

## The Portrayal of Women in Brides Are Not for Burning

**Dipak Jadhav**

Ph. D. Scholar

SLL&CS

SRTM University, Nanded

### Abstract:

Theatre being the audio-visual medium has a desirable impact on audiences' minds. Drama is a genre of literature and its significant aspect is that it is meant to be performed on the stage. Mehta tried to voice the social discrimination against women through her play *Brides are not for Burning*. The present paper is an attempt to explore the various women's issues prevalent in society.

**Keywords:** Theatre, woman, dowry, violence, voicelessness

Plays are meant to be performed on the stage and being the audio-visual medium of expression, it has a great degree of impact on the audience. Theatrical performances can bring a significant change in the perception of society. It creates social awareness among the population and diversifies the various thought-provoking ideas to bring a substantial change in the social psyche. Dina Mehta tries to use the platform of theatre to uncover the prevalent social problems concerning women and to raise voices for the marginalized section of society. The theatrical performance was considered a men's profession and therefore, female roles were also enacted by male actors. But with the emergence of feminist thought in the 1970s, women got a wide variety of opportunities to articulate the painful experiences which are imposed upon them in the name of culture, custom, creed, and religion. It provided women playwrights to explore, align and raise questions against the social standards.

In the Indian context, many women playwrights and actresses came forward to give justification and representation to their identities. And they have had to bear the derogative remarks offered by orthodox people. In Indian society, culture enjoys high esteem, and people do respect it by holding

different views in their minds. Most Indian parents believe that daughters in the family must get married at an early age to avoid future misfortune falling upon the family. Woman in society is considered as a commodity, a liability to parents, and can tempt males with their youthful age. Hence, she can be denied access to education and professional jobs.

Dina Mehta, through her plays, depicts the sufferings of women due to old customs and creeds for which they are vulnerable to various forms of violence. The issue of dowry death is highlighted by the present author and suggests the failure of laws and justice. Dina Mehta in her play *Brides Are Not for Burning* opens with the conversation between Malini and her father. Malini feels and suspects that her sister Laxmi's death is a case of the bride burning. Her father mentions that Laxmi's wedding was a wasteful one. He says: Marriage is 12 tolas of gold, 2,000 rupees for a hall, utensils of steel, saris of silk... their expectations were endless because they imagined a government clerk makes so much on the side. They thought that I had feathered my nest with bribes and kickbacks... And I let them think that because I wanted to do my best for Laxmi. (Mehta 13)

Both her parents and her in-laws oppress Laxmi. She was forced to drop out of school at a young age and was not fully educated because her mother was always

pregnant and ill, and she had to babysit for...! Her younger siblings." Laxmi was tortured in her in-laws' house for not bringing enough dowry, and she was treated as a commodity rather than a human being. The in-laws harassed and ridiculed her since the dowry she brought them was not what they had angled for. She is accused of infertility, but the truth is that her husband, Vinod, was impotent. However, this fact was hidden from the public eye. Her in-laws have insured Laxmi's life for an amount of Rs.80000/- by foreseeing the future and profiting from it even if something unnatural occurs to her. She is a victim of the oppressive dowry system. If she had a healthy bank account, she could have lived happily at her husband's home. Malini corrects Anil by saying that "Anil, freedom is money in the bank. Do you believe they would have trampled Laxmi if she had a large bank account? Never" (21)

Mehta's spokesman Malini, is not as passive as Laxmi was. She is outspoken and thinks critically about every aspect of the system. She is an angry young woman seeking solutions to women's issues. Malini is portrayed as the personification of protest. She considers violence to be action, and her brother Anil's idealism to be futile. She speaks out against women's subordination and attacks the patriarchal setup through her course of actions. Malini mocks the court's decision that her sister's death was an accident: "They determined Laxmi's sari got soaked in kerosene by mistake. A match was set to it by accident " (15). She is frustrated by the government's inaction in her sister's case. she says to Anil that 'I've come to the opinion that democracies' shortcoming is that they move too slowly in the correct direction,' (21). She was originally interested to pursue a career in law, but after the loss of her sister, she abandoned that goal and instead chose the path of revolution. "I spit on your law courts!" she says, mocking the judiciary. They dish out one form of justice to the rich, another to the poor, as playthings in the hands of exploiters and reactionaries" (18). She is hell-bent on getting

Laxmi's husband and in-laws punished. She seeks retribution for the murder of her sister.

Malini challenges the society that tolerates crime in her battle for justice. Even her brother Anil is unable to help her. This is clear from his remarks:

*"Come on Malu. She is gone now. Let her go. She is beyond pain, beyond redress.*

*Malini: But not beyond retribution" (18)*

She starts out on her own, following the route she believes is correct. Can you deny that the law is solely for those who can hire it to serve them?" Roy replies. ... He claims that even military protection comes at a cost—ask a Harijan. How many arson cases have gone to court against them? I want accountability! It was my sister who was set on fire (19). Malini realizes that her lover Sanjay is a hypocrite and declines the revolutionary leader Roy's offer. She, too, is irritated by the media. "Of course, there is no word of it in the press," she says emphatically. We aren't significant enough" (11). She succeeds in exposing the truth about her sister's murder, but she is unable to deliver justice to her because she is not supported in her endeavor. Through Malini, the drama exposes the common man's disenchantment with the justice system. She loses her cool when she learns that the law has also determined Laxmi's death to be an accident.

...one avenue still beckons: I will educate myself all I can," Malini says, anticipating a more satisfying future. There is no way I can be denied a future (94).

Anil assists Malini in solving the mystery of Laxmi's death near the end of the play. He plays the character of male promotion against dowry and gets the credit in the drama alongside Malini. Though initially passive, he eventually says the play's concluding line: "That brides are not for burning! Not on the altar of avarice and greed as a ritual sacrifice" (63).

#### **Conclusion:**

Dina Mehta's representation of protest against the patriarchal treatment of women is motivated by her commitment to the cause of

female emancipation. Malini is among her preferred characters because she is a strong woman who refuses to be typecast into the stereotyped picture of women. They opt not to submit to society's dictates and instead take charge of their lives. They understand that they must tackle both their talents and their faults. It represents their independence.

**References:**

1. Devika, S. "The Voice of Protest: Burning Issues in Dina Mehta's Brides are not for Burning." *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*. Vol.2.2012:1-7
2. Mehta, Dina. *Bride's Are Not for Burning*, Bombay: Rupa & Co.,1993

