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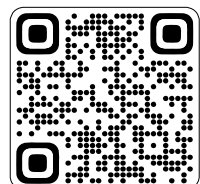
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EMOTIONAL AND INVISIBLE LABOUR: A THEORETICAL EXPLORATION THROUGH MAHASWETA DEVI'S WORKS

Banumathi Selva

Research Scholar, Presidency University, India.

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I question the idea of emotional and invisible labour in works of Mahasweta Devi, used to discuss how the author raises the invisible caring, mourning and birthing duties of women in the patriarchal-capitalist world. With the references to Arlie Hochschild talks about the theory of emotional labour and analysis of Silvia Federici about reproductive labour, the article is about analysing such short stories as Breast-Giver (Stanadayini), Rudali and Chinta and revealing the systematic exploitation of women's bodies and affective forces.

In Breast-Giver, the maternal role of Jashoda is sold out, but her attachment with the children is not accounted for in the logic of the market, which leads to her physical as well as emotional destruction. In the case of Rudali, Sanichari has turned to professional mourning by selling her grief, indicating how caste-dominated the performance of emotions is when it comes to death ceremonies. Chinta depicts the underrepresented emotional labour at old age when being a caregiver and memory worker constitutes most of the people involved, but their work is not rewarded or recognised.

This paper will claim that Mahasweta Devi's stories are critical of how capitalism and patriarchy exploit disadvantaged women physically and emotionally. Shortening the long history of the Marxist discourse on labour exploitation, Devi takes into consideration the distinctive analysis of the Marxist theory within the perspective of labour exploitation and introduces into this limited view the emotional economy of the subaltern. Her narratives constitute a reminder of the need to reconsider what labour is, and to bring care, grief and emotional work to the arena of economic and literary analysis.

Keywords: emotional labour, Invisible Labour, Gendered Exploitation, Reproductive Labour, Feminist Political Economy

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1. Introduction

The contribution of the female workforce to capitalist and patriarchal systems tends to be marginalised, devalued, and unrecognised. In addition to the traditional understanding of labour as paid labour, there is an enormous landscape of unpaid labour as: carework, emotional labour, reproduction work, grief work and work of social/family stabilisation. Although the roles played are essential in maintaining the social order as well as the labour force, such activities are commonly naturalised into feminine virtues instead of being treated as labour; consequently, they are excluded from the economy and systematic political recognition.

The theoretical approaches of emotional labour and invisible labour can be used to pursue a critical examination of this phenomenon. The phrase emotional labour was devised by Arlie Hochschild in her influential 1983 book *The Managed Heart*, which explained that emotional work is the reasoned control of feeling to manufacture a socially observable facial and physical presentation to serve the interest of others, usually in the service economy. However, in patriarchal societies, emotional labour is no longer restricted to paid labour, as women in society are socialised to be emotional carers in the family and society and may not necessarily be endowed with or be given any payment or recognition.

Similar to Hochschild, Silvia Federici in *Caliban and the Witch* (2004) criticises the historic overexploitation of reproductive labour, and highlights how capitalism has a systematic overexploitation of the reproductive labour of women, who have worked unpaid in their homes

to guarantee the labour power. According to Federici, the reproductive labour of women is the underlying infrastructure of the capitalist economies. This labour, however, is still segregated to the realms of the personal, and it is deprived of reference and worth in the civil arena.

This is not only physical and emotional exploitation, but it is also further reinforced by the caste and class inequality factor that exists in South Asia to produce a multiple-layered cycle of oppression. The case of Dalit, tribal, and impoverished women in India is an example of such intersectional burden, through which the economy of care and emotional labour is rendered at the expense of the women who are already disabled by caste, poverty, and gender norms.

This is where the literary activities of Mahasweta Devi come into particular relevance. As one of the most influential literary writers and social activists in India, the writings of Devi highlight the politics of labour, underrepresentation, and exploitation of emotions not only of certain kinds of women but of the subalterns in general. Her stories do not fit the rules of the binaries of the public and the private, the waged and the unwaged, the emotional and the physical, but show how the body and the affective capabilities of women turn into the domain of exchange and abandonment.

Characters offered by Devi in her stories like *The Breast-Giver* (Stanadayini), *Rudali* and *Chinta* have like given their characters to society, to be consumed on the basis of their emotion, fertility and motherhood capabilities. In *Breast-Giver*, Jashoda, who is a primary character in the story, actually turns her maternal body into a profit-making machine by breastfeeding children of the upper-class families. However, her physical lactation is of economic benefit and her emotional work, her love, connection and nourishing are thrown out the window when her body gives up under the strain. Her death turns into a metaphor of the degradation of the reproductive and emotional reserves of women as a system.

Likewise, in *Rudali*, Sanichari, a low-caste woman, has to commercialise her sorrow, turning into a professional mourner in a feudal society, in which the expression of grief has been ritualised as part of social status, but is exported to the Dalit women. The privatised pain of Sanichari is transformed into a public conveyance of mourning, as an illustration of the caste system of labour in the emotional economy. In *Chinta*, the titular main character is a metaphor of the invisible toil of the old folks, who have been giving their life to earn their living and enduring the emotional scars and still their life needs to be disregarded at the point of supposedly being forgotten as is what has happened to the contribution of aged women within the society as directed by the culture.

These stories are a revelation of the predatory systems of capitalist patriarchy in which female affect, motherhood, grief, nurturing, and memory are mined, packaged, and disposed of

after they have been consumed. The works by Devi disrupt the classical Marxist emphasis on waged labour and the process of production by placing economies of affect altogether within the foreground of the subaltern, challenging our thinking as to what labour is to begin with.

What is more is that the depiction of emotional and invisible labour that was carried out by Devi does not exist in a vacuum with other societal realities. She represents her characters as not only gendered subjects but they are also as identified in terms of caste, class, geography and colonial effluent. Incorporating the feminist-Marxist ideas into real-life situations of the Dalit and tribal women, Devi also expands the limitations of literary protest and social protest.

1.1 Objective of the Article:

- Examine an apparent expression of emotional and invisible labour in the works of Mahasweta Devi, specifically *Breast-Giver*, *Rudali* and *Chinta*.

Place these stories into the context of feminism-Marxism, basing it on Arlie Hochschild and Silvia Federici.

- Analyse the way Devi criticises the capitalistic social system, showing greedy patriarchal culture against the background of caste exploitation and class as well and gender exploitation.
- Add to South Asian feminist literary analysis by claiming the importance of affective and reproductive economies as main foci of study.

2. Literature Review

Labour, gender and affects study Labour, gender and affect study has been an increasingly interdisciplinary area of research, especially in Marxist-feminist contexts in literary studies and socio-economic studies. This review is an overview of the literature on emotional labour, hidden labour and the exploitation of reproductive labour and locates the works of Mahasweta Devi within the same critical discourse.

1. Emotional Labour and Gendered Expectations

Arlie Hochschild was the first to describe the idea of emotional labour in the book *The Managed Heart* (1983). Hochschild comes up with the term emotional labour as the work of handling emotions so as to produce publicly visible performances to the advantage of others, and it occurs basically in the area of services. Yet, even in a patriarchal society, emotional labour is required much more widely than in the area of employment in the fields of family and

social life. Women are overworked about their obligation in offering services of caring, emotional, and performing the affective acts without payment and official accolade.

Hochschild writes:

“When jobs require the management of feeling to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others, emotional labour is involved.”
(*The Managed Heart*, 1983)

Eva Illouz (*Consuming the Romantic Utopia*, 1997) and Dana Y. Takagi have used the meanings of emotional labour to challenge those of consumerism, gender codes, and cultural rituals of non-Western societies. Through these works, it becomes evident that the emotional abilities of women are trademarked, made natural and being fundamental to the capitalist patriarchy.

2. Indian Emotional and Invisible Labour

Nivedita Menon and Sharmila Rege, in their sociological studies about feminism in South Asia (*Seeing Like a Feminist*, 2012; *Writing Caste, Writing Gender*, 2006), claim that women in India cannot be studied without references to caste- and class-based inequality. The care work, rituals of mourning and household work are largely subcontracted to lower-caste Dalits and tribal women or lower-class women in a compound matrix of gendered and caste-based exploitation.

The *Caste Question* by Anupama Rao (2009) looks at the ways Dalit women have their bodies become objects of labour as well as being objectified through feeling as an instrument of degradation, being the agents of reproduction, and even being moulded into agents of rituals of the upper castes.

3. Mahasweta Devi and the Labour in Literature

It is no secret that a body of writings by Mahasweta Devi has been drawing much critical concern because of its interest in exploring subaltern resistance, labour exploitation and gendered plight. Critics like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have even interpreted Devi as a reportage of the oppressed, in that any form of literary prose goes through her writing as she records how people have lived socially and economically caught within the margins of the margins.

As Spivak says in her translator introduction in *Breast Stories*:

Devi texts do not merely show the subaltern woman; they make that woman speak even in the pain and silence or even the language of the body.

Vanessa (Breast Stories 1998)

The largest body of current literature about the work of Mahasweta Devi rests on the themes of labour, resistance and subalternity, and texts such as "Draupadi" are regarded as major outcomes of literature on bodily politics and exploitation. Nevertheless, to a certain degree, such a connection between the tales of Devi and the theories about emotional and invisible labour is rather blatant. Although works such as Spivak (1998) and Samik Bandyopadhyay (2006) talk about the context of class struggle and gender oppression, the notion of the affective and reproductive economy in the works of Devi is poorly studied as a certain theoretical category.

4. Gap and Contribution of This Research Study

In spite of the fact that the work of Mahasweta Devi has a full extensive criticism, there is still a lack of rigorous scholarly attention to her depictions of both emotional labour and invisible labour in the context of feminist-Marxism theory. Physical labour, caste exploitation or even tribal resistance have been at the centre of most critical discussion, leaving out much of the emotional, reproductive and caregiving load that the individuals in her characters have to face.

This paper aims to fill this gap by:

- Bringing the theories of Hochschild and Federici and projecting them on the texts by Devi and inputting them into the bigger picture of the theoretical debate, the one that speaks about affective labour, care work and the commoditization of emotions.
- Much attention to how caste and class interfere with emotional labour in the Indian context, specifically through the work of professional mourners, wet nurses and elderly care-givers.
- Donating to intersectional literary analysis through its combination of Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial approaches to comprehend what passions drive the Project Gutenberg at the heart of Mahasweta Devi's stories.

This is a fairly comprehensive section on Theoretical Framework centred around Emotional Labour that you can appropriately adapt to your article, and split into subsections as well:

3. Theoretical Framework

1. Emotional Labour (Arlie Hochschild, 1983)

The Emotional Labour has been theorised initially by Arlie Hochschild in her masterpiece *The Managed Heart: Commercialisation of Human Feeling* (1983). Although emotions are an essential ingredient in every aspect of life, how people manage them, as well as their expression, finds its definition in what has been termed as emotional labour. Emotional labour has been explained by Hochschild (2004) as the way individuals manage their feelings and show their emotions to the satisfaction of the emotional needs of a task, usually to the advantage of others. As compared to physical labour, a psychological aspect makes the difference in emotional labour because people are required to control their inner feelings to achieve social harmony or fulfil particular social roles.

The Major Elements of Emotional Labour

- Surface Acting: Show emotion rather than experiencing it.
- Deep Acting: Investing and making the emotions a reality to fulfil the role requirements.
- Commodification of Emotion: Emotions are subjected to commodification as they are included in a service that can be used as products to sell, as in the case of actual labour or commodities in the capitalist economy.

Hochschild mainly runs it through flight attendants, service workers, and caregivers, although scholars have proposed its application to unpaid domestic and social labour, including that done by women. One person in patriarchal societies is the female gender who is socialised to become the emotional nurturer of any person, including managing their feelings, as well as those of their kin, society and social groups. This is usually assumed to be a feminine nature instead of labour.

3.1 Affective Labour and Sexual Surplus

Women in the patriarchal-capitalist systems have the debilitating burden of soothing sorrow, leading the home fights, resolving conflicts, providing Emotional support to their relatives and managing employee relations.

Such as non-paid emotional work is predictable, unnoticed and socially compulsory, further strengthening subordination by gender and exploitation by economic necessity. Emotional labour consequently functions as a kind of double bind: it is found to be vital to social reproduction, and yet it is impoverished, undisclosed labour.

3.3 Significance to the Study

Using the theory of emotional labour, Hochschild this paper:

- Reconstructs the characters of Mahasweta Devi as sentimental labourers rather than just meat and breeding machines.
- The cherry pick of how the affective capacities are drawn and commercialised within capitalistic and caste generated systems.
- Sil wonders how patriarchy and capitalism overlap to use the emotional fortitude of women in an age-old exploitation that leaves them physically, emotionally and socially exhausted.
- Places emotional labour in the location of both gendered oppression as well as the possible origin of resistance and agency in the manner in which Devi presents subaltern resilience.

4. Emotional Feelings as a Social Imperative

Emotional labour is the use of the strength of emotions and showing them in a way expected by society or the job. This term was coined by Arlie Hochschild in *The Managed Heart* (1983) and at first applied to those occupations that needed to employ empathy, kindness, patience or grief as part of the job, like nurses, flight attendants or customer service agents.

Nevertheless, emotional labour does not apply only to the professional setting. Women in patriarchal and capitalistic cultures are compelled to carry out emotional labour both at the workplace and the home front. This includes:

- Care and giving roles (motherhood, wife, daughters or caregivers)
- Emotional control (hold in anger, boost affection, hide exhaustion)
- Mediating relationships (pacifying conflicts, keeping a whole family in order)
- Acting out culturally mandated feelings (mourning rites, e.g. grief or celebrations, e.g. joy)

Hochschild argues:

Emotional labour means that one needs to feel and feign or repress feelings so that the outward appearance can create the right disposition of minds in others.

([*The Managed Heart*, 1983])

This leads to the drainage of emotional energy, which can result in burnout, alienation or emotional distancing, especially in cases of expression of feelings that are not related to actual inner feelings. This turns out to be quite exploitive at times when such work is needed

without any acknowledgement or value to some instances when that happens, most often to women.

Invisible Labour (Silvia Federici, 2004)

Invisible labour is defined as that kind of work which is not paid and has no acknowledgement; work not included in calculations of a specific economic system, which is, however, necessary to the perfectly functioning capitalist economies and social life. The greatest theory of this concept is seen in the work of Silvia Federici entitled *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), in which the author criticises the historiography of capitalistic growth and women's labour exploitation.

5. Definition and Features

5.1 Invisible labour comprises:

- o Domestic work (cleaning, cooking, child rearing) is unpaid
- o Care giving (nursing of the sick, elderly care, nurturing)
- o Reproductive labour (biological reproduction, upholding of social reproduction, upholding of family and community structures)

It is termed as invisible due to the reasons of it not being taken into account as part of GDP, it is not considered as part of the waged labour, and it is considered as a woman's natural responsibility, especially in patriarchal social societies.

Federici's Argument

Federici states that capitalism relies on the free exploitation of the domestic-reproductive work of women. This labour:

It is critical to capital accumulation; it has been systematically devalued, naturalised, and strived not to be reckoned in the economy.

o *Caliban and the Witch* (2004)

She underlines the fact that capitalism makes women execute housework and reproduction processes without being paid, so that they appear at a low cost and can be continually replenished when used in the formal sector of production. Such privatisation of care-work in the household is a powerful and well-thought-out course to reproduce labour power at the minimum expense of the capitalists and the state.

5.2 Application of the Works in Mahasweta Devi

The stories by Mahasweta Devi very well fit into the model offered by Hochschild. Emotional labour also seems to be a survival mechanism of her characters, but it is a commoditized, outsourced, and racialized or caste-defined activity in the Indian scenario.

Examples:

5.3 Jashoda in Breast-Giver

Jashoda does not only provide infants with her breast milk but also provides them with emotional care and maternal affection, forming the network that is eventually discarded as her physical body cannot withstand overwork. Her emotional affiliation is not unexpected yet unacknowledged like the idea of Hochschild regarding the commodified care giving.

Sanichari among Rudali

Sanichari then turns her personal sorrow into a business, she becomes a paid mourner (rudali). She is commodified, turning crying on demand to work in the market of death rites, although it is an expression of not only emotional labour but casteistic exploitation. She grieves and she does it as a service, such a notion as surface acting created by Hochschild.

Chinto in Chinto

The old woman Chinta has passed her whole life in emotional labour as a mother, a storyteller, a caregiver and a moral teacher. Later in her life, however, her emotional input is also forgotten, which once again borders on the invisibility of the emotional labour when the exploited no longer serve a purpose to the system.

And here is a deepened and scholarly rendition of your remark, and companions it with your theory:

6. Work in Mahasweta Devi Works

Emotional labour in the writings of Mahasweta Devi has been shown as a gendered process as well as a commercialised social role, especially of subaltern women:

- In Breast-Giver, Jashoda not only carries out the mothering process in a physical sense but also in an emotional sense, albeit despite providing her love and affection along with milk, her emotional contribution is overlooked when her body gives way.
- Sanichari in Rudali has converted her sorrow into a tradable grief, crying as a service and selling her tears, a subject which could be taken as a commercialisation of grief.

Critical Analysis

The stories of Mahasweta Devi present an incisive criticism of emotional and invisible labour, revealing how gender, caste and class collude to exploit both affective and reproductive labour of invisible women. Devi is disrupting the romanticised forms of motherhood, service and emotional hurricane that patriarchal-capitalist ideologies tend to inflict upon women by dramatising caregiving, grief and (re)productive work as spaces of systematically abusing the population.

1. Labour Beyond the Factory: Broaden the Marxist Perspective

In classical Marxist theories of labour, the main definitions concentrate on waged labour, surplus value, and the production of commodities, and hence overlook reproductive and emotional labour in the domestic and social sphere. The works by Devi force a shift in the study of labour by giving prominence to the:

7. Affective economies of caregiving

Commodification of emotion

1. Exhaustion of the female body of reproduction and emotional means

The enlargement of the concept of labour questions the confines of classic Marxist thought. Devi shows that capitalist accumulation is not only exploitative to workers in factories, but it also relies on moneyless, undocumented, and emotionally expensive work by women, both at home and in society. Her narratives, therefore, converge with those of the critical thinkers such as Silvia Federici, who suggests adding reproductive labour and care work to the repertoire of capitalistic exploitation.

2. The Survival and Subordination of Emotional Labour The labour of emotionality can be called as a survival and subordination of the non-materialistic.

The physical work cannot be separated from the emotional effort of Jashoda in the Breast-Giver by Devi. As she feeds her baby milk, she also offers care, love, and emotional support. However, in the context of such contributions, families in higher castes systematically avail her reproductive abilities and leave her to die when her body fails. Her breast cancer is symbolised and becomes a metaphorical figure of speech of the capitalist and patriarchal over-exploitation, which is a metaphor of her physical and emotional breakdown.

Likewise, in Rudali, Sanichari, as a professional mourner, underlines the fact that grieving turns into a fare that should be bought, especially in the caste-organized community.

Her distress is being turned into commodities, and her tears are sold as the working product to the upper classes, who rent them out as a part of the ritual dissections of death. Hochschild, dramatising the theory of surface acting, women are forced to show feelings, which they cannot have, matching their inner worlds with what society demands to get money.

7.1 Writing Strategy and Political Practice

Mahasweta Devi combines reportage, fiction, and political criticism, and to capture such realities, she uses unsophisticated but sharp styles of narration. Her writings exclude sentimentalism in favour of the incisiveness of bare explanations of the emotional exploitation which needs readers to face the systematised behaviour of commodify and emotional labour. Her stylistic decisions are politically conscious, and her stories serve a purpose within the branch of activist writing that does not adhere to the common modes of literature.

8. Case studies:

Emotional and Invisible Labour: The Case Studies With the Narratives of Mahasweta Devi

Breast-Giver, Rudali, Chinta and Bayen are stories by Mahasweta Devi, in which we see how the bodies and emotions of women are used as a human labour resource by capitalist and caste-based societies. This literary review is consistent with both the facts on the ground case study and with empirical evidence in India.

Real Life Relevances:

- **The Unpaid Care Work:**

As per the data provided by Oxfam India (2022) and NSSO, women in India used to spend more than 300 minutes a day on unpaid emotional and care labour compared to men, who spent less than 30 minutes a day. This is, in most cases, aggravated among Dalit and tribal women because of the unavailability of public infrastructure.

- **Mourning the Dead Person at Work:**

Lower-caste women serve as professional mourners in Rajasthan, and this is reminiscent of Sanichari in Rudali. They act as mourners in a profession, whereas their personal lives do not receive adequate attention (Menon & Bhasin, 1998).

Reproductive Labour Exploitation:

The history of Dalit women includes the role of wet nurses and midwives, to feed the babies of upper-caste families with the socially reinforced prejudice (Raka Ray & Seemin Qayum, 2011). This is similar to that of Jashoda in *Breast-Giver*.

• **Social Ostracism:**

Dalit women are shown to do ritual labour associated with death and childbirth, but are subject to social death and exclusion as exhibited by Sharmila Rege (2006), similar to that of Chandidasi in *Bayen*.

9. Conclusion:

This paper has discussed how the stories of Mahasweta Devi tap into the political critique of the systematic exploitation of emotional and invisible labour, especially how the system functions within the intersections as invoked by capitalism, patriarchy, as well as caste oppression. Based on the works of Arlie Hochschild and Silvia Federici, the discussion has exposed how plots in the stories of Devi highlight unpaid care labour, reproductive labour, emotional work and affective display as an overlooked but imperative kind of labour that maintains familial as well as social economies.

In such other stories as *Breast-Giver*, *Rudali*, and *Chinta*, Devi demolishes the myth of women as self-sufficient, caring and nurturing creatures and brings out that the construct of motherly care, emotional support, and even emotions and grief turn into being purchasable practices. Her heroes are not just those who meet only personal pain but also symbols of a larger socio-economic structure in which the bodies and emotions of women become an instrument of labour and social stability, which, having become exhausted, is eliminated with disposal.

Offering care in the form of service and exploitation, Devi compels the redefinition of labour politics, resulting in the foregrounding of affective economies, which are usually not taken into account in the traditional Marxist discourse. She leaves the reader face to face with the bitter facts of subordinate women who have their reproductions as well as emotional labours exploited by not only the capitalists but the familial, feudal, as well as the caste related systems. Through this, the works of Devi do urge the reader to challenge classical Marxism ideas by taking a more intersectional approach towards labour, demanding to focus on the gendered, emotional, and reproductive aspects of labour.

Moreover, the portrayal of subaltern women's resistance, survival tactics, and illegible ways of resistance by Devi not only draws victimhood but the persistence of a subject through

the subjugated system even at huge personal sacrifices. She often finds solutions to such exploitation in the form of weathering emotional and invisible labour among her characters, and thus turning it into resources instead of merely accepting it and bearing its burdens, although such actions are never devoid of repercussions.

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