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Politico-cultural Consciousness in Mahasweta Devi's *The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh*

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Abstract

This research explores the oppressive politico-cultural practices and consciousness of lower caste to oppose it in Mahasweta Devi's The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh (2003). As a renowned Bengali writer for marginal, Devi often reflects oppression of the elite and resistance of the oppressed people. As this notion, Devi has portrayed a harsh reality of then Hindu feudal society in which lower caste and class people face extreme exploitation of upper caste landlords. Characters from lower caste like Lachhima, Rukmani, Haroa, Dusad and Bhangi are living in the miserable condition with little or no property in the oppressive Hindu society, the Barha village. Finally, they jointly struggle against domination of the potent and authoritarian Hindu feudal ruling system after they perceive their socio-economic condition and exploitation of the upper caste landlords, especially Ganesh Singh. For this idea, this research applies B.R. Ambedkar's Annihilation of Caste and ideas of Educate, Agitate, and Organize. Overall, the idea related with the caste consciousness and resistance has been framed as the theoretical insights.

Key Words: Exploitation, Politico-cultural, Consciousness, Caste, Resistance

This research exposes the brutal oppression of the upper caste landlords upon lower caste people along with their revolutionary act against such tyrannical landlords in Mahasweta Devi's *The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh*. Devi juxtaposes the live-style of lower caste—Lachhima, Rukmani, Haroa, Bhangi—and upper caste landlords—MediniSingh, Ganesh, Nathu—to represent the socio-economic contradiction of the early post independence rural villages of Bihar. The characters of low caste are at the bottom of the socio-economic structure with less or no property. They are living in the difficulty and complexities facing exploitation and subjugation.

As landless workers, lower caste people work hard at the home and field of landlords, but they do not attain rudimentary needs. Bonded labor and share-cropping system are imposed upon them in order to sustain economic prosperity. With such system, landlords are enriched day by day, but workers are stagnated. Devi does not only present exploitation rather, as a conscious writer, she empowers marginalized people by raising their voice against the exploitative elite. In this respect, gradually all the lower caste characters discern their poor undergoing condition as well as excessive oppression of landlords. They unite for their rights, fight against landlord Ganesh and get victory over him.

Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016) is a leading Bengali woman writer and activist of second half of the twentieth century. Devi worked on the issue of marginal: tribal groups, especially *Lodhas* and *Shabars*, Dalit and women of West Bengal, Bihar and other states of India. Devi, in her literary works, often blends oppression of mainstream—upper caste landlord, money-lender, government officials—and resistance of oppressed people. As this notion, Devi contextualizes this novel on socio-economic condition of the early post independence Bihar's rural villages, Barha,

Nawagarh, Tohri, which were under the ruling system of the upper caste elite with the ideology of casteism, feudalism and patriarchy. In fact, it is a Bengali novel originally written in 1981 under the title *Sri Sri Ganesh Mahima*, but, in 2003, it is translated into the English by Ipsita Chanda.

This novel begins with the birth of Ganesh from Chhodki, a youngest wife of landlord Medini Singh. Unfortunately, Chhodki dies after the birth of Ganesh. To care and raise up Ganesh, Medini orders to his mid-wife Gulal: “Bring Lachhima... I’ll give you three bighas of land. And ten rupees a month” (1-2). Gulal and Haroa—a strong middle-aged *Kharidi* (purchased) man—work in the field and home. When Lachhima requests Medini for her liberty to get married with Mohor, he forcefully kicks her. Lachhima shares it to Mohor and, as feeling sorry, she convinces him to marry Dhanapatiya, elder daughter of Bigulal.

Ganesh's marriage is arranged with Putali at age ten. Mohor prepares to marry Dhanapatiya with an agreement to be a *Kharidi* subject of Barkandaj Singh, but it does not happen with false accusation of Medini: “The sipahis from the police station arrested him right there” (53). On the occasion of Holi, a crowd of Bhangis comes beside the house of Barkandaj, and sings about the recent scandal of Medini: “...every incident was sung aloud in juicy language” (58). Due to their song, Barkandaj dies from coronary attack, and Medini also paralyzes from blood vessel burst in his brain. When Medini wishes to bring *Bahu* (daughter-in-law), Lachhima prepares to leave his house. At that time, Medini offers her money but she rejects, “*Money! Hansli!... I shan't take anything*” (68). *Bahu* comes to home, but, after few days, Medini dies.

Ganesh becomes landlord and allows Lachhima to get married with Haroa. On the occasion of Holi, Bhangis sing a song about Ganesh as his glory: “The bhangis, dressed up, sang to the glory and power of Ganesh” (74). Pallavi, a girl from Mumbai,

comes to Barha to help low caste people, especially Bhangis. But Ganesh tries to abuse her. Due to the obstacles, Pallavi departs for Mumbai. Ganesh brings Rukmani, an illegitimate daughter of Ganga, to handle domestic chores. At one night, Ganesh rapes her, and makes pregnant. Rukmani commits suicide to reveal crime of Ganesh: “In order to turn everyone’s eyes towards him, Rukmani had hanged herself” (116). All the people of lower caste gather there and take her corpse to the house of Nathu, Chandarbhan and Ganesh and do the funeral procession. After death of Rukmani, Ganga and Mori leave Nathu's home. Bhangis and Ganjus also quit their jobs and live in the nearby forest with Dusads.

As a request of Abhay, the newly arrived Sub Division Officer (SDO) allows them to collect and sell dried woods. Ganesh says SDO to evict them from the forest, but SDO refuses it. As feeling looser, Ganesh plans to set fire into the forest to blame them, but Haroa licks his plan: “Haroa told Lachhima everything” (137). Knowing this, Ganesh shoots Haroa. Then SDO seizes Ganesh's gun. At one night, Ganesh goes to forest to burn it, but Ranka Dusad and others see him, and chase him. Coincidentally, he reaches at the hut of Lachhima, and requests her to save. Lachhima brandishes sickle at him, and screams, “Wherever you are, come quick!... Ganesh Singh is hiding here” (165). All the lower caste people come there and Ganesh becomes the victim. Lachhima becomes one of them for their right and liberty in the Barha village.

In the society, powerful people often exploit and abuse marginal people. Due to their exploitative nature, the marginal people cannot rejoice the human rights and legal aid. The writer like Mahasweta Devi, documents such subjects to show the real scenario of the society. Koyel Chakrabarty examines:

Mahasweta Devi... very well relates the sorry state of affairs in the village of Bihar and Bengal despite the existence of low... *The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh*

reproduces the torments in the lives of the male and female Dalit/Tribes pressed below the ruthless domination of the Maliks (Feudal Lords) deprived of proper food, clothing, living and rights. (36)

Chakrabarty illustrates that Mahasweta Devi's literary works incorporate Bihar and Bengal's inhuman condition of Dalit/Tribes and lack of legal aid for their justice. As this, according to Chakrabarty, Devi presents tormented live of Dalits to relate it with the real condition of Bihar. They rarely rejoice basic human rights: food, clothing, and shelter. Chakrabarty concludes that Devi has reflected social injustice to advocate for human right and legal aid.

In the Indian society, there is the high influence of patriarchy in which women become victims. Women often face the sexual harassment and abuse. Mahasweta Devi's literary works often depict such issues. In this regard, Chakrabarty states, "One of the major issues that the novel explores is the exploitation of women. The women sect remains the worst suffers amongst the suffering lot. They are triply marginalized. They die not only of economical and social reasons but also are sexually assaulted" (46). According to Chakrabarty, along with socio-economic subordination, women become sexual victims from the mistreatment of landlords and their male, i.e. triply marginalization. They are sexually assaulted and suffered due to being women; they are remained at the bottom of the society.

Additionally, Sirupa Mahalanabis argues, "The Subaltern is the subject and the women further disadvantaged because of their relative position as objects of sexual and economic exploitation" (146). Mahalanabis traces the double marginalization of women. They are sexually and economically exploited due to being women. As their inferior position, men sexually abuse them considering as the objects for their

pleasure. It means Mahalanabis reveals the sexual and economic exploitation of the women as a subaltern subject.

In the Hindu society, the caste system, a significant notion of the Hinduism, is the hierarchical social order of people. In the caste system, the upper castes oppress and subjugate the lower castes. Firoz N. asserts, “*The Gloy of Sri Sri Ganesh* provides a poignant picture of escalating encroachment on the untouchable communities at the hand of the upper caste landlords” (179). Firoz examines this novel as the picture of vulnerability of untouchable communities. As the notion of caste, the upper caste landlords exploit to the all untouchable people. All the lower caste people suffer from the oppression of upper caste people. It easily happens in the Hindu society due to the legacy of oppressive caste system. Indeed, all the lower caste people become victim of the caste system. As an addition, ManojDamai observes:

Devi has told a life-like story of Lachhima, Rukmani, Haroa, Mohor and others in order to show how the ideologies of casteism treat Dalits, how the bonding of Dalits and their individual and collective effort of resistance plays an important role in questioning the traditions, cultures and customs which promote caste-based discrimination. (1)

Damai shows that Devi has presented the lifestyle of Dalits to question the existing caste ideology embedded with tradition and culture. The caste ideology promotes the caste discrimination in the name of practicing tradition. It furnishes the discrimination and oppression in the life of entire lower caste people. As the resistance of such hegemonic practice of upper caste, Damai traces the individual and collective effort of marginalized Dalits.

In the writings of Mahasweta Devi, the issue of the marginal people is the focal point. People who are socially, economically, and politically marginalized are

considered to be projected in her writings. Their critical condition caused by mainstream is presented with incorporation of voice against it. In fact, Devi depicts the real oppression and resistance in her writings to empower the marginal people.

Soma Gupta affirms:

Devi's works do not present a glorified picture of the downtrodden but they certainly present their lives amidst adversity and exhibit their spirit and strength to resist any form of social oppressions... Hence, the author's discourse of class, caste and gender oppression reveals a unique narrative of the downtrodden, his / her oppression and finally his / her resistance to oppression. (6)

Furthermore, MilindPandit argues, "Mahasweta Devi has explored the following issues on a radical scale: depravation and degradation of life and environment; exploitation and struggle of the laboring poor, the unprivileged, the landless, small peasants, share croppers, bonded labors and miners in West Bengal and Bihar" (29). Gupta and Pandit trace Devi's works as the unique and radical reflection of extremely oppressed people with their resistance and struggle. Gupta argues that Devi's works do not only praise the miserable condition of downtrodden, rather they encourage to fight against the any form of social oppressions—caste, class and gender. Regarding resistance, Devi exhibits spirit and strength of downtrodden. Pandit postulates that Mahasweta Devi presents the issue of degrading life of the subordinated people and environment of West Bengal and Bihar in a radical way. Devi reflects the exploitative life style of the marginal people—poor peasant, sharecropper, bonded labors—as well as their struggle against oppression.

These reviews mostly concern the different issues like gendered subaltern, caste-based subaltern, and marginalization of tribal. KoyelChakrabarty and

Sirupa Mahalanabis presents gendered subaltern by exposing the socio-economic and sexual exploitation of women. Chakrabarty, on another paper, depicts the role of literature on legal aid by relating literature with the critical condition of Bihar from the perspective of human right (46). Firoz N. exposes the worst practice of the caste system and exploitation of landlords (179). Monoj Damai explores resistance of caste based subaltern by presenting the oppressive caste system and attempt against it. Soma Gupta examines the Devi's works as resistance of any forms of social oppressions—caste, class, gender—in order to show issue of the subaltern (6). Milind Pandit traces Mahasweta Devi's works as the reflection of the marginalized people's issues in the radical way.

It makes clear that these aforementioned reviews have lacked this novel to be analyzed from the perspective of politico-cultural consciousness and the struggle of oppressed lower caste people—Dalit. Therefore, in this research, the researcher analyzes this novel in terms of the politico-cultural consciousness and resistance of lower caste people presenting the issue of caste. In this novel, characters from lower caste work for the upper caste feudal landlords being domestic worker, bonded labor, and sharecroppers. They are living in poor socio-economic status with miseries, pain and anguish. Such condition represents them as the marginal people of Hindu society. In contrary, the upper caste people are mainstreams. With this concern, the researcher conducts this research from B.R. Ambedkar's theoretical concept about caste.

In this research, the researcher uses B.R. Ambedkar's perspective dominantly in order to deal the politico-cultural condition of lower caste characters. Ambedkar thoroughly theorized the issue of caste as the politico-cultural system of Hindu society. In Hindu society, there is the Hindu oriented set of attitude, belief and notion to shape the ruling system of the society. The politico-cultural system of Hindu

society occurs with the gradation of Hindu people. It means one group of people is higher than another group. The Hindu society is set with the hierarchy among the same people. Regarding Hindu society, Ambedkar critically observes, “For the Hindu social order is based primarily on class or Varna and not on individuals. Originally and formally the Hindu social order recognised four classes: (1) Brahmins, (2) Kshatriyas (3) Vaishyas and (4) Shudras” (1119). Hindu people are categorized in hierarchical social order in the name of varnas—Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra. Their social status is unequal to each other due to their vertical classification. Such unequal social system evolves the discriminated politico-cultural practices with the rigid oppressive caste system. The caste system is the result of the labor system of the then Hindu society which is considered as the cause of categorization of Hindu people. In this regard, Aahuti argues:

In this process of division of labor, all the people were divided into four varnas: those who functioned as priests and earned knowledge and education were categorized as Brahman, those who worked in military and administration as Kshatriya, those who involved in agriculture and trade as Vaisya, and those who worked in non-skilled and skilled occupation and service as Shudra. (72)

After the development of varna, the works of society were assigned as their varna. People who belonged to Brahman and Kshatriya engaged to rule the state and those who belonged to Vaishya and Sudra involved in production and distribution of things for the society, and serviced to Brahman and Kshatriya. Especially, Shudra would engage in production and services. They were quite marginalized people in the Hindu society.

People who belonged to Sudravarna enslaved themselves due to the legacy of varna. They were obliged to work under the rule of upper varnas. The varna system initiated the class of Hindu society. Aahuti observes, “In present-day India, class society had actually developed into a varna society. So, then the varna society was a class society” (129). Here we can see that then varna system was class because of hierarchical socio-economic status. People from Brahman and Kshatriya ruled the society with dominancy in the economy, whereas people from Shudra did exploitative work with little or no economy. They were at bottom of the society with miserable socio-economic status; other upper varnas constantly exploited to them. Furthermore, Aahuti says that the class society that began with the varna system became a feudal society with the imposition of labor on certain caste or community.

People from Sudra were considered to be serfs or slaves for the upper varna people. They did all the required labors for the society. Hindu people's categorization was extended due to growth of labors. As a result, varna was transformed into caste. Ambedkar points out, “For a time these were merely classes. After a time what were only classes (Varnas) became Castes (Jatis)...” (1159). Caste was evolved from the varna system with socio-economic aspects of Hindu society. As the labor system, people were hierarchically categorized in many castes as the varna. Indeed, caste system adopted the ideology of varna system. People were hierarchically graded in the fixed position just like varna. Many types of labors were operated according to the caste. People from Shudra had to do the many types of labors for the society. As the consequence, the varieties of caste were evolved in Hindu community. In fact, caste became as a new form of varna and class of Hindu society in different varieties.

Regarding development of the varna or caste system, labor is one of the main cause. The labor is integral aspect for the society. Although hierarchical social order

of people in terms of labor is wrong practice. Hindus defenders proclaim that varna or caste is merely a division of labors. However, Ambedkar refutes it: "... caste system is not merely a division of labor. It is also a division of laborers" (234). The caste system drags individuals in fixed positions based on patrilineage on a system of graded hierarchical social order. Indeed, social hierarchy occurs among the laborers with their grading in terms of labors. Caste based hereditary system is key aspect of labor in which fixed position of individuals determines their occupation, social status and lifestyle. Though laborers hardly change the labor but their caste remains same. Actually, caste system enforces all the Hindu people to adopt caste category even they change the labor. Therefore, caste system is not only division of labor rather it a division of laborers.

The caste system is the one of the most significant ideologies of Hindu religion in which one person becomes superior and another becomes inferior in terms of birth in certain caste. As the caste system, the upper caste people directly gain the good social status and property and then they control the liberty of lower caste people. In this regard, Ambedkar argues, "Religion, social status, and property are all sources of power and authority which one man has to control the liberty of another" (230). The upper caste people are powerful people having good social status and property. Being born as upper caste, it becomes possible to have power to rule the society with higher socio-economic status, but the overwhelming majority of lower caste people face exploitation. The ideology of the caste system operates the socio-economic system of the state in which upper caste people rejoice the power and oppress the lower caste people. The privilege goes to the upper caste in the politico-cultural aspect of the Hindu society. It means caste becomes as a prominent factor to be marginalized in the Hindu society.

The caste system constrains all the Hindu people in the fixed hierarchical position. It disorganizes the entire society where different caste people's birth and heredity pre-determine their socio-economic rights. Social life of the people is guided by the principle of caste system. Caste governs the entire society, and no one can change pre-determined caste. Ambedkar asserts, "Castes are autonomous, and there is no authority anywhere to compel a caste to admit a newcomer to its social life. Hindu society being a collection of castes, and each caste being a closed corporation, there is no place for a convert" (254). The caste system reinforces to all the people and restricts to the opportunities for any social or economic mobility. In fact, it functions not only in differentiation of the people into specific category, but also traps into a certain unequal position. All Hindu people have no authority to convert caste and admit to the newcomer in caste-based social life. Such activities happen due to the autocratic system of caste functions everywhere in the Hindu society.

Hindu politico-cultural system pushes back to the oppressed lower caste people. Most of the lower caste people face obstacle and complexities in every step of life. They naturally become inferior due to the legacy of caste system. In contrast, upper caste people gain the power to subordinate all the lower caste people. Ambedkar argues, "As an economic organization caste is therefore a harmful institution, inasmuch as it involves the subordination of man's natural powers and inclinations to the exigencies of social rules" (236). Obviously, caste system is the harmful institution which ruins the life of the entire lower caste people. The lower caste people are politically, socially and economically inferior in the society. The cause of such condition is the caste system which unequally treats the Hindu people. All the upper caste people naturally obtain the power but lower caste people lack it and face subordination.

All the lower caste people often suffer from the caste based oppression and violence due to the socio-economic, cultural and political subordination. In every steps of their life, miseries and vulnerabilities fall. They are inferior and helplessness to get liberation. For their liberty, Ambedkar propounded the ideology of "educate, agitate and organize"(276). Education is the significant element for the human civilization which enlightens all the human beings. It furnishes the knowledge which outlines the progress of the entire society. However, it is not easy to rejoice educational facilities for certain people of the society. In Hindu society, lower caste people often lack accessibility of education and become oppressed group. Therefore, Ambedkar firstly focuses on education for them. He means to say that education can initiate path of liberty of entire lower caste people.

In the same way, an agitation—a mental uprising and revolution, not physical—is also a key element to raise the voice against silencing of caste atrocities. So, Ambedkar secondly points out agitation of thought in the mind of oppressed lower caste. It is a mental reaction to fight against the dehumanizing nature of caste system. As Ambedkar outlined, after getting education, lower castes need to agitate mentally for their liberty. Indeed, an agitation can empower the exploited people to move forward towards the direction of liberty. Moreover, organization is also important element after getting education and agitation to materialize the goal of liberty. In fact, it is hard to achieve the liberty from the single attempt. For liberty of entire people, it is necessary to be united as a whole. Actually, an educated and agitated mind unites all the oppressed people for the common goal with common force. Therefore, organization is the third element for liberty of exploited people. These three interlinked approaches guide the way towards justice and emancipation.

Furthermore, the issue of caste is a significant factor to be oppressed in Hindu society. The caste embodies all the politico-cultural activities of people. So, the notion of caste plays a vital role to determine the consciousness of the Hindu people.

Ambedkar argues, "In every Hindu, the consciousness that exists is the consciousness of his caste" (238). Caste system impacts to every social behavior of the people. The social activities evolve the consciousness. Due to caste based socio-economy, caste appears as a class, and caste and class consciousness occur together. Ambedkar argues, "The Hindu is caste-conscious. He is also class conscious. Whether he is caste conscious or class conscious depends upon the caste with which he comes in conflict" (1164). In the practice of caste based politico-cultural lifestyle, caste influences to class consciousness. Therefore, caste is the significant element for the caste and class consciousness.

Caste is the prominent factor of politico-cultural system of Hindu society which organizes the value system of people. It generates the ideology of higher and lower among Hindu people. Indeed, such ideology functions to shape the political, cultural and economic aspect of Hindu society. As a consequence, it evolves the exploitation and oppression to the lower caste people. The root cause to the oppression is the mechanism of caste system in which the privilege directly goes to upper caste people due to being born as the upper caste. It occurs because caste is the fixed and hereditary system to determine the status of entire Hindu people. Having high status, upper caste people perceive that they need to rule the society in the basis of the caste ideology, and they marginalize the entire lower caste people. In contrast, the lower caste people face socio-economic marginalization, and they naturalize it till not attaining consciousness. After perceiving a consciousness, the lower caste people raise the voice against the domination of the upper caste people.

In the Hindu feudal society, caste becomes an affective factor for politico-cultural aspect. The upper castes own the majority of land due to being born as upper caste, and they rule over the lower caste. It is the Hindu feudalism based on dominancy of land and privileged caste. Due to this, upper castes like Rajput, become mainstreams with much property and lower caste become marginal with little or no property. Narrator explains:

In the Demographics of Barha village, the scheduled castes were both marginal and necessary...The mainstreams were the Rajputs. They were necessary. They did all the work that the people of the mainstreams needed. Because the village was very much a creation of Rajputs like Medini Singh, nine tenths of the land in the village was under their control. The rest, the majority, farmed the lands of the minority. (39)

Here, these lines clearly expose the Hindu feudalism. Being upper caste Rajput, it is necessary to be mainstreams. They control land and make the majority of lower caste as *Kharidi* (purchased) subjects to cultivate their land. In this regard, narrator states, “One village, nine malik families, the rest *Kharidi* subjects” (40). It means few people from upper caste own land and drag the majority of people to cultivate it. The upper caste people grab the land and make lower caste people landless. In fact, it is the Hindu ruling system which forces lower caste people to do work for the upper caste. Not having land and good social status, the inferiority renders among the lower caste people. As a result, the entire lower caste people become marginal people.

Additionally, *Kharidi* subject, bonded labor and share-cropping systems are imposed to lower caste in order to control them for cultivating land. Being the sharecroppers, they produce crops, but the huge amount of crops goes to the landlords. As being the *Kharidi* subjects, they provide free labor to the landlords. As

the bonded labors, they work hard for the landlords with little or no wages in the name of repayment of debt. All the landlords operate these systems with their cunning legacy for their benefit. They lend loan and force borrowers to impress thumb in a ledger in order to systematically bring them and their descendants to work. Narrator articulates:

[T]he rule for debt repayment was a thumb impression in the malik's ledger.

They had to give him the lion's share of the crop plus, if necessary, free labor.

In this manner, they were mortgaged, caught in the snare of the all-powerful

ledger in the malik's *skatcheri*. They were *kharidibanda*, 'brought subjects'. (40)

The marginalized lower castes are trapped in a snare of the upper caste elite. Most of the upper caste landlords operate the cunning legacy of a thumb impression in their ledger to trap the lower caste people. Being trapped, they take loan, but it is constantly enlarged with high interest even they pay from labors. Ultimately, they are mortgaged and situated at the bottom of the society being *Kharidi Banda*. Law and orders do not exist for them: "In such areas, whatever suited the malik become the law... the prevailing laws were those created by their one-time masters" (40). Law and orders are in favor of upper caste people. The upper caste landlords rule the society in their own way. They can do whatever they want upon inferior lower caste people. Therefore, in such ruling system, lower caste people lose their human rights. In fact, the pitiable condition that occurs in the life of lower caste people is the output of the Hindu politico-cultural aspect. The society is highly guided by the Hindu politico-cultural aspect. In such society, the lower caste lacks right to move forward as the upper caste.

In Hindu society, lower castes are hurled at the bottom of the society. The socio-economic aspect of the Hindu society is the main cause to be placed at the

bottom. There is the vast socio-economic difference between the upper caste and lower caste. The upper castes have high social status and property, whereas lower castes do not have high social status and property—especially land. If the lower castes own a piece of land by chance, ultimately landlords seize it in the name of repaying interest of loan. Narrator points out, “...they’ve paid the malik his share, they take a loan. And get bonded. Repaying the interest on loans, almost every one of them had lost his own piece of land, and they had learnt that in order to survive, to stay alive, it was best to sharecrop or serve the malik” (40). These lines reveal the harsh reality of Hindu feudal practice in which lower caste people face critical condition. *Kharidi* subject, bonded labor and sharecrop system are imposed to rule them. Such inimical systems bring turbulence in the life of lower caste people.

Kharidi subject, bonded labor and sharecrop, the oppressive feudal practices, seize the liberty of lower caste people. The upper caste people operate these practices to enslave the lower caste people. Being born upper caste, they own land and rejoice the power to oppress the lower caste people. Due to not having access of land and high social status, lower caste people lose their liberty; they face exploitation. Ambedkar observes, “Religion, social status, and property are all sources of power and authority which one man has to control the liberty of another” (230). In fact, religion, social status and property are all sources of power to grab the liberty of others. The upper caste people gain the power from the caste ideology of Hindu religion to accumulate land or property. As a result, upper caste people own the majority of land and control the liberty of lower caste. In this novel, lower caste such as Dusad, Bhangi, Ganju, Dhobi and others own low social status, and they lack the property—land. The compulsion occurs upon them to work in the field of the upper caste landlords. The landlords force them to follow *Kharidi*, sharing-cropping and

bonded labor system in order to rule them. They become marginal and face exploitation in terms of the caste and economy.

In Hindu society, caste system is the fundamental aspect in order to run the labor system. Caste based labor system reinforces people in particular job. Such labor system embodies a hierarchical division of people, where socio-economic rights of people are different due to the pre-determination of people with their birth and heredity. This is not only division of labor rather it is a division of laborers by birth. The lower caste people are often supposed to work and service for upper caste, whereas upper caste people rule over lower caste people with high socio-economic status. It shows caste as the fundamental aspect of Hindu society that already differentiates oppressor and oppressed. People from upper caste like Rajput, rule the society and they often oppress and subordinate lower caste people. Narrator explains this:

The Rajputs were the high caste in this region, the lower caste had different roles to play at different times; sometimes these men and women were bonded labours, sometimes debtors, sometimes they were landless fanners evicted from their land, sometimes kept women—these roles were decided by the higher castes. (28)

Rajputs are the mainstream of the Barha village. They run the society in their own way. As privilege goes to upper caste, Rajputs rule the society and subjugate the entire lower caste. As the consequence, lower castes become bonded labor, debtor, and landless fanners. Such condition exists with the division of laborers in the name of division of labor. In fact, caste based labor system traps the Hindu people, especially lower caste people, in deigned labors. Actually, lower caste people face critical

condition after becoming bonded labor, debtor, and landless farmers. Such condition happens because of the imposition of exploitative labor system.

Indeed, the labor system is also imposed with the caste system. The lower caste people assigned labors to survive in the society. Their castes drag them to do their particular labor. Regarding this, narrator states, “The bhangis, hajams dhobis and indispensable groups did the jobs assigned to their castes...” (40). It shows that labor is concerned to be done as the caste. In this regard, Bhangi, Hajam, Dhobi are supposed to clean garbage, trim hair, and wash clothes respectively. It apparently shows the division of laborer in the name of labor in terms of caste. Ambedkar claims “... caste system is not merely a division of labor. It is also a division of laborers” (234). In fact, caste system itself carries the hierarchical division of laborers. The labors are assigned by grading people in the fixed position—caste system. The lower caste people are assigned hard and degraded labors. In return, they are discriminated and subjugated by upper caste in terms of their caste. Such labor system equips poor socio-economic status of lower caste people. Regarding this novel, people from low caste such as Dusad, Bhangi, Hajam, Dhobi, Ganju are encircled with assigned labors. As Ambedkar said, this is not only division of labors rather also the division of laborers. It is apparently a division of laborers which drags them to do particular labor. Neither lower castes own the good social status nor have their own land and property. They work in the land of upper caste landlords like Ganesh and Nathu with cheap or no wage. While doing work for upper caste, they face domination and exploitation.

Landlords often rejoice their power to do whatever they want upon lower caste people. Lower caste men face brutal exploitation, but women face sexual exploitation too. It happens to dominate lower caste and class people. In this novel, Bhangis are

obliged to be evicted from their land in the name of giving space for Pallavi to live in their home. As Dusads, they also live in the forest due to fear of Ganesh. It is seen in the dialogue between Mangal's wife and Pallavi:

While it's still light, let's run, come.

Where?

To the *fores* (forest). MohonDusad will show us the way.

Dusad! They're also Harijans.

Maliks took away their land and made them homeless. Come, come. (91)

It shows that how landlords rule over the lower caste and class people. Landlords easily bereave a piece of land of lower caste people. Most of the time they ravish their land in the name of repaying debt, but sometimes their ego becomes a cause to evict them. The ego of Ganesh pushes Bhangis into forest. When Bhangis go to forest, Ganesh burns their huts. Laloa reveals it: "They have set it on fire" (92). Later, Ganjus also are evicted from their land due to Ganesh's demand for repayment of debt. They live into forest with Bhangi and Dusads. The series of eviction of the lower caste from their land shows the exploitation of Ganesh. Being upper caste landlord, Ganesh owns the power to oppress the lower caste people.

The women of lower caste and class suffer from the sexual abuse as well as other exploitations. The landlords often sexually abuse lower caste women. It is common to be sexual partner of master: "...Barkandaj used to go to Mori... Nathu used to go to Lakhapatiya. In every malik household, it was usual to keep women" (83). The upper caste landlords treat lower caste women as the object of pleasure. They get sexual pleasure either agreement or force. Landlord Ganesh rapes Rukmani in order to fulfill his carnal desire. Narrator reveals it: "Ganesh grabbed her hand. 'Na... na... na,' Rukmani cried out in terror, 'Didi!' Ganesh slapped her hard. 'Ah!

What pleasure!' The turmoil in his blood began to subside. '*Na... na... na*, Malik.' Rukmani's words turned into sobs, then morns. Then silence" (108). It shows that how the landlords treat to the working class women of lower caste. The upper caste men sexually abuse to the lower caste women. They think that it is their right to abuse the lower caste women. Actually, working class women are encumbered with sexual violation in the society.

In the Hindu society, the atrocity befalls upon lower caste people. The upper caste people easily assault to the lower caste people. They abuse the lower caste people for their benefit. They beat and threat the lower caste people in order keep them in their designed place. Moreover, the upper caste elite men molest the lower caste women for their pleasure. The cause of the atrocity is caste system that evolves the arrogance among the different caste people. In this respect, Ambedkar argues, "It is a social system which embodies the arrogance and selfishness of a perverse section of the Hindus who were superior enough in social status to set it in fashion, and who had the authority to force it on their inferiors" (241). Caste system ruins the life of the lower caste people. They often live under the cruel ruling system of the upper caste elite. In this novel, Ganesh evicts Dusad and Ganju from their land. He also burns the huts of Bhangis and pushes them into the forest. Regarding sexual exploitation, upper caste landlords excessively abuse lower caste women as considering their right. As this, the landlords like Barkandaj, Nathu, sexually abuse lower caste women. Ganesh keeps Rukmani for domestic work, but he rapes her.

All the lower caste people are facing mental and physical suffering. Such suffering evolves the consciousness to be agitated against the exploitation. The suffering of Lachhimabring her consciousness about caste and class oppression. She starts agitating mentally. In this regard, she says, "Mortgaged me for money, and land,

and cattle... I'm mortgaged. When I'm sucked dry, useless as an old cow, then he'll let me go" (32). These lines clearly reveal the agitation of Lachhima about her position. Actually, this agitation is the result of her consciousness about exploitation. This consciousness leads her to resist Medini Singh by refusing his offer: "Money! *Hansli!* You have ruined me, how can you undo that? How much money, how much gold, will it take? No, I shan't take anything" (68). These lines show the raising voice against the silencing caste atrocities. Indeed, it is not only the rejection of things rather it is the voice against landlord Medini. It becomes possible because of her consciousness.

Moreover, Bhangis show their agitation after becoming conscious. They are aware about the wrongdoings happening in their society. As the reaction, they compose songs in order to reflect such wrongdoings of society. In fact, their songs question the system of ruling class. In this respect, the narrator evokes, "They composed songs about new laws, about murders and fights, about the oppression of the police and the scandals of the maliks. In fact, in that malik-controlled Barha area, the only history of exploitation and oppression of the poor was found in their songs" (57). Bhangis compose song to enlighten the people about the activities of oppression. In this sense, their song is the medium to relay the message among the people about injustice. In this regard, their songs can be traced as the medium to be presented themselves as protesters to oppose injustice.

Moreover, many types of exploitations occur in the life of the lower caste people. The lower caste people try to oppose such exploitation from their sides. In this regard, the song of the Bhangis helps to resist the oppressors as well as questioning the wrongdoings. Narrator narrates: "The Bhangis arrived with flaming mashaals, beating on their dhols... Medini and Lachhima and Lachhima and Mohor, Mohor and Dhanapatiya, Mohor and daroga—every incident was sung in juicy language dripping

with innuendo, and fountains of reckless laughter erupted” (59). These lines clearly reflect the consciousness and agitation of the Bhangis. The group of Bhangis comes with the flaming mashaalsto raise the voice against the landlords. The Bhangis raise the issue of the wrongdoings happened upon Lachhima, Mohor, Dhanapatiya and Daroga. In fact, the incorporation of murder, sexual abuse and scandal represents the way of resistance to the wrongdoings.

Regarding this notion, their songs become the cause of the decline of Medini and Barkandaj; Medini paralyzes, later dies, due to a blood vessel burst from the hypertension, and Barkandaj dies from coronary attack due to overwhelmed happiness about mocking to Medini. Bhangis consciously furnish the nasty language in their songs to mock Medini and Barkandaj. As they become conscious about their caste and class, they try to resist Medini and Barkandaj through their songs. In fact, their song is a powerful weapon to resist oppressors and empower oppressed. The decline both landlords happens because of Bhangi's caste and class consciousness. B.R. Ambedkar claims, “The Hindu is caste-consciousness. He is also class consciousness. Whether he is caste consciousness or class consciousness depends upon the caste with which he comes in conflict” (1164). In Hindu society, caste is the cause of suffering of lower caste. The lower caste need to be conscious on the issue of caste and class oppression. When they become conscious, they stand against the oppression of upper caste people. Lachhima, Dusads and Bhangis, all from the lower caste, consciously perceive the cause of being oppressed. They understand that they are repressed due to caste and class. Actually, they all consciously initiate to raise voice against exploitation.

The brutal exploitation of the upper caste elite becomes cause for lower caste to be conscious. As the conscious people, they can put forward their steps to resist the

oppressor. After being conscious, they agitate mentally to realize the liberty, fraternity, and human right. In fact, they raise the voice against the caste based oppression. This is the way of showing agitation against the extreme exploitation of the upper caste elite. As this, Ganesh raps Rukmani, but she reveals his crime. Ultimately, as she cannot punish Ganesh, she consciously commits suicide to disclose his crime: “In order to turn everyone's eyes towards him, Rukmani had hanged herself...” (116). Ganesh sexually assaults to Rukmani. However, Rukmani dares to bring this accident in the surface of the society. Though Rukmani could live with Ganesh—he approaches her to be second wife—but she sacrifices her life for the liberty. It means Rukmani consciously sacrifices her life for the liberty of the entire lower caste women. She bravely sacrifices her life in order to resist the sexual abuse among the lower caste women.

In fact, the suicide of Rukmanienlarges consciousness of all the lower caste people. All the lower caste people perceive that it is necessary to be united to fight against the caste atrocities. Indeed, after becoming conscious, they get agitation to resist the exploitation of the upper caste elite. They all get together and place Rukmani's corpse on the yard of Nathu as their reaction. They challenge Nathu by talking directly without any fear. It is seen in the conversation between Bigulal and Nathu:

Malik, you send her to Ganesh Singh's house. There she lived like a caged bird. She came back three days ago, three months pregnant. She...lost all interest in life, and hanged herself.

Bigu! Is this something to shout out aloud?... Now what? What do you people want?

We want money, Malik. Or else we'll leave the body here. (118)

In the same way, they carry Rukmani's corpse and place it to the houses of Chandarbhan and Ganesh to challenge them. While going to Ganesh's house, Dusads and Bhangis also join the crowd, and it becomes a strong crowd with about two hundred people. They consciously unify themselves and show the deep sense of anger toward the landlord Chandarbhan placing the corpse of Rukmani. This is the real agitation of mind to resist the caste based oppressions. It becomes possible because of their consciousness. Moreover, they also pour their anger to Ganesh with direct talk. By representing mass, Bigulal says:

Take a good look Malik, she was in Nathu Singh's custody, he sent to you, she was your responsibility... But Malik! Three days ago it came to know that she was three months pregnant... She could not take it. So, in the early hours of the morning, she put noose around her neck. We went to all the maliks' houses and told them this story... She used to live here. So, we brought her here once, for you to take a look. Brothers! Now blow the trumpet and beat the drums.

(119-120)

These lines clearly reflect the consciousness and agitation of the oppressed lower caste people. Their consciousness and agitation lead the lower caste and class people to fight against exploitation of the upper caste elite. The extreme exploitation of the upper caste elite, especially Ganesh, becomes a cause of their consciousness and agitation. Due to sexual exploitation of Ganesh, Rukmani commits suicide, but, as a result, it exasperates anger of the all lower caste victims. They perceive that upper caste landlords are the causes of their sufferings. The upper caste people brutally oppress to the entire lower caste people. As this notion, Ganesh sexually abuses Rukmani but this incident raises the consciousness and agitation in the mind of the lower caste people.

In fact, all the lower caste people become aware to be united to struggle against the oppression. People from lower caste such as Dusad, Ganju, Bhangi, Dhobi and others know that caste is the cause of their suffering. Indeed, they understand that the source of their discontent and oppressions is caste. Therefore, they unify themselves and challenge landlords by placing the death body of Rukmani. Actually, Rukmani's suicide case triggers their collective consciousness and agitation. In this respect, narrator asserts, "Not in life, but in death, Rukmani proved her strength" (119). It is the worth action of Rukmani that brings drastic change in the mind of oppressed lower caste people. Actually, this incident empowers all victims of caste atrocities. It extends the resentment and discontent in their mind to raise voice against domination. After agitation, all the lower caste people break the relation with the upper caste landlords. This is also a kind of resistance against the exploitation.

The consciousness of the oppressed people leads them to reject relation with the oppressor. It reflects their agitation emerged from the brutal exploitation. In this novel, after suicide of Rukmani, lower caste people do not work for the upper caste landlords. Bhangis already refuse to clean latrine and garbage. Dusad and Ganju are no more bonded labors and *kharidi* subjects for landlords. Mori refuses to work in the house of Nathu: "I can't work anymore. I've slaved for your father since I was twenty" (124). In the same way, Ganga also quits her jobs by saying Bigulal and others: "I won't enter that house again. I've given my life to them, and you know what I got in return" (126). They dare to leave their jobs because of their consciousness. Their courage to refuse work for landlords is the output of their consciousness. It is appropriate and rational reaction to shake the domination of landlords. It means their refusal to work implies resistance of the exploitation of landlords.

In fact, education is a powerful instrument to oppressed lower caste people to get liberty. It initiates a first step of emancipation by outlining the apparent way of solution. In this novel, Abhay Mahato, a leader of Harijan Sangh, plays a significant role to enlighten all the lower caste people. He guides and mobilizes them to get liberty. He educates all the lower caste people about gaining the economic liberty: “Anyhow, I’ve finalized things with the *fores depart* as well...I said, I want *permits* for the people of Barha to collect firewood. The *fores depart* has no objection to that. Condition being, no tree felling, and no lighting fires in the forest... Monthly *permit*, not daily” (134). Indeed, Abhay educates to all the lower caste people to achieve economic emancipation. For this, he manages to sell dried woods with permission of SDO. This is a way to run the movement of emancipation maintaining the economic aspect. It is necessary to reduce the economic dependency of oppressed people to get the real liberty.

Moreover, Abhay enlightens and supports to lower caste people to get rid of oppression. He always advocates for unity of lower caste people to get liberty. Besides this, he illustrates the situation and educates people to realize freedom. For this, he conducts informal meetings among all the lower caste people (137). The SDO of Tohri also involves himself to cooperate with Abhay. In this respect, the SDO urges to Abhay: “Your duty is to bring courage and confidence into the minds of the *achhuts*” (135). Actually, Abhay and SDO put forward their efforts to educate the lower caste people in their way. According to Ambedkar, education is the most important mean to know about the oppression and its solution (276). Regarding this novel, Abhay plays vital role to educate the entire lower caste people. He educates the lower caste people about the way of getting liberty. People from lower caste realize

that caste system is the cause of their suffering. After such realization, they raise the voice against the caste based exploitation.

Furthermore, consciousness of the oppressed people raises their courage to stand for justice. This is the result of the education and agitation which pushes people to revolt. Haroa, a lifetime slave of Ganesh, dares to disclose Ganesh's conspiracy about the eviction of the Dusad and Bhangis from forest. By revealing everything about Ganesh's plan, Haroa says to Lachhima, "You tell Ranka. Tomorrow I'll be going to repair the plough and the cart and wheel. I'll tell Abhay" (138). Here we can find the consciousness of Haroa to oppose Ganesh. Though Haroa works for Ganesh only for the meal, but his consciousness leads him to be agitated against the exploitation. He dares to obstruct Ganesh in order to save all the lower caste people. He discloses the plan of Ganesh to oppose atrocity of Ganesh upon the lower caste people. From his act, Ganesh cannot set fire into the forest. It means what Haroa does is a significant work for the lower caste people.

However, Ganesh knows about lick of his plan. He is sure about Haroa for the lick of his plan because Haroa is the only one person who knows it. Therefore, he becomes furious with Haroa and goes to shoot him. When Ganesh reaches in the hut of Lachhima, Lachhima opposes Ganesh. Blocking to Ganesh, Lachhimasays, "All these years you terrified him and got so much work out of him, without wages, all worth so much money" (146). This dialogue reveals the consciousness and agitation of Lachhima. Ganesh keeps Haroa in his palm for many years. However, Haroa gradually becomes conscious about the exploitation of Ganesh. He also gets agitation and attempts to resist the Ganesh. Lachhima helps to Haroa in order to resist the exploitation of Ganesh. In this regard, she directly opposes Ganesh while threatening

Haroa. She is conscious and agitated about caste based exploitation. So, she fearlessly stands against the landlord Ganesh.

After listening Lachhima, Haroa's anger immediately raises in his mind. Indeed, it can be traced as his agitation against the exploitation of Ganesh. Having agitated mind, Haroa moves forward to resist Ganesh. Narrator reveals this: "Haroa's scream was wild, animal-like. He pushes Lachhima aside and charged out brandishing a sharply honed sickle... The sickle sliced through Ganesh's left shoulder... Ganesh's gun roared... The gun flew from his hand. Haroa got a bullet in his thigh" (147-148). These lines apparently depict the consciousness and agitation of Haroa. Though Haroa dies in this battle, but he fights for justice of entire oppressed lower caste people. Narrator expresses this: "Now all of them suddenly realized that Haroa had died for them..." (148). Consciousness of Haroa pushes him to fight against Ganesh. In fact, it is not only battle between Haroa and Ganesh rather it is the battle between entire lower caste people and landlords. It is the result of consciousness and agitation of Haroa.

In fact, agitated mind drives the conscious people to take action in order to settle down the problems. Regarding social problems, it can bring social revolution in the society. As Ambedkar said, the educated and agitated mind guides people to unite, strive and struggle for the common goal. The oppressed people mobilize themselves to fight against injustice, exploitation and domination. As the conscious people, they evolve the agitation of thoughts in their mind in order to be united or organize. They perceive that it is necessary to be united for social justice and liberty. As this ideology, the death of Haroa enlarges the mental uprising of the lower caste people. All the subordinated lower caste people get ready to involve in the terrible battle for

their rights. They consciously prepare to debunk the oppressive ruling system of the upper caste for their right, liberty and justice.

In fact, the educated and agitated mind leads people to be organized for the revolution. Without organization or unity, it is hard to materialize the revolution for liberty. It means organization attains the force to fight against the exploitation. After the consciousness and agitation, they evolve the unity among the oppressed lower caste people. As they organize themselves, they set the plan to fight against the tyrannical landlord Ganesh. When Ganesh enters into the forest at night to set fire it, Ranka and other people notice him: “There, there he comes! Harrrrrrr!” (163). This line reveals that they are aware about the resistance against exploitation of Ganesh. It is the state of being educated and agitated. All the lower caste people realize that it is the time to fight against series of dominations of Ganesh.

Furthermore, all the lower caste people get ready to initiate revolution against the brutal oppression of Ganesh. Ranka and his people pick sticks, Ganesh instantly runs and disappears. By searching him they say, “Where, where’d he go? Has he run away? Gone into forest? Rotani and Rupa stay here. If you see him running across the fields, attack, We’ll search the *fores*” (163). Here we can see the hostile milieu. Indeed, these lines clearly reflect the result of the educated and agitated state of mind. They are conscious about the exploitation and the way of resistance. Not only that, they organize and mobilize themselves to overthrow the exploitative ruling system. So, they all involve together in the battle to dismantle the tyrannical ruling system of Ganesh.

When Ganesh runs away from there, they all search him. Coincidentally, Ganesh reaches at the hut of Lachhima. He feels helplessness and kindly begs her to save his life. As a response, Lachhima says, “Only I could have saved you then.

Today, I shall save you again. But not, Ganesh Singh, in the way you want me to. Today, I shall do it my way” (164). These all lines show the consciousness and agitation of Lachhima about the suppressive system. As a conscious person, Lachhima challenges to Ganesh there. It implies the way of resistance of Lachhima against landlord Ganesh. Moreover, there we can see the agitation of thought of Lachhima which leads her to oppose Ganesh. Indeed, the unceasing oppression of Ganesh leads her towards the way of consciousness and agitation.

In fact, they collectively struggle to demolish the exploitation of the upper caste. As this, Lachhima refuses to save Ganesh, and brandishes the sickle at him. Instantly, she shouts to her people: “Wherever you are, come quick! Ganesh Singh had come to set fire to the forest, he's hiding in my hut. Wherever you are, hurry! Ganesh Singh is hiding here. Come quick!” (165). Here we can see the agitation of Lachhima which leads her to organize the oppressed lower caste people. Here, she plays significant role to organize people. She brandishes the sickle and traps inside her home. After trapping Ganesh, she consciously calls all the lower caste people to resist the cruel exploitation of Ganesh.

As she shouts, a crowd of her people comes there instantly: “Then their screams—harrrrr—leapt up the sky in tongues of flame. Racing forward like an all-consuming forest-fire. A sea of armed people, voices raised, surged around the house in mighty waves. Lachhima moved aside, leaving the door free, and became one with the crowd” (165). Ultimately, the battle between Ganesh and lower caste people is ended with rupture of Ganesh. This is the revolution of unified lower caste people. In this regard, Ambedkar says to educate, agitate, organize, have faith and lose no hope (276). As his notion, in this novel, all the lower caste people become conscious firstly. After that, they evolve agitation of thought to raise the voice against caste based

oppression and subjugation. Eventually, they unify themselves to revolt against Ganesh. Indeed, this is a social revolution for right of the entire lower caste people. It becomes possible because of their education, agitation and organization.

In conclusion, MahaswetaDevi documents the issue of caste as the very significant social system of Hindu society which impacts to politico-cultural activity of the society. Caste system is one of the crucial ideologies which involve hierarchical division of people, and it pre-determines socio-economic rights of different caste people. It happens because the norms and value of caste system influences to politics, economy and culture of Hindu society. In this novel, Devi beautifully depicts how lower caste people suffer from the socio-economic malaise of Hindu feudal society, Barha. The socio-economic status of all the lower caste characters like Lachhima, Rukmani, Haroa, Bhangi, Dusad is quite miserable in terms of their caste. They are oppressed and subordinated due to being born as lower caste. In contrast, characters like Medini, Barkandaj, Ganesh, Nathu rule the society with dominancy over land due to being born as upper caste. Living with high socio-economic status, upper caste characters rule the society, and extremely exploit lower caste.

Furthermore, Devi delineates how lower caste people organize and revolt against the brutal exploitation of landlords. The upper castes rule over lower caste and often oppress them. Gradually, lower castes become conscious and evolve agitation of thought. After their agitation of thought, they unify themselves and they iterate a path of the liberation. For this, they do series of struggle against exploitative landlords of Barha village. Eventually, they collectively revolt against landlord Ganesh and overthrow the tyrannical ruling system of Ganesh for their right, liberty and transformation of the society. This is the result of their politico-cultural consciousness which accomplishes revolution. Indeed, Devi furnishes the politico-

cultural consciousness of marginalized characters from lower caste who constantly attempt to resist the process of dehumanization. The politico-cultural consciousness and agitation of the lower caste lead them to resist the cruel domination of ruling class.

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