors to unravel the suppression of feudal dominance and its perpetuation within Indian society, while also exploring ways for dismantling this oppressive structure through the resilience of real-life farmers.

Devi, in this novel, presents the impact of the feudal system in its extreme form in the then India's rural area called Taharr where the impact of education, law, and the like has not been felt. Devi questions the practice of exploitation of workers and the acceptance of rape of

poor women through the real-like incidents of fictional characters, such as Dhouli, Shanichari, Murari, Jhalo, mother of Dhouli, father of Dhouli, and others. The questions that arise in the research are: what are the factors that force workers to rebel against this cruel system? Why and how do they resist the exploitation done upon them? The current research work primarily aims to show the domination of the feudal and the factors behind its continuous existence in the then-Indian society. Secondly, this paper tries to propose the possible ways of resistance adopted by the servants and workers to end the feudal system.

Dhouli has been subjugated, discriminated against, and abused by her masters. The reasons that drove her to oppose these individuals include the exploitation of her labor, her role as a kept woman and sex object, their failure to take responsibility for her son, and their neglect in providing her with a means to survive. Consequently, she rebels against the so-called socio-economic structures to initiate and achieve transformation for herself and her society.

The storyline of *Dhouli* unfolds in the backdrop of a rural village named Taharr, where the main character, Dhouli, awaits the return of Misrilal, her would-be husband. Despite her impoverished status, Dhouli finds herself loved by Misrilal, a landlord from a privileged background. Their relationship results in Dhouli becoming pregnant with Misrilal's child, yet she receives no financial support from him or his family.

After a prolonged absence, Misrilal returns to the village and promptly marries a wealthy woman, further exacerbating Dhouli's plight. Despite his assurances of financial assistance for their child, Misrilal fails to fulfill his promises, leaving Dhouli to fend for herself and her offspring. Desperate to fulfill the needs of her family, Dhouli turns to prostitution, a decision that draws scorn and condemnation from Misrilal and his people. Instead of acknowledging her as his wife or supporting her, Misrilal criticizes Dhouli, calling a *panchayat* meeting to expel her from the village. In a cruel twist of fate, Dhouli is held

solely accountable for the consequences of Misrilal's actions, bearing the brunt of societal judgment and condemnation.

Ultimately, Dhoulī is compelled to leave Taharr and relocate to Ranchi, where she embraces her new role as a member of the larger community of sex workers. Rather than pleading for mercy or acceptance from those who have cast her out, Dhoulī embraces her newfound freedom and autonomy. Despite the hardships she faces, Dhoulī finds solace and a sense of belonging among her peers in Ranchi, highlighting the resilience and agency of marginalized individuals in navigating oppressive social structures.

Devi, revered as a writer, journalist, and social activist hailing from India, stands as the creative force behind this novel. Her origins trace back to Decca, British India, where she was born in 1926, into a family steeped in intellectual pursuits. Raised by parents who were both highly educated, her mother distinguished herself as a writer and dedicated social worker, while her father left his mark as a poet and novelist. Devi embarked on her academic journey, earning a Master of Arts degree in English from Calcutta University. Her professional trajectory led her to the esteemed role of a teacher at Bijaygarh Jyotish Ray College in 1964, where she imparted knowledge to a diverse cohort of female students primarily from working-class backgrounds. It was during this period that Devi's passion for understanding and advocating for marginalized communities, particularly proletarians, women, and tribal groups blossomed her prominence as a prominent voice in the realms of literature and activism.

The publication of this novel brings some reviews, and the critics have put forth their opinions. Debasish Chattopadhyay states the miser condition of women in a male-dominated society. Chattopadhyay writes:

[*Dhoulī*] is a treatise on the pathetic doom of . . . Dhoulī . . . I will argue that it is Mahasweta Devi's intention . . . to excavate and exhibit the gendered causes . . . and

clearly indicates the plight of these women who usually have no one to turn to, nothing to look forward to, and have only a few to lend them a voice—women who are regarded as sub-human and treated as commodities both without and within their own communities. (105)

Here, Chattopadhyay discusses how women like Dhoulī face hardships in Indian society despite being given promises of equality. Dhoulī, lacking support and a voice, is treated as a creature less than human solely because she is a woman. Chattopadhyay uses Dhoulī's story to shed light on the mistreatment of women due to their gender.

In the same manner, another critic, Damodar K. Rao includes the writing ability of Devi used in *Dhoulī*. He mentions:

Mahasweta has the storyteller's rare genius of transporting her audience into her world of creation in no time. . . . Mahasweta proceeds with her narration of capturing the different time-frames in Dhoulī's life . . . languorous' afternoons, pristine forests, and waterfalls, a bathing scene with a wet sari, a perfect setting for romance. . . . A flashback within flashback shows Dhoulī recollecting her past: she does not exactly remember her marriage but remembers how she was sent to her in-laws' place at a tender age. (4-6)

Here, Rao praises Devi's narrative techniques in *Dhoulī*, noting her ability to immerse readers in the harsh world she creates. Devi effectively portrays different stages of Dhoulī's life and employs visual and flashback techniques to engage readers. Rao's article highlights Devi's narrative style in depicting Dhoulī's story.

Mary Cappelli mentions that women are taken as objects to fulfill the lust of men. Cappelli writes:

In *Dhoulī*, Devi establishes that the sexual taking of young Dusad girls is nothing new in this village as the Misra landowners are accustomed to treating girls as chattel. . .

.Dhouli's mother is quite aware of the plight of young girls and refuses to let her daughter produce sexual laborers for upper-caste desire and entertainment. . . .This question reflects a patriarchal ideology, which reinforces the victimization of women. . . .Devi's ethnographic observations that within the Hindu religion women take on roles of the self-sacrificing mother; a husband-worshipping and self-sacrificing wife. (4-5)

Here, Cappelli explores the theme of sexual exploitation and societal norms in *Dhouli*. Cappelli criticizes the Brahman community's attitude towards Dalit girls and highlights Misrilal's mistreatment of Dhouli, blaming her for circumstances beyond her control. Cappelli argues that *Dhouli* portrays women as objects of male pleasure, reflecting societal attitudes towards gender and sexuality.

This is what Audity Nowshin writes about the discriminatory system in the men-dominated society. Nowshin opines:

Mahasweta Devi holds the distinctive power of representing the suppressed class. . . .As a docile and dominant character in the story, Dhouli becomes powerful when she becomes a part of a larger community. . . .She dissects her movement from the private domain to the public domain by capturing the very moment of riding on the bus and leaving for Ranchi. She gives an exposure to Dhouli's transition that also explains the marginalized women's acts and results. In other words, it explains that Devi is actually giving them a voice.(11)

Here, Nowshin applauds Devi's advocacy for marginalized communities, particularly tribals and oppressed females. Devi's portrayal of Dhouli's choice to enter prostitution challenges societal norms and perceptions of sex work. Nowshin views *Dhouli* as a text where Devi champions the voices of marginalized women and critiques societal hypocrisy.

K. ShamsNaveeth exposes the issue of marriage and remarriage which discriminates against women. Naveeth states:

Dhouli is an early widow, but society does not think of marriage. Normally, a frustrated mind like Dhouli can easily fall for things without thinking. It is the fault of the society and also the politics that force the question of why Dhouli can't remarry to any man in her own community. She was only given a choice to be a concubine for her brother-in-law. (1)

Here, Naveeth addresses the issue of remarriage and gender discrimination in marriage. He questions the societal double standard where men are allowed to remarry while women like Dhouli are condemned for the actions of others. Naveeth critiques the societal restrictions placed on women's marital choices in *Dhouli*.

Moreover, Sahana Priyadarshini shows the real face of a men-dominated society where the total responsibility to withhold the traditions is up to women. Priyadarshini writes:

Dhouli as the female protagonist in *Dhouli* shows the underlying situational result of tribal custom. Dhouli becomes pregnant because of Misrilal, who belongs to both the upper caste and upper class but does not get any attention when he leaves her. Later, she starts prostitution without having any choice of a different livelihood, thus it comes to the knowledge of the so-called good society; in those times Misrilal becomes the custom/ value saver. He denies his responsibility and motivates others in society to cast her away from society.(450)

Here, Priyadarshini critiques societal customs and their impact on women like Dhouli. She questions the hypocrisy of customs that condemn Dhouli for her choices while ignoring her struggles for survival. Priyadarshini highlights the societal pressure on women to conform to traditional roles, even at the expense of their well-being.

Based on above mentioned reviews, it is evident that none of the critics has thrown light on the novel from the perspective of class struggle. That is why, it is a new perspective for reading this novel, and such an approach will help in understanding the condition of workers and their ways of tackling the problem of oppression, discrimination, exploitation, and the like.

This study has only analyzed *Dhouli* from the perspective of class struggle concerning the issue of rape of servants, violence against workers, not being paid well, and exploiting them in feudal society. It has dealt with how workers are targeted to fulfill the economic goal of the masters in feudalism. It has also focused on resistance against feudalism through different means. This study has not focused on other aspects of the novel, such as the use of myth, exploitation of women, mistreatment of *Dalits*, and the like. Mainly, this research has focused on the projection of feudal values and its effect on the life of servants and their struggle to end feudalism.

Class struggle is a concept that has been extensively explored by various philosophers, economists, and social theorists throughout history. Some of them that would be used to explore this novel are mentioned here. The founding father of class struggle and class consciousness is Karl Marx who has explained this in his *The Manifesto of Communist Party*. Appreciating his contribution to the ideology of class struggle, R. J. Rummel mentions, “One of the most powerful sociological explanations of social conflict is that of Karl Marx, who posited a class struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie intrinsic to capitalist, industrial society” (1). He tries to claim that Marx is the pioneer of class conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Marx and Engels opine, “By bourgeoisie is meant the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labor. By proletariat, the class of modern wage laborers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced

to selling their labor power in order to live” (14). It means that the bourgeoisie refers to the contemporary capitalist class, possessing the social production means and employing wage labor. The proletariat denotes the contemporary wage labor class, lacking independent means of production and compelled to sell their labor power for survival.

To clarify the concept of proletariats regarding who they are, and what the factors are that determine them as proletariats, Marx and Engels state:

What is the proletariat? The proletariat is that class in society that lives entirely from the sale of its labor and does not draw profit from any kind of capital; whose weal and woe, whose life and death, whose sole existence depends on the demand for labor—hence, on the changing state of business, on the vagaries of unbridled competition.

The proletariat, or the class of proletarians, is, in a word, the working class of the 19th century. (42)

The proletariat, or the working class of the 19th century, is defined as the segment of society reliant solely on labor sales for sustenance, without deriving profit from capital. Their fate hinges upon labor demand, subject to the fluctuations of business and cutthroat competition.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *Manifesto of the Communist Party* state, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” (14). Throughout history, the narrative of society has been shaped by clashes between different social classes. *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* includes the principles and aspirations of communism. They argue that historical progression has been marked by class conflicts, particularly the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. Proposing a proletarian-led revolution, they indict capitalism and inspire the working class to rise against their oppressors. Their vision includes a society devoid of private property, fostering egalitarianism and classlessness.

Similarly, George Lukacs' *History and Class Consciousness* illuminates the dynamics of class struggle in society. Lukacs' insights shed light on the plight of the working class, neglected in mainstream narratives, and emphasize their pursuit of equality despite feudal oppression.

In the same manner, Aditya Panda's *Marxist Approach to Literature: An Introduction* underscores literature as a reflection of societal realities. This analysis intends to uncover the novel's feudalistic undertones and their impacts. Panda states that Marxism and literature have a very close relation and says:

To Marxism, literature belongs to the superstructure which is a product of the base realities. The Marxist approach relates the literary text to society, to the history and cultural and political systems in which it is created. It does not consider a literary text, devoid of its writer and the influences on the writer. A writer is a product of his own age which is itself a product of many ages... Many such literary pieces witness the social historical and political processes which happen in the real world. (1)

According to Marxism, literature is a product of societal structures, reflecting historical, cultural, and political contexts. Writers are influenced by their surroundings, and literary texts serve as windows into societal processes.

Similarly, M. H. Abrams writes that Marxists take literature "not as works created in accordance with timeless artistic criteria, but as 'products' of the economic and ideological determinants specific to that era" (149). Literature is viewed not as timeless artistry, but as a manifestation of economic and ideological forces specific to its era.

In the same manner, the *Varna System and Class Struggle in Nepal* by Bishwabhakta Dulal discusses class struggle in *Varna* or caste-based society. Aahuti mentions, "In present-day India, class society had developed into a varna society. So, the then varna society was a class society. The varna system was imposed on the working class to deprive them of

knowledge and political and social rights, and to regulate the exploitation and oppression by the ruling Brahman-Kshatriya” (129). In the then-Indian society, people were divided into classes and later on, the varna system was implemented with the classes. The working-class people are not given education or political and social rights. It is done to exploit and suppress the proletariats by the power holders like Brahman and Kshatriya. The same events are mentioned in Devi’s novel as well. Usually, the struggle between the ruling and working class is neglected, but with the help of his concepts, the same issue will be discussed thoroughly to show how the workers get the status of equality in society despite being mistreated by feudal.

A narrator narrates, “Dhouli kept crying. The night drew on, and her mother finally said, they’ll throw us out” (3). Dhouli was crying because Misrilal was not in contact with her anymore. So, the narrator tells us about Dhouli and her mother are fearing of being chased away by the landlords as an indication of the level of torture done to the poor. On the one hand, Dhouli was worried about being deceived by her lover-cum-master, and her mother was worried about being chased away from their village because of the love relationship between Dhouli and Misrilal, the poor and the rich respectively.

In a similar manner, another event where we can find out that the poor are left uneducated. Mother, “Couldn’t even write a letter?” Dhouli, “Can I read?” (4). It is the reality of the poor. They are unable to read and write, they are illiterate. They are not given a chance to study and make themselves aware of their oppression. When the mother of Dhouli questions Misrilal’s negligence, Dhouli expresses her anger by claiming she even cannot read. So, we can say that the downtrodden are not allowed to read and write. They are only asked to work and work. They are not allowed to study because it allows the oppressors to oppress their workers without any questions.

Similarly, Dhouli tells Misrilal, “*Deota?* I’m your slave” (6). Here, with the help of this line, we can say that the poor like Dhouli are taught to accept the rich as the savior.

Dhouli submits herself to Misrilal and accepts her position as a slave which indicates that the poor are taught not to question, but to submit themselves to their masters.

Rummel also opines, “Marx highlighted the role of property ownership, whether of land or the means of production, in dominance and power. Historically, he saw primary social relations, culture, and ideology as reflecting property relationships” (1). Ownership of property provides dominance over the poor in society. The same theme is also echoed in the novel.

In the novel, Parasnath, the shopkeeper says, “What does Dhouli expect? . . . Did she expect a house and land?” (2). Here, it is clear that a shopkeeper in the same place also asks the question of why Dhouli needs land and a house. It is as if she does not need any kind of property as it is the right of the rich to have a house, money, and land. He gets into thought because the poor cannot have property of their own. So, Misrilal has property and exploits Dhouli as the property is the source of power.

Similarly, the narrator says, “Kundan had not let her mother till the land. Dhouli’s mother had pleaded, Sarkar, I’ll pay the rent; the other *Dusads* will help me till the land. I’ll pay whatever rent you ask but give me the land. Otherwise, we’ll starve to death” (6). Here, it is clear that the proletariats are left nothing to own. All the property is owned by the bourgeoisie. And the irony is that the rich own land, but the poor till their land. Mother of Dhouli requests Kundan let her till the land and she is ready to pay the rent as well. It is only the way to survive for them. But he is not ready to allow her to cultivate the land despite being known that she needs that land to live. Here, we can claim that property is taken as the source of exploitation and power against the poor.

In the same manner, the mother of Kundan told her son, “As long as her husband was alive, he tilled the land and worked as bonded labor . . . then they’ll graze the goats, sweep the orchard” (6). Kundan is the landlord of the village where Dhouli lives. Dhouli’s father

worked as a bonded laborer when he was alive and now Dhoulis and her mother also work as a labor in the same house. They work for Kundan's family because they own property, a power. And, Kundan has used his property to use and misuse Dhoulis and her family.

Another event that indicates wealth hegemony is when the narrator says, "Hanuman Misra took off his shoe and flung it at her, saying, "Shut up, *randi!*" (32). Here, Hanuman Misra violently silences Dhoulis's responses by throwing a shoe at her and using derogatory words, demonstrating the aggressive enforcement of social norms and the suppression of marginalized voices because he holds property. Marx and Engels mention, "Our bourgeois, not content with having wives and daughters of their proletarians at their disposal" (25). Dissatisfied with their spouses, the wealthy engage in extramarital affairs, including the wives of their servants, as does Misrilal in the novel.

Dhoulis says to Misrilal, "*Deota?* I'm your slave" (6). Here, Dhoulis submits herself to him. And, he sexually exploits her. Similarly, Dhoulis's mother says to her, "They always make such promises. You're not the first *Dusad* girl the Misras have ruined. *Dusad, Ganju, Dhobi*- whom have they spared?" (3). From these lines also, it is clear that the wealthy have so many extramarital affairs with the poor as it is their right as they are rich, they can have the kept women from proletariats to fulfill their lust.

Kundan informs Misrilal that Dhoulis has turned into a prostitute, "One must be a man! Otherwise, how would Kundan manage it all? So many fields, orchards, illegitimate offspring, sexy, low-caste females! Such bliss! How else would manage his empire?" (30). Kundan confronts Misrilal about Dhoulis's descent into prostitution, justifying his actions as necessary for maintaining control over marginalized individuals and preserving his position of power and privilege. He accepts that he has so many women from poor families and manages them but how Misrilal could not manage one, Dhoulis.

Lukacs writes, “The class struggle must be raised from the level of economic necessity to the level of conscious aim and effective class consciousness” (76). The emergence of class conflict, particularly when economic concerns take precedence. The same events happen in the novel.

When Dhouli’s mother says, “Will you see the Mishras, then? Tell them, ‘Your son has got me pregnant, give me money for the child’s upkeep. Dhouli replies, “How can I? Who will listen to me? Mother answers, “They’ll have to” (3). It is a kind of courage she gets for her and her daughter’s rights where she can speak for them. It is their resistance as they were silent earlier but now, they care for themselves and are aware of their suppression. When Dhoulidoubts, that nobody will listen to her, her mother resists and insists on her hearing as they must listen to her. She has a sense of class struggle with economic necessity. She is well aware of the importance of wealth in society.

Dhouli says to her mother, “Let’s go to Bhalatore, Ma. We’ll work as coolies” (11). Dhouli proposes to her mother a journey to Bhalatore, suggesting they seek employment as laborers, hoping for a better life elsewhere. She means that it is better to work for others in other places than to work for their landlords without being paid. It indicates that she also has developed a sense of class struggle and economic consciousness.

Dhouli tries to kill herself but a coolie grabs her hand, and she permits him to come to her and sleep with her. She says, “Yes. And some makai too. If I’m setting up shop, I might as well charge” (28). In a moment of desperation, Dhouli tries to commit suicide, only to be stopped by a coolie. Subsequently, she reluctantly agrees to engage in transactional intimacy, viewing it as a means of survival and potential financial gain. People may take it as a regression of the proletariat. But it can also be taken as a tool to dismantle so-called structured society’s norms and values which are set by the rich and always support the

bourgeoisie. In another event from the novel which also shows a similar situation, the narrator reports:

[Misrilal] knocked on Dhoulis door that evening and . . . At the sight of Misrilal, her face went pale. But instantly she grew hard and composed . . . Misrilal came in. A lantern instead of a *dibri*. A fresh rug and a pillow on the machan. Stored under it, a sack of *maroa* and a container of oil. You have become a whore? Of course. (31)

In this scene, confronted by Misrilal, Dhoulis initially recoils but quickly adopts a composed face, admitting to her new profession without hesitation. Misrilal is her lover and master. He comes to her to question her regarding her profession. She also answers very strongly and accepts that she has now become a prostitute without any guilt. She has chosen to question the so-called peaceful society where the exploitation of the poor is accepted easily. It means that she has developed a sense of economic necessity to fight back the unjust society.

In another event, the narrator says, "Dhoulis asked, why didnt the Brahmans pay for the upkeep of one of their own offspring" (32). During the panchayat meeting against her, Dhoulis challenges the Brahmans' hypocrisy, questioning why they dont take responsibility for their own offspring's well-being, exposing the double standards and injustices inherent in societal hierarchies. She demands money to raise Misrilal's son. She questions them for not paying any penny, but questioning her all the time.

As much as the rich try to unite to save each other and suppress their servants, they are the real causes behind their downfall. Marx and Engels opine, "What the bourgeoisie therefore produce, above all, are its grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable" (21). The bourgeoisie's end is not the fault of any individual but stems from the society they've constructed, destined for destruction by the proletariats. Events like these lines are also prevalent in the novel.

In the novel, Mother says to Dhouli, “You fell in love, and I had to lose my cattle grazing job. A wolf stole one of their lambs and they blamed me. Is that fair? Throw me out then” (4). In these lines, resistance and anger can be noticed. Dhouli and Misrilal are in love, two people who are from opposite poles in terms of economy. Because of it, Dhouli’s mother has lost her job of grazing the cattle of Misrilal’s family. Not only this, she is blamed for stealing a lamb. These lines include the suppression of the landlords and the anger of their servants. For the mistreatment from her masters, she asks questions with Dhouli, ‘Is it fair?’ It means the poor are building a sense of awareness against the domination of the rich which is why it is right to say that the rich are the real reasons behind their downfall.

Mother says to Dhouli, “Don’t I know how this place works? Everyone’s waiting to see if Misrilal takes care of you after the baby is born. If he does, no one will touch you. If not, they’ll tear you to pieces” (5). Here, the mother of Dhouli is very well-known and careful of her place where the landlords are ready to use and misuse the poor for their benefit. Dhouli is pregnant from Misrilal. The mother is very worried about whether he will take care of her or not. Overall, we can claim that she is conscious of her surroundings and her people’s sufferings. She gets this consciousness because of the exploitation of their masters.

Similarly, the narrator comments, “[Dhouli’s] father had to borrow from the Misras for her wedding and the *gouna*. He died repaying that loan, working for them as a bonded laborer” (8). Here, the pathetic life of laborers is depicted. The father of Dhouli has lost his life in the process of paying debt taken from the Misras at his daughter’s wedding. So, we can say that the exploitation of the proletariat can cause the downfall of the rich. The poor have nothing to manage their day-to-day needs. So, they are forced to take loans from their masters. Their loan is never paid as they are illiterate and cannot calculate their loan and earnings. The rich manipulate the ledger and make the poor their slaves forever which ignites anger and dissatisfaction in the poor and rebel against their landlords.

In addition to the same, Dhouli says, “Please don’t play with a poor woman like me, *Sarkar*. You’ll play your games and push off, but what will happen to me? Look what happened to Jhalo! And Sanichari! No, *Sarkar!*” (10). Dhouli implores authority figures not to toy with her plight, fearing the same fate as Jhalo and Sanichari. She pleads desperately, wary of being abandoned once the game is over. It makes us clear that in the village, the wealthy sexually exploit the poor. So, Dhouli, being aware of this scenario, alerts Misrilal that she is not a playing tool. Here, we can claim that she speaks for herself and her people which may cause the end of the regime of the wealthy.

Moreover, J. V. Stalin writes, “The capitalists are organizing in a separate class with the object of curbing the proletariat. On the other hand, the proletarian camp is wide awake too. . . . It is evident that the proletarians are also organizing in a separate class with the object of curbing exploitation” (1). While the bourgeoisie mobilizes against them, the proletariat strategizes to overcome the oppression done upon them. Similar events are present in the novel as well.

In the novel, at the *panchayat* meeting, “Hanumanji announced, that Dhouli cannot practice prostitution in this village. She can go to some town, to Ranchi, and do her whoring there. If not, her house will be set on fire and the mother, daughter, and child will be burned to death. Such sinful activities cannot continue in the heart of this village” (32). In a *panchayat* meeting, Hanumanji decrees Dhouli's exile from the village, threatening her with violence if she continues practicing prostitution locally, underscoring the community's condemnation of her actions. All the people from the high class gather and decide in favor of them. It indicates their unity to silence the poor.

In another event, the narrator comments, “Hadn’t he left Taharr because his parents forced him to? . . . hadn’t the pressure applied by the head of their family, Hanuman Misra of Burudiha, scared them” (5). Here, it is clear that Misrila is forced to get into the trap of

society which runs based on domination and exploitation. In these lines as well, Misrilal loves Dhoulis and is ready to accept her as his wife. But, his parents, the head of his family, and other relatives force him not to marry a poor girl who does not match them in terms of economic status. So, we can claim that the bourgeoisie unites to manage their status in society.

To indicate the unity among the proletarians, the narrator says, "Sanichari was the village gossip and medicine woman, so the Misras left her alone. She was somehow moved by Dhoulis's plight and, in her typical manner, decided to raise public opinion in the girls favor" (19). Sanichari, known as both the village gossip and medicine woman, takes an unexpected interest in Dhoulis's plight, using her influence to garner support and sympathy for the troubled girl, Dhoulis. Sanichari also belongs to the proletariats. So, she tries to unite her people against the rich which indicates that not only the bourgeoisie but also proletariats unite to end the hegemony of the bourgeoisie.

Similarly, Marx and Engels present how the proletarians can get their equal space in society. They mention:

All the preceding classes that got the upper hand sought to fortify their already acquired status by subjecting society at large to their conditions of appropriation. The proletarians cannot become masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation, and thereby also every other previous mode of appropriation.

They have nothing of their own to secure and to fortify; their mission is to destroy all previous securities for, and insurances of, individual property.

(20)

Throughout history, dominant social classes have aimed to solidify their existing positions by imposing their ways of taking ownership of society as a whole. However, the proletariat can

only gain control over society's means of production by eliminating their former methods of ownership, along with all others that came before. Unlike previous classes, they lack possessions to safeguard or strengthen; their objective is to dismantle all existing protections and guarantees of individual property. In the novel too, we can take an act of indulging in the prostitution of Dhouli as a resistance to the so-called progressive and civilized society. And, their unity for each other also indicates their class consciousness. Dhouli is ready to leave her all securities provided by the same society that exploits her.

In the same manner, stating the sameness of sufferings in workers and their unity, David Harvey states:

Assembled in factories, fields, offices, and institutions, individuals come together and develop a collective understanding of the common sources of their discontent and frustrations. From this, they begin to sense the class identity implicit in their varied experiences and on that common basis start to articulate collective arguments and demands. (18)

Gathered in factories, fields, offices, and institutions, people unite and cultivate a shared comprehension of the same origins of their dissatisfaction and grievances. This leads them to recognize the class identity inherent in their diverse encounters, prompting them to articulate collective grievances and demands on this shared foundation.

A similar point of being united proletarians is also put forward by Stalin writes, “There can be no doubt that the class struggle will flare up with increasing vigor. The task of the proletariat is to introduce the system and the spirit of organization into its struggle. To accomplish this, it is necessary to strengthen the unions and to unite them” (1). To end the rule of the rich, there should be unity among the poor. Stalin further mentions, “The unity of the bourgeoisie can be shaken only by the unity of the proletariat” (2). The narrator

emphasizes that the unity of the proletariat stands as the sole force capable of challenging the bourgeoisie. This is a recurring theme of the novel.

The same event is also present in the novel as well. The narrator narrates, “After giving the mistress of the Misra family a piece of her mind, Sanichari went off to the Dusad neighborhood. She told them, that *Deota’s* son brought shame on Dhouli. And all of you looked the other way. What’s to become of the girl!” (22). After confronting the mistress of the Misra household, Sanichari vented her frustrations in the Dusad neighborhood, accusing them of turning a blind eye to *Deota’s* son bringing disgrace upon Dhouli, and questioning the community's indifference towards her plight. People from Dhouli and Sanichari neglect Dhouli’s problem. But, Sanichari comes forward to awaken her people and unite them for their emancipation from the oppression of the bourgeoisie.

Marx and Engels opine, “Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear . . . the proletariat is its special and essential product” (20). Among the classes confronting the bourgeoisie presently, only the proletariat emerges as a genuinely revolutionary force. While other classes deteriorate and eventually vanish, the proletariat stands out as its distinctive and indispensable creation. The same events are also available in the novel.

In the novel, Dhouli talks to Misrilal, “You can get married, get a shop set up for you, all to please others! But to please yourself it seems you can only ruin the poor” (24). Dhouli confronts Misrilal, condemning his actions that have brought ruin upon her life and her poor people, accusing him of prioritizing societal approval over personal fulfillment. Dhouli belongs to the proletariat. She presents her words very strongly before her Misrilal who is a master. She does not have any fear of putting her thoughts which is a revolutionary act.

Dhouli again says to Misrilal, “You have ruined my life, *deota*. Does it hurt to hear a few home truths? Or all rich people like you so thin-skinned?” (25). Expressing her resentment towards Misrilal, Dhouli blames him for the havoc he's wreaked on her life, questioning if the wealthy are incapable of handling harsh truths or if they're all too sensitive. Here also, she questions Misrilal, a bourgeoisie without any shyness and fear. This is also an example of not only her but also her people's revolutionary nature to face their exploiters strongly.

Similarly, one another event that is also a strong step of the proletariat; Misrila asked Dhouli, “Why didn't you die instead!” Dhouli, “I tried to kill myself. But then I thought, why should I? You can get married, run a shop, see movies with your wife, and I have to kill myself? Why? Why?” (32). When questioned by Kundan about her survival, Dhouli reflects on the unequal burdens placed upon her compared to Misrilal, highlighting the stark disparity in opportunities and societal expectations. She questions back him about why she should commit suicide, rather she lives her life as she wishes.

In the same manner, Kundan tells Shanichari, “Your tongue is getting sharper by the day!” Shanichari, “That's enough” (30). Kundan admonishes Shanichari for her increasing support for the poor. But she responds to him indicating their oppression and exploitation are out of limitations. This act of presenting and exposing the rich can be taken as a revolution in a society where everyone remains silent in the plight of the poor.

Similarly, Shanichari tells Kundan, “She was a widow. But your brother forced her to become a prostitute” (29). Shanichari informs Kundan of Dhouli's coerced involvement in prostitution, casting blame on Misrilal for exploiting her vulnerable position, and revealing the systemic exploitation of the proletariat by those in power. Shanichari speaks supporting Dhouli and against Misrilal and his family. Shanichari also belongs to the proletariat and her act of speaking strongly against Kundan can be taken as the revolution.

One another event that is quite relevant is when the narrator says, “There was somebody else watching all this. Kundan. He realized it was a case of the survival of the fittest. Dhouli had learned to survive and had bested his attempt at vengeance. Kundan was burning with rage” (29). Observing Dhouli’s plight, Kundan recognizes the harsh reality of survival and acknowledges her resilience in his revenge, fueling his anger towards her. The bourgeoisie class creates hurdles for Dhauili and leaves her on the verge of dying. But she learns to survive and lives happily in the same society that wants her to disappear. Surviving in such a society where there are problems all around her can be taken as an act of revolution.

When her mother thought that her staying with her brother-in-law would be good for her, but she took the situation differently:

Dhouli’s face broke into an inscrutable, pitying smile. If that had been the case, she would have been a *randi* in her private life. But now she was about to become a professional *randi*. When you are a kept woman, you’re all alone. But now she would be part of a community. The collective strength of that society was far more powerful than an individual’s strength.... Her mother wouldn’t understand all this, but Dhouli did. Which is why she could smile. (33)

Dhouli’s expression shifted into an enigmatic, compassionate smile. If circumstances had been different, she might have been considered a whore in her personal life. However, she was now on the verge of entering the profession. As a mistress, one often feels isolated, but now she would belong to a community. The combined force of this society outweighed individual strength. Although her mother might not comprehend her choices, Dhouli did, which allowed her to smile. In this way, Dhouli is a revolutionary figure who challenges and changes the class hegemony.

In conclusion, Mahasweta Devi’s *Dhouli* serves as a profound exploration of workers’ oppression and resistance within a feudal society. The character Dhouli, alongside her fellow

laborers, represents the struggle against the dominant feudal figures such as Misrilal Misra and others. The analysis, grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels delves into the class struggle depicted in the narrative, illustrating how the oppressed laborers challenge the exploitative system.

The research highlights the exploitation faced by the proletariat in contemporary India, particularly in rural areas like Taharr. Devi's narrative captures the harsh realities of feudalism, where the laborers initially appear subservient but gradually awaken to their oppression. Dhouli's transformation from compliance to rebellion symbolizes the resistance among the workers. This resistance, as depicted in the novel, underscores the necessity for societal reform and the dismantling of feudal dominance.

The character of Dhouli is a symbol of resistance and resilience. Despite her subjugation and abuse by the feudal lords, she emerges as a revolutionary figure, challenging the socio-economic structures that confine her. Her journey reflects the broader struggle of the proletariat against the feudal system. By focusing on Dhouli's resistance, Devi highlights the agency of marginalized individuals in confronting and overcoming oppression.

Devi's portrayal of feudalism in *Dhouli* sheds light on the systemic exploitation and subjugation of workers. The narrative questions the acceptance of such exploitation and challenges the societal norms that perpetuate it. Through the experiences of Dhouli and other characters, the novel exposes the mechanisms of feudal oppression and the factors that drive workers to rebel. This exploration is crucial in understanding the dynamics of class struggle and how the oppressed resist and seek to dismantle the feudal system.

The study also emphasizes the importance of unity and solidarity among the oppressed. The characters' collective resistance against their oppressors demonstrates the power of unity in challenging and ultimately transforming oppressive structures. Devi's narrative advocates for the proletariat's rights, dignity, and equality, envisioning a more just

and equitable society. This vision is not just a fictional aspiration but a call to action against real-world injustices.

Moreover, the research underscores the relevance of Marxist theories in analyzing *Dhouli*. The insights from Marx, Engels, Panda, and Dulal provide a comprehensive understanding of the class struggle depicted in the novel. By applying these theoretical frameworks, the study illuminates the socio-economic realities of feudalism and the proletariat's resistance. This approach enriches the interpretation of the novel and highlights the enduring relevance of Marxist analysis in contemporary literary studies.

Finally, Devi's *Dhouli* is a powerful narrative that captures the essence of class struggle and the resistance of the oppressed. Through the character of Dhouli, the novel portrays the harsh realities of feudalism and the transformative power of resistance. The research, grounded in Marxist theory, offers a new perspective on the novel, emphasizing the need for societal reform and the eradication of class-based oppression. Ultimately, *Dhouli* stands as a testament to the resilience and agency of the proletariat in their quest for justice and equality.

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