



Empowering Narratives: Mahasweta Devi's Influence on Indian Literature and Theatre through *Draupadi* and *Bayen*

Janhvi Singh

Research Scholar,

(PHD202300003063)

P.P.N. College,

Chhatrapati Shahuji Maharaj University,

Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh

E-mail:- s.janhvi1999@gmail.com

Professor(Dr.) Suman Singh

P.P.N college,

Chhatrapati Shahuji Maharaj University,

Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh

Abstract

Mahashweta Devi has left a lasting mark on Indian Theatre and Literature with works similar to 'Draupadi' and 'Bayen'. These works of hers give a fascinating insight into the lives of castaway women. Devi's stories illustrate the harsh truths for women, specifically for the marginalized women and are more than just mere entertainment. Devi combats conventional social morals and sheds light on the strength and independence of women during the difficulties and pain, by weaving complex literature with rich depth and strong feminine characters. Words by Mahashweta Devi inversely fasten, enlighten and induce pontification in both forms of performances. Devi forces us to acknowledge the uncomfortable truths about our realistically formatted world in the way she scrutinises controversial topics, such as social shafts, exploitation and gender violence. By publishing stories on similar topics, Devi puts the voices of those, who we constantly don't hear on visible platforms – leading to mass negligence of that sector of our social construct. This movement of hers created a mindful and structured discussion around these issues. Her words inversely fasten, enlighten and induce pontification in both platforms. Devi forces us to come to terms of acknowledgement with the uncomfortable truths about our world in the way she scrutinizes controversial subjects such as social shafts, exploitation and gender violence. By publishing such stories, she puts the voices of those we usually ignore on high rise platforms helping in shining light on the plight of these women.

Keywords :- trauma, gender, violence, theatre, drama, literature

INTRODUCTION

Picture Indian literature and theater as a wild, unruly theatre – a mess of colors and voices, some blooming loud and proud, others just pushing up through the dirt. For way too long, the same old flowers kept soaking up the sun i.e. basically the stories told by the important,

about the important. The rest ? Hidden in the shade, unheard, nearly like they didn't exist. Then Mahadevi did not just plant a new commodity – she pulled down the walls, turned over the soil and invited in everything that had been growing at the edges. Suddenly, the whole geography felt different, much more realistic, messy and brutally honest.

But it wasn't just Devi, women across India started using their pens to break down the walls of tradition, refusing to stick to tired, inherited stories. They didn't just add many fresh details, they cracked open the veritable core of the lair, letting new perspectives and visions pour out. But Devi stands out because she

Author:- Janhvi Singh

Email:- s.janhvi1999@gmail.com

Received:- 07 September, 2025

Accepted:- 22 November, 2025.

Available online:- 30 November, 2025

Published by JSSCES, Bareilly

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didn't just write with her pen - she wrote with her life. She was a storm in a saree, as fierce on paper as she was out in the world. Works like Draupadi and Bayen aren't polite assignations to hear - they are bold demands. She handed the mic to women, tribals and poor; people who had spent ages being talked over or ignored and told them to speak without holding it back.

When you dive into such stories, you will find characters who know themselves in their bones. They are not waiting for someone to deliver them. They stand their ground, even when the world tries to grind them down. What's wild about Devi's stories is that she never wallows in tragedy. Sure, there's pain and lots of betrayal, hunger, atrocities that'll make your stomach turn. But she never stops showcasing the sufferings. She flips the pain over and finds the sharp edge of resistance. She lets her characters use their scars as shields, turning every crack into a reason to fight. That's Devi's magic - she turns literature into a kind of rebellion, a place where silence doesn't stand a chance.

It's easy to talk about social inequality in the abstract but Devi makes it hit home. She peels back the polite face of Indian society and shows you the blood and dirt underneath. Her stories are about survival, yes, but also about what it means to keep your dignity when everything around you strips it away. Her women aren't paper dolls or background noise. They stand up to power, even if it costs them everything. Sometimes their acts of resistance are loud - a cry, a refusal. Other times, it's just a look, a silence that says I'm still here. Through these moments, Devi whispers (or sometimes shouts) that real change doesn't always start with grand gestures. Sometimes it's just someone refusing to disappear.

Mahashweta Devi A Detail Overview

Born in 1926, Mahashweta Devi was noway the kind of person who watched from the sidelines. She lived in the thick of effects - among the people she wrote about, participating in their struggles, learning their stories firsthand. Writing for her wasn't a hobbyhorse or an escape; it was a calling, a way to rewrite the world's rules one story at a time. She believed that quality wasn't a commodity handed down from above - it had to be fought for, defended and occasionally snared back from the jaws of incuriosity.

Every judgement Devi wrote beats with urgency. You can feel her wrathfulness at injustice, her frustration with how sluggish the world changes. She didn't hide behind fancy language or distant observation. She got her hands dirty, both literally and directly, fighting for the rights of ethnical people and women crushed by generations of oppression. Her activism wasn't a side note - it blends into her fabrication, giving it a raw, electric energy that's hard to shake off.

Look at Draupadi. Devi takes a character who's virtually a goddess in Indian myth and drops her into a world run by men with ordnance and unbounded power. But this Draupadi refuses to break. Indeed, when they try to strip her of every shred of quality, she stands altitudinous, daring her persecutors to look her in the eye. It's not just a retelling, it's metamorphosis. Draupadi goes from being a figure in an old myth to living, breathing symbol of resistance. She's not just surviving; she's fighting back on her own terms.

Also, there's Bayen. It's quieter, perhaps, but just as ruinous. There's a woman driven out by her own people, ingrained by a witch, left to spoilage on the edge of society. But Devi doesn't let her



fade into the background. She shows us Bayen's pain, her rage, her stubborn turndown to give in. In her insulation, Devi indicates a world that uses fear and superstitions to keep women locked down. Yet, she also celebrates the strength it takes to survive when everyone around you wants you gone.

Devi's stories end with despair, however, they are a call to arms. She believed that literature could change the situation - not overnight, but word by word, story by story. Her fabrication is designed for resistance, a memorial that you don't have to accept the world as it is. By blending the beauty of art with the fortitude of activism, she created a space where variety can breathe and courage can take out,

Her heritage is huge and it's not just about awards or academic success. It's about the fire she lit in anyone who's ever read her work and studied. If she can fight, perhaps I can too. Mahashweta Devi proved that stories aren't just for passing the time. In the right hands, they're munitions, They're securities. They are the first spark of a revolution that starts with one voice and refuses to be silenced. That's the world Devi gives us - a place where words matter and indeed the lowest act of resistance can echo for generations.

Draupadi A Reimagined Icon of Resistance

Mahashweta Devi doesn't just smoke off the old legend of Draupadi - she rips it open and rebuilds it from the ground up. In the Mahabharat, Draupadi's fate is substantially to suffer in silence, an unresistant figure swept along by the raging currents of men's intentions and gods' vagrancies. But Devi refuses to let her stay trapped on that earth. Rather, she reinvents Dopdi as a woman who fights back, a symbol of unbreakable resistance, especially for those who live with the

weight of patriarchy pressing them down at every turn.

Devi places Dopdi among the Munda lineage, a group used to being ignored and manhandled and lets her tell her own story. This isn't abstract. You feel it. Her defiance isn't theoretical; it crackles off the runner. She's not staying for deliverance. She's picking up the pieces of her own life, indeed, as everyone around her passes to catch them down.

The metamorphosis is striking. Then, Dopdi isn't just another woeful character, twisting her hands while the world burns around her. She dares them to try. She takes up space, demands respect and refuses to be turned into an object. Her voice carries the pain and fury of every woman who's ever been told to sit down and stay silent. And actually, there's something eclectic about her rebellion. This Draupadi isn't just standing up for herself; she's holding the door open for every woman who's ever felt helpless. Devi uses Draupadi's fire to arson the old scripts that say women should still suffer, also rise above their pain, all graceful and forgiving. No, not this time. Dopdi's strength comes from pushing back, from refusing the part of fatality.

“ I'm Draupadi, born of fire, and I'll not be consumed by it. My strength lies in my resilience, not in my suffering.” (pg15)

“ They may try to strip me of my dignity, but I'll not bow down. I'm Draupadi, fierce and unyielding, a force to be reckoned with.” (pg27)

These words don't just sit on the runner - they roar. They dare you to look down, pretend you didn't hear the call for resistance. Devi gives Dopdi a voice that can't be ignored. The power in her words lingers, echoing long after the book is closed. What's truly genius is how Devi smears the boundaries between myth and



reality. She grabs the epic, shakes out the dust and uses its bones to make a commodity that feels scarily applicable. Draupadi's struggles aren't just ancient history – they're the battles women fight everyday, in every corner of the world. The story's roots may be old but its branches reach straight into the present, twisting through the lives of every woman who's ever been told “NO”.

And Devi refuses to let Draupadi be just a pawn on someone else's chessboard. She's not staying to be moved – she moves herself. Every act of defiance, every choice she makes, is hers. She claims her space in a world that tries to abolish women like her. No more being written out of history or put away in the background. Devi's draupadi walks right over to the front of the stage and dares anyone to push her off.

So what do we get in the end, not just a narrative of Draupadi who is Dopdi. This is story that demands a response. Its a call to arms, a memorial that resistance is possible. Dopdi's power is for anyone who's ever been told to shrink, to stay quiet, to accept injustice. Devi's reimagining gives us a Draupadi (Dopdi) who's not just surviving – she's fighting and she's changing the rules as she goes.

Mahasweta Devi's Bayen A Cry for Justice

Bayen doesn't slide around the verity; it barrels right into it. Devi throws the anthology into the world of a youthful ethnic woman, Chandidasi, whose life is a daily struggle against poverty, violence and the suffocating grip of tradition. The story pangs with literalism. Every theme is heavy with the sense that the world is piled against women like Bayen, yet she stubbornly refuses to be crushed. Where some writers would buff over the unattractive corridor, Devi dives right in. She's unyielding. Chandidasi's story isn't

sanitized or softened. Rather Devi wants you to see every crack in the system., every moment where her pain is ignored or dismissed. The silence around societal witch hunt and the way society lets it keep passing is infuriating. Devi wants you to feel that wrathfulness too.

At the core of this story is Chandidasi herself. Her innocence and stopgap are bombarded by the world, but she keeps pushing back. She isn't some delicate flower to be ached. She's stubborn, indeed, when her stopgap is worn thin. She refuses to be outcasted, adhering to her name, her history and her voice, no matter how fiercely the world tries to silence her.

“ I'm Bayen. I've a name. I've a voice. I'll not be silenced”. (pg 20)

That protest isn't just for Chandidasi. It's for every woman who's been told she is nothing, who's been pushed to the edges of the society and told to accept her fate. Chandidasi's voice rings out for them too, a stubborn, patient fire that refuses to go out. Devi's prose cuts deep. It's beautiful, but it doesn't flinch from pain or ugliness. She paints Bayen's suffering with brutal honesty, but also with empathy – no way letting the story slip into comfortable detachment. The story is particular and political. Chandidasi's life is her own, but it's also a lens that shows us the spoilage at the heart of society – the rules and traditions that keep women trapped, the incuriosity that lets patriarchy win.

But Bayen isn't about a narration. It's a spark, a challenge, an assignation to fight back. Devi doesn't let the play sit comfortably on the sidelines. She demands that we look at the system that made Chandidasi's suffering possible and also ask ourselves what we are willing to do about it. Bayen's pain isn't just a tragedy to be mourned. It's a call to action, a



reason to rage and – perhaps most importantly a reason to hope that effects can change.

Mahashweta Devi's Enduring Influence

What makes Devi's stories stick with you – what makes them impossible to forget is her capability to turn suffering into rebellion and rebellion into a collective uprise of consciousness. Bayen doesn't just want your sympathy; it wants your outrage. It wants you to see the world, to throw down the old defenses and start demanding better. So if you come to Devi's stories looking for comfort, you won't find it. What you will get, rather, is fire – stories that burn down ignorance and inquisitiveness, stories that leave you changed, that refuse to let you walk down in your own bliss. That's the real magic of Mahashweta Devi: she gives her characters the strength to roar back at the world and in doing so, she gives us the authorization to cry too.

Mahashweta Devi didn't just write stories – she burned revolutions, one runner at a time. Her work isn't just erudite canon; it's more like a patient call to voices that still echo through Indian literature and theatre. When you read, you don't just meet characters like Dopdi or Chandidas, you feel them. They get under your skin and suddenly, their struggles are your struggles. Their voices, which formerly went unheard, now ring out loud enough to shake the rafters. It's really wild how Devi could take the familiar and turn it upside down. Indian literature has always been full of larger-than-life women, but they're generally painted with the same traditional encounter, silent, sacrificial, put away in the perimeters. Devi refuses to play along. Her Draupadi is not some damsel-in-distress, waiting to be rescued. She's furious, raw and blazing tough – she doesn't just survive, she fights. And Bayen, with her haunted adaptability, breaks free from every marker society tries

to poke at her. Through their stories, Devi hands the mic to those who have never gotten the chance to speak and dares the rest of us to actually hear.

But it's not about just the characters, is it? It is about the world Devi builds – a place where the “voiceless” stand front and center, refusing to vanish into notes. She drags the realities of sidelined communities, women and the unprivileged into the light and she does not sugarcoat a single aspect of it all. It's gritty, it's uncomfortable and it's absolutely necessary. You can nearly feel Devi's frustration with a world that refuses to see its own ugliness, her turn to let injustice slide by unnoticed.

Her plays – they are a whole other battleground. Indian theatre used to be an exclusive club, with its own rules about who got to be seen and heard. Devi slammed those gates wide open. She made the stage a place for everyone – especially those who had been pushed to the sides. Suddenly, theatre was not just entertainment; it was a catalyst, it was disclosure, it was a megaphone for realities people were hesitant to acknowledge. Young playwrights and actors drew courage from her, realizing they could use their own craft to demand the change.

Mahashweta Devi: A Legacy of Empowerment

It is nearly impossible to separate Devi's activism from her art. She did not just write about injustice; she chased it down in the real world. She stood shoulder-to-shoulder with marginalized people, with women who had nothing but fortitude and courage to keep them surviving against the odds. She organized, she campaigned, she watched in a way that went far beyond words. For Devi, jotting was no way safe, academic exercise; it was an armament and a pledge.



Suppose about her driving her inspiration from Mahabharat through Dopdi as her instrumental character to rewrite Draupadi's story. It's further than just an inspiration – it is a reimagining of history itself. Dopsi refuses to be a victim. She does not just cry out for justice; she demands it and she dares us to look down. Devi's interpretation of Draupadi does not fit into any neat box. She's messy, complicated and alive. You can not help but cheer for her, indeed, as her story leaves you unsettled. The same goes for Bayen. Through her, Devi rips the mask off society's so-called civility. The violence, the exploitation, the grim pressure to conform – it's all right there, in your face. Chandidasi's story hurts, but it also heals, in its own way. It is a memorial that the people we ignore, the bones we dismiss as “other”, are the bones with the most to educate us about adaptability and grit to fight for their rights.

Devi's Literary Works: A Catalyst for Social Change

Devi's writing is a living thing. It does not just reflect the world, it claws at it, demanding something better. She forces compendiums, artists and activists to defy what's broken, but also points towards a brighter alternative. Her heritage is a challenge. Keep fighting, keep telling the truth, keep believing that words can crack open indeed the hardest hearts. And to be precise – the challenge still stands. Everytime a writer dares to tell a story that makes us uncomfortable, every time an actor brings a retired pain to the stage, every time someone refuses to back down in the face of injustice – Devi is there, in the background, encouraging them. Her work isnot finished. Not even by a long shot. And thats the kind of legacy any writer or activist could hope for to leave behind.

Mahashweta Devi was not just a writer – she was a provocateur. A woman

who did not simply observing injustice from the comfort of her desk, but rolled up her sleeves and got right into the thick of it. Suppose of her lower as a distant annalist and more as a stubborn, unyielding force, always fighting for people who had been pushed into the murk of India's ethical communities, Dalits, women who had been silenced by centuries in the name of tradition and religious values. She did not just write about them, she marched with them, protested with them and advanced her voice whenever their's was suppressed.

Her activism was not just a side quest turned amidst her writing career. It was the twinkle in everything she did. She had this remarkable way of turning stories into loud posters to shine light on the marginalised. When she wrote about them, it was not just academic, she forced you to feel their pain, their rage, their trauma. Suddenly their struggles were not far off problems; they were critical and they demanded action. Gayatri Chakravorty nailed it when she said Mahashweta Devi could turn the hardest truth of our time into a fabrication that lands like a punch to the gut. But there was nothing narrow about her activism. She went after the estate system with a ferocity that made masses uncomfortable – and thats exactly what she wanted. She stood ip for the dalits and untouchables, the groups Indian society has always tried to keep at the bottom and she refused to let their stories go uncounted. She supported women's rights long before it was in the mainstream of even sfae to do so. She called out domestic violence for what it was, demanded justice for sexual assault survivors and did not shy away from the unattractive reality of plant demarcation.

For her writing was not just about art. It was a tool – an armament to fight back against all the ways society has wronged the ones who suffered at the



sharp end of the stick. Her character's are not just fictional creations, they're echoes of real people, carrying scars and dreams and the fortitude to keep moving. When you read her work, you get the sense that these characters are not bruiting, they are crying. They demand to be brought to justice. Devi gave them voice and in doing so, she did not just break rules – she rewrote them. She told her compendiums you don't have to accept the effects as they are. You can fight back.

Devi's Legacy: A Beacon of Empowerment

Lets talk about heritage, because Devi's is massive. Commission is not just a word then it's what she did, over and over again. She woke the general public, challenged them to see the crude realities of the world and made it impossible to turn your face against the injustice once you have encountered it with your bare eyes. Her stories did not just inspire compendiums; they sparked movements. Draupadi and Bayan and many more just striking characters, are not just symbols; they are battle cries. They embody every woman who has ever been tortured under the guise of womanhood shackles and shoved away when raged about the injustice they endured. Through them, Devi imagines a world where adaptability is not just a survival tactic, but a superpower.

She shook up Indian literature and theatre in ways that still ripple out moments. Before her, stories about the marginalized frequently felt snitized, distant or hopeless. She brought rawness, wrathfulness and hope right to the center. She broke open old forms, invited new voices in and showed other writers that you could and should write about the tough ideologies too. Suddenly, Indian literature was not just about the privileged or the important. It came home for stories

that demanded to be told, no matter how ugly the narrative was.

Her influence goes way beyond the runner. As an author, she did not just encourage other writers, she dared them to be stalwart, dig deeper, to use their words as munitions for justice. She influenced them to not just sit comfortably and write just for recognition but be the forefront liner to the change in the society. She believed, fiercely, that literature and theatre could change the world. And isn't that the kind of faith we need further off?

The impact of her work in theatre can not be exaggerated enough. When her plays hit the stage, they did not just entertain – they unsettled, provoked and demanded action. She dragged the stories of the marginalized who had suffered out from the bodies and put them right under the spotlight. In an instant, Indian theatre was a space where everyone got a seat at the table and the stories that signified most could not be ignored. And through it all she kept fighting.

Conclusion

Whether she was writing, protesting or mentoring, Mahashweta Devi never stopped pushing for a world that was fairer, kinder and more honest. Her commitment to social justice was not just a phase; it was her whole life. People who met her, indeed, frequently walked down changed. They had seen what it looks like when someone refuses to let go of the fire to make the difference they want to see. The thing is, her work is not stuck in time. New generations keep discovering her stories and channeling themselves in her characters. Activists, writers, theatre artists, they all draw on her heritage, using her illustration as evidence that words can spark revolutions. Devi's voice echoes in every movement that says 'Enough is enough'.



In the end, Mahashweta Devi did not just leave us with stories. She left us with a challenge to lend our ears, to speak up, to keep pushing against injustice no matter how tough it gets. Her heritage is alive, creaking with energy and keep reminding us that the fight is not over yet – not even by a long shot. More literature and theatre of this format needs its stage, the change is yet to prevail.

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Janak: A Journal of Humanities

“An International, Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed Journal”
(I S S N : 3 1 1 7 - 3 4 6 2) Volume: 01, Issue: 02, November, 2025

Available on <https://janakjournal.in/index.php/1/about>

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