



Quest For Identity: A Study of Mahasweta Devi's *Bayen*

Rekha R

Assistant Professor

PG Department of English

Don Bosco College (Co-Ed), Yelagiri Hills.

Abstract

The present paper unveils self-identity of Chandidasi in the play *Bayen* by Mahasweta Devi. The play *Bayen* presents an account of a woman who had to face cruel realities in rural India. Chandidasi played predominant role in this play. Her themes are brutality and the oppression faced by the Dalits, especially women and other marginalized communities at the hands of upper elite Indian society. The play focused on the concept of unusual transformation that a normal woman undergoes through the process of scapegoat by the society.

Keywords: Superstition, Illiteracy, Marginalization of Women, Self-identity.

Mahasweta Devi, the eminent Indian Bengali writer. She was born in 1926 in the city of Dacca in East Bengal. She moved to West Bengal in India and also received her education from the prestigious Shantiniketan set up by the great Indian Writer Rabindranath Tagore that now became a part of Vishwa Bharati University. After completing her Graduation, she pursued her career in teaching and journalism. Her first book was *Jhansir Rani* was published in 1956. She is well-known activist who fights for the welfare of the tribal people in Bihar, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal. After her father's death she forced to take up the profession of her father, burying the dead bodies of children. She continued her ancestral job till she got married and even she gave birth to a child. The society labeled Chandidasi as a

Bayen, a woman who breastfeeds dead children and also the ability to curse others. She is banned into the village and also considered to be an ill-omen for the views of the villagers. In the beginning she leads her as a normal human being but later she prohibited to enter into the village and also even not allowed to see her own child for the sake of society's eyes. Both the ignorance and illiteracy make the village people blind in the view of Chandidasi. From the beginning to end she make a search on his own identity that whether she is a woman, daughter, wife, and also mother.

Chandidasi has forced to carry a string with a canister which has tied towards her neck and also hanged it along the floor while in her walk. It made others not to cross over her way. The villagers are afraid to kill her. So, the people kept her in a little hut near by the railway tracks. Her identity was Bayen, it was labeled by the village people, when her entry into the village. It made a cruel death on the village children due to many diseases. So, they treated Chandidasi as an ill-omen. The villagers forced her to get in the profession of burying the dead bodies of the children in the village. It is the beginning to lose her identity in the village. Only at the end of the play, the villagers were ready to accept her as a normal human being. Even it has attempted only by her son, Bhagirath. According to Mahatma Gandhiji, *"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."*

The play begins with a sorrowful song which has sung by Chandidasi in order to express her loneliness and also her melancholic situation. The song represents that her finding for an unseen child. She has followed by an imaginary dog named Jhumra. She became very exhausted due to starvation and despondent because she has prohibited entering into the village. Her appearance may be very disgusting towards others. She wears a filthy saree, and also has a disheveled hair. She says that *"I don't have anybody anymore, nobody. When I hadn't become a Bayen I had everybody"*. (55)

Chandidasi has deprived on her motherhood towards the society, where her motherhood is considered as the most sacred and also be an important responsibilities for each and every women in the world. The society has banned her to look after her child. Mahasweta Devi used the character of Chandidasi as *Bayen* in order to represent the marginalized role of all women in Indian society. It described that how a normal woman, has turned as a Bayen by the superstitious belief and illiteracy of the villagers. Bayen came to the village on Saturdays for her ration and also in order to saw her own Bhagirath. Malinder, her husband not permitted to her to see their son. Because, he considered that her evilness may

spoil the future of their son. Malinder feels sympathy for her sometimes. So, he wanted to help her by giving money and also ration things. Even it is also banned by the villagers. So, he keeps those things at the foot of a tree and told her to pick it from there. Whenever Malinder threatened her not to see their son, she became afraid and also left the place. Once Bhagirath happens to meet his mother, even he also noticed her as a *Bayen*. Malinder feels disappointed on it and began to reveal the secret of *Bayen* and his life journey.

Bhagirath calls her mother as *Bayen* and made his father that aware of her otherwise she may kill him. Finally, he says that *“no dear, she won't kill me. She's a Bayen now, but.....but....., Bhagirath....she's your mother.”* (n.p) Bhagirath has become heartbroken to hear this from his father. So, he questioned his father that how his mother has become as a supernatural woman, one who breast feeds to the dead children and also one who always used to talk with an unseen child and also cursed by all of them in the village. Finally, he questioned that *“How can such a person be his mother?”* Bhagirath wanted to answer his father about their life. According to Richard Wright, *Black Boy*, *“If you possess enough courage to speak out what you are, you will find you are not alone.”* (124)

Malinder began to narrate his story towards Bhagirath, the story moves towards twelve years back. He belonged to the kingdom of Harishchandra who is the king of Gangaputta. It has provided all cremations towards the people. Chandidasi is a descendent of Kalu Dome whose are in the profession of burying the dead bodies of the children. Malinder fall in love with her and also got married. It has happened through a tribal song which indicates that Mahasweta Devi has celebrates their love and marriage. After marriage, she gave birth to Bhagirath. Meanwhile, before the birth of Bhagirath, she didn't find any difficulties in her profession. But, after his birth, she feels an anonymous situation while performing his duty to bury the dead children under the Banyan tress. Besides this incident, many children from their village have affected from some diseases and also found death. Unfortunately, the people believed that it has created by Chandidasi and also she must be an ill-omen with an evil eye which made disasters in the village. If she stares at any children means it will be a sure death. Even though the people began to throw stones on her and also beat her as cruelly. So, she decided to stop her ancestors work. These made Malinder to think as indifferent about her wife Chandidasi. Meanwhile she sends as a guarding personality to the graveyard throughout the night. She feels that breast burst with milk and also got head

ache in order to see her son Bhagirath. She became helpless to be in the state of normal. Her mind has filled with full of conflict between her motherhood and her ancestral profession.

While after the end of these all incidences, Tukni, Shashi and Pakhi's children are died out of some diseases, who are the sister and brother-in-law of Malinder. They made the whole blame on Chandidasi's responsibilities. After all these calamities, she has almost turned as mad by them. On that night, she got into her profession of Bayen by performing raving and randing in the burial ground. She began to talk to herself and also sing lullaby.

The people make use of the situations and also made her husband to believe that his wife Chandidasi has turned as Bayen, an ill-omen. They proclaimed that through all over the village by the announcement of Chandidasi became as Bayen. It made her to lose her own identity of Chandidasi. But, she fights for her identity among the villagers and also began to search for her identity that whether she must be woman, daughter, wife or mother. According to Naomi Wolf *"Most urgently, women's identity must be premised upon our 'beauty' so that we will remain vulnerable to outside approval, carrying the vital sensitive organ of self-esteem exposed to the air"*. (85)

After getting her mother story, Bhagirath wanted to see his mother. But Chandidasi refused to meet her son. Because, she too feels that her evilness may affects her own son. So, she turned her from him. Meanwhile, Bhagirath watched her face in the shadows in the pond and also used to talk with her. So, Bhagirath used to go to the railway tracks in order to see his mother at every evening. He witnessed only the crying sound of his mother only. So, he asked reason about his mother crying. She answered that she cried out only because of her loneliness and also she was afraid by being in the darkness. But, Chandidasi advised him to go back to home. But, in the same day Chandidasi happens to meet some men in the village are trying to place some bamboo sticks on the railway track in order to rob the train. Meanwhile, she tries to alert them. So, she waves her hands which represent them to stop train. Finally, she stops the train. But, she was killed by the train. She made a great effort and also made sacrifice her life in order to save others life. So, the authorities decided to present an award to Chandidasi for her bravery.

The people began to notice that she must be a Bayen from their village. But, Bhagirath came forward with tears and said that *"She's not Bayen. She is my mother"*. Bhagirath reconciled his mother's

originality and also her own identity. Finally, Chandidasi became as a mother, wife, woman and also human being. According to Charlotte Bronte "*I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will*". The play which described that how the ignorance and superstitious belief of people may lead the life of an innocent woman into the misdeeds. The superstitious belief made Chandidasi as a scapegoat for the society. From the beginning to end, Chandidasi made an attempt to find her identity among the villagers. The responsibilities for the tragic life of Gangadasi woman must be in the hand of the society. So, people should have awareness towards social responsibilities. It must be attained only through the way of providing equal education for all over the county.

WORKS CITED

Devi, Mahasweta. Five Plays. trans. Samik Bandyopadhyay. Seagull Books: Calcutta.1997. Print.

<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/identity>

<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/self-identity>

<https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/n/naomiwolf184461.html>

Menon, Rajiv Kannan. "Unheard Screams and Silent Acceptance: Modern Indian Cinematic Representations of Subaltern Women." Wide Screen. 1.1 (2009): 1-3.Web. 20 Sep. 2013. <<http://widescreenjournal.org>>.