

# BUFFALO NATIONALISM AND DALIT AESTHETICS- A SUBALTERN STUDY OF DHOULI BY MAHASWETA DEVI

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This paper deals with Mahasweta Devi's story "Dhouli" and attempts to analyse the story from the theoretical matrix of 'Buffalo Nationalism' as expounded by Kancha Ilaiah who conceptualized the idea of Buffalo Nationalism on the basis of Brahminism and Dalitbahujan. India as a nation is constructed on the narrative of Indian nationalism. The paradigm of nationalism in India is cow-centric and Buffalo stands for Dalitbahujan, while the cow stands for upper caste in the Indian psyche. In the hierarchy of power Dalit are at the bottom. The aesthetic space in our society is occupied by the discursive points of the upper caste. Indian nationalism is a sheer hypocrisy. Cow is considered as a holy animal but suddenly a new twist has emerged among the Dalit when they challenge the cow as a symbol of Indian nationalism. They argue that instead of cow, the Buffalo should be considered as a symbol of Indian nationalism. The Dalit intellectual Kancha Ilaiah leads the debate. Like the Buffalo, the Dalit give the largest amount of labour, but still they are treated as inferior, ugly and black. So Kancha Ilaiah emphasises on the point that time has come to redress the Cow-centric nationalism by Buffalo nationalism and in a deeper level Brahminical paradigm has to be replaced by Dalit paradigm. Mahasweta Devi in her story "Dhouli" is trying to redress the absence of lower classes. So, in this paper I would like to argue that it is a story of redressal.

The Dalit intellectual Kancha Ilaiah argues that Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan-the four states are known as the Cow belt of India because in those states Brahminism is more predominant where women are viewed as inferior and marginalized. In this paper I would like to argue that the story of "Dhouli" is

a story of redressal because it redresses the absence of the lower class. It is a story about a woman who belongs to the Dusadh community and not a Elite family and raises the issue of Buffalo Nationalism. Misrilal, the representative of Brahminism fell in love with Dhouli, a subaltern. For the outcome of their love Dhouli becomes pregnant. Surprisingly enough, when Misrilal hears the news he becomes very excited and assures Dhouli that he will get married with her because he is least bothered about Untouchability, but it is sheer case of hypocrisy that exposes the hypocrisy of Indian nationalism. When Dhouli, the mother betrays by her lover decides to be a prostitute to lead her livelihood. She understands "how simple to sell one's body in a loveless exchange for salt, corn, maroa" (p-28). Thus Dhouli knows how to live. When Misrilal accuses Dhouli for becoming a kept and ask why she has still not committed suicide, Dhouli replies "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? Why?" (p-31). So she raises a voice of protest that release her soul from all kinds of oppression. At the end of the story she goes to Ranchi in order to search her agency and defeats the societal norms and raises the issue of Buffalo Nationalism. Kancha Ilaiah in his "Why I am Not a Hindu" also talked about that. U.R. Ananthamurthy' in his "Sanskara" also raises the issue of Buffalo Nationalism.

The Indian nationalism is constructed on the rigid caste system. In "Rig-Veda" there is a chapter known as 'Purusha suktam' where it is said that Brahmin comes from the mouth of Purusha or God, Kshatriya comes from the arms, Vaishya comes from thigh while the Shudra comes from the feet of God, so they serve the other three castes, but the Dalit did not belong to the 'Chaturvarna schema' and that is why they are known as panchama and Untouchable. So, in this paper I would like

to expose the hypocrisy of Indian Nationalism where the upper caste always try to explore their supremacy to the lower caste and the same is the case with Dhoulis. As she is a Dalit so she faces a lot of Dalit predicaments. They are oppressed among the oppressed. Their life is full of sufferings and miseries. If India is the so-called democratic country and when there are certain basic inherent rights to all human being then why is the discrimination between the upper caste and the lower caste? So, the question arises is the Dalit are not human being to possess human right or they did not have any right at all? Dalit are victim of human right violation. They are deprived of their rights over land, right to access drinking water, right to education, cultural rights. In "Dhoulis" it is seen that both the state and society through their hegemonic brutality attempted to annihilate the life and existence of Dhoulis. According to Gangadhar Patawane "Dalit is not a caste. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution". (cited by Das and Massey) At the end of the story Dhoulis becomes a symbol of change and revolution.

In this paper I would like to foreground the story of Dhoulis, who is a victim of exploitation. She is subalternized castewise and genderwise. The upper caste men always look after the lower caste women as an object with whom they can do whatever they want. The lower caste women used to gratify the lust of the upper caste men. In "Sanskara" Sripati has an illegal relation with Belli to gratify his lust. Physical exploitation of tribal women become a trend in Taharr and Dhoulis becomes a victim of that. When Misrilal informs his mother that Dhoulis is carrying his child she replies "So what? The men of our family have planted their seed in so many Dusad and Ganju girls" (p-13).

The story of Dhoulis can also be studied from Marxist point of view. Marx says that the production system is utilizing the the potential of the individual as a labour. The operability of production system is premised on false consciousness. Once a dead labour breaks away from the trap of false consciousness then the dead labour becomes a living labour. Dhoulis at the end of the story can be called a living labour. Marx says any product have three types of values-use value, exchange value, surplus value. Dhoulis gives birth to a child which is known as use value and in exchange of her body she gets corn, maroa which is known as exchange value and as a prostitute when she is exploited over and over it is called surplus value.

"Dhoulis" can also be read from post-colonial point of view as Dhoulis is colonized while the upper caste is presented as colonizer. Bhabha's notion of 'nation and narration' is also found in "Dhoulis" because narration is a political concept and the upper caste compose the narration for his benefit and thus the liminal and peripheral can be silenced under the rubric of the nation, but in "Dhoulis" the assertion of black identity is distinctively portrayed.

In contrast to the upper caste women Dalit women are more awakened and conscious of their existence in society. They have radical intellect. They are participating in all kinds of social gatherings organized on various social issues. The nation can not really progress unless the Dalit are developed at par with other sections of the society. Therefore, it becomes necessary for the protection and promotion of human rights to shape the mind set up of the people. Thus Dalit have as much right to freedom to developed their personality fully as other enjoying the rights. So in the story of "Dhoulis" the issue of 'Buffalo Nationalism' is portrayed distinctively.

Key words: Mahasweta Devi; Dhoulis; Dalit; Untouchability; Buffalo

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