

D.P. Sinha's *The King of Mathura*: A Megalomaniac's Story

- AJ Sebastian sdb

Abstract: *The King of Mathura* portrays how King Kans growing up under cruel circumstances, becomes himself an evil monarch full of malice, cruelty and jealousy. As a child, having fallen in love with a flute than a sword, his father thwarts his growth through evil machinations, making him a demonic character. In his turn, he becomes a megalomaniac, who destroys and kills everyone who crosses him in his inhuman ways. Kans himself narrates his story of extraordinary ambition which led him to become a demi-god. Finally, his own demonic ambition leads to his destruction. The playwright traces Kans' growth and annihilation in several flashback scenes, proving him a megalomaniac.

Keywords: megalomania, flashback, barbarity, destiny, id, ego, superego. consciousness, conscience, unconscious.

D.P. Sinha, the distinguished Hindi playwright in his short play *The King of Mathura* probes into the evil machinations of King Kans of Mathura. The play could be assessed in the absurd theatre tradition with its atmosphere of nervous tension, coupled with comical situations. The absurdists believe that reality is meaningless and senseless. Absurd theatre presents the absurdity of modern human condition and the humanity's loss of religious, philosophical, or cultural roots. The individual is essentially isolated and alone. It presents the existential outlook of man depicting him lonely, confused and often anguished in a bewildering universe (Murfin:2). Kans' victimization in the hands of his cruel father leads him to become cruel, jealous and intriguing. The sensitive boy who fell in love with a flute than a sword, becomes a demonic character, destroying and killing everyone who crossed him in his megalomaniac dreams.

The playwright has clearly demarcated two acting spaces for the play – the first, the open space of the palace terrace where there is a high stone pillar, a royal chair, a huge gong and a hammer; the second, space in the jungle beside a big tree. The play opens as King Kans enters, tired and exhausted, having spent sleepless nights with tension of his own making with his obsession with his own self. He wonders how his poor commoners sleep soundly despite their misery and utter poverty. He muses: “I the “Brightest of the Bright”, “Bravest of the Brave”, “Mighty King of Kings”, the Highest, Lord Kans, the God – roams about restlessly alone in the dark of the night, like a ghost...” (Sinha: 132). He is so self obsessed with his own superiority complex that has led to narcissist tendencies. He sits on the throne, closes his eyes and lets off a

scream. He imagines as though some strange hands attempt to strangle him. He slips out of the throne and falls to the ground, crying for help. A palace Guard rushes to assist him as he wakes up from his delirious state. Regaining his composure, Kans drives away the Guard, who bows and exits. Recollecting the dream vision, he is all scared of the terrible hands and the gory faces of thousands of men, women and children. He begins to laugh ironically, taking possession of himself as the King, driving away all fears and dangers: "Afraid? Lord Kans! The Almighty God was frightened! The God was frightened. He was terrified" (132). As he undergoes such a conflicting psychological trauma, he could overhear the sound of flute playing. The notes of the flute keeps haunting him as he recollects thoughts of the rebel youth leader Krishna hiding somewhere in the palace. He gets panicky and orders his guards to search the palace to capture Krishna. He is unable to sleep as he keep hearing the music of the flute, driving him crazy and utter: "What a torture. No peace... asleep or awake! Death in life and living death! Sleeping and waking have become one" (133).

In his frustration, Kans comes forward and begins to narrate the story of his life. His was the story of an ordinary young boy, with extraordinary ambition, which led him to become a god. His demonic ways led him to his own destruction. The sequence shifts to a flashback in childhood, when Kan's father King Ugrasen asked him to choose his favourite weapon among sword, bow and arrow, spear, thunder-bolt and mace. Surprisingly, the boy Kan opted for a lute. The King is so infuriated that he calls his son a woman in the garb of a man. The flashback ends as King Kan recollects the scornful insult of his father when he opted for a lute in childhood. The insult becomes part and parcel of every fibre of his being. Flashback II begins with Prince Kans in the company of his beloved, Swaati, a village girl. The sequence in the open field presents the duo in exchange of affectionate words. She wishes him, her god, solace and happiness all the time. She acknowledges that she finds him most handsome when wrapped in thought. He wonders and queries if he has lost his masculinity as his cruelty is synonym for manliness. He speaks of callousness, violence and murder as hallmarks of a man. He doesn't accept her praises referring to the ridicule heaped on him by his father which has forced him to subscribe to his new found conviction: "A man is one who kills and takes joy in shedding blood. Unfeeling, cruel, barbarous, blind and deaf – such is a man" (135). He is puzzled by his cruel nature and his feelings of pity for the sufferings of others lets him shed tears. Swaati doesn't consider it weakness on his part, instead he is ahead of his times. Kans lets out his cherished childhood dream of building a world devoid of barbarity, bringing equality, sympathy and love by which music of lute would become man's companion in solitude. But he realizes his times have become cruel as he has to snatch away all smiles from the faces of people. Kans recalls the gruesome sights of cruelty meted out to animals by his father. As a child he had been groomed in cruelty like the way his father shot at animals for entertainment. Goats used to be tied and the king would shoot arrows at

their eyes from a short distance to prove his expertise in archery. The young Kans was told to do the same. He mused: "Am I not myself an animal, about to kill a nearly dead creature? What is this madness?...I confessed to the king that it was not possible for me" (136). His father only taunted him telling him to wear bracelets on his hands and play on the lute as such masculine games were not meant for him. He shared his frustration with Swaati as he beheld such sights of corpses of men, women and children and heaps of goats with vultures hovering over them. He accepted it as his destiny. The flashback ends with Kans at the present time as king. He confesses to Swaati that he can't return back from cruelty in which he has grown as he is rendered a deflated and lifeless man, reaching the pinnacle of his life, lonely and frustrated.

In flashback III, Kans recounts his father Pradyot, giving audience to Baahuk, the special emissary of the King of Magadh. The king bursts into laughter as Baahuk does obeisance. He places his sword on the emissary's chest calling him a captive. Suddenly Kans challenges his father's mocking remarks saying, "King, my father! I had sworn to myself that on your lips that twisted so often in mockery, there shall be entreaty for forgiveness one day" (139). Kans then goes on to challenge the king to ask his pardon. In shock King Ugrasen goes dumbfounded. The King shows his helplessness as he has lost his power of speech. Kans orders the guards to imprison his father and declare in the Yadav empire that he has committed suicide. He is keen that his father should be kept alive to regain his speech to make him apologise for having ridiculed him. As the guards take King Ugrasen away, Kans is moved with emotions and in a state of confusion he cries out: "King, my father! What have you done? I had been waiting ever so long for the moment when you will ask my pardon" (139). The flashback ends with Kan's reminiscing his childhood days when his father had taken him to the middle of the forest as he engaged in hunting.

In flashback IV the king asks the young Kans if he could go back to the palace all alone in the thick of the night. The boy Kans was left alone there to fend for himself while his father rode away. The young Kans shivered in fear of dreadful beasts as he limped back home. Suddenly his father appeared from behind a tree letting the boy run and cling to him. When the Prince began to cry, his father brushed him aside for his lack of bravery. The boy Kans, shivering with fear, wet his clothes in utter shock and cried out: "Forgive me, Royal Father... I will never feel afraid. Never shall I wet my clothes... I am a brave Yadav of the Bhoj clan" (141). The flashback ends with the various official discussing King Kan's plan of building a powerful Yadav republic like his father-in-law, the mighty king Jaraasandh of Magadh. The officials Pralamb (Minister of Mathura), Pradyot (Military Chief of Mathura) and Baahuk (Army Commander of Magadh), heap praises on King Kans who would establish his kingdom from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari, though surrounded by rebels. Suddenly a Guard rushes in to inform that Pradyot, the Military Chief, is busy searching for rebel Krishna in the royal palace as per Kan's instruction. Meanwhile praises are heaped on the King by the passing

officials. The sequence moves to the arrival of Queen Asti. She brings the good news that she has brought Magadh soldiers as part of her dowry. She tells Kans to disregard everyone to spend time in her company and make love. Kans is still in great fear of the astrologer's predictions of destruction of Kans by the eighth son of Vasudev and Devakee. Asti brushes aside all fears of such impending danger. But Kans writhes in pain uttering: "How can one sleep! How can one relax when everyone is wishing for his death" (144). A furious Kans demands that Devakee is brought there and killed.

When Devakee, his sister, arrives and praises his greatness, all his bitterness is forgotten. She reminds him of their childhood days when he jumped into a river to retrieve her doll, risking his life. Now, she wonders why he has imprisoned her along with her husband king Vasudev. He has very paradoxical opinions when he says that he loves his darling sister and yet tortures her in prison. He has his argument: "Yes, demon-like and also god-like. This is the dilemma of a human being – split into a god and a devil – half and half" (146). As Devakee begins to cry, he consoles her with utmost affection and begins to shed tears. She reminds him how he himself had selected her husband Vasudev. Kans acknowledges that Vasudev was his good friend from childhood, but now things have changed as he has become his enemy due to political ambitions and conspiracies. Though his sister pleads him for mercy, Kans drives her away. The sequence moves forward when Asti, his Queen, arrives to dispel his fears. She ends up taunting his vain glorious attitudes inherited from his father. As she exits scorning him, Kans calls his officials Pradyot, Baahuk and Pralamb, ordering them to keep strict surveillance of his enemies and all tribes of the Yaadavs. In his suspicion of his own people, he wants to know what goes on in every household in his kingdom. He finds himself so lonesome as there is no one whom he can trust and confide in. He confides his predicament in Pradyot, his military chief, who reassures him of his allegiance till death. Pradyot also surrenders his life in his service, more out of fear and trepidation than affection.

In the next sequence Swaati enters as she had been summoned by the King. Kans confides in her how lonely he is imprisoned in his own palace. He expresses his passion for her and wants her to be beside him as he suspects everyone attempting to murder him. He tells her to marry Pradyot and to observe his every move and inform him. There and then, he summons Pradyot and makes him tie the marriage knot, as he is overwhelmed with the loss of his much loved woman.

Flashback V is one surrounding Kan's secret love affair with Swaati as a young man. Though scared of nurturing love for her, a village beauty, he reassures her that he wouldn't abandon her love even to the point of death. She is convinced of the invisible bond of love as he has promised. The flashback ends as Kans wonders if his love for Swaati is one of invisible bond of attraction and attachment. Suddenly he hears the chorus pleading, "Do not delay further, O! Deliverer!" (155). He wonders who the deliverer is and vaingloriously imagines himself as the great Mahaarajhadhiraaj Kans, King of Kings, the deliverer. Pralamb, his

minister enters and tells him that the deliverer is fictitious. An argument ensues between them. Kans decides to smash the fiction and nip it in the bud.

Kans: I shall smash this fiction.

Pralamb: You cannot destroy it.

Kans: What can I not do?

Pralamb: As long as a single person lives, the fiction will continue to live in his mind.

Kans: In that case, not a single person shall remain alive.

Pralamb: Over whom will the King of kings rule then? ... At the root of all this are the religious beliefs and the discourses and teachings of the godmen...that in their time of difficulties God will take human form and appear on this earth to free them from misery.

Kans: So these are my real enemies?

Pralamb: Godmen, religious teachings... (155).

Pralamb informs the king that seven sons of Devakee had been killed as per his orders. Yaadav women had experienced killing of their male children like the Biblical account of the way wicked Herod killed all Jewish male children who were two years or under in Bethlehem at the birth of Jesus. It is a tragic report of how a wicked ruler tried to destroy Jesus, the Messiah and how God prevented it from happening (Matthew 2:13-23).

Pralamb brings news of a theatre group touring Mathura with their play on the incarnation of Narasingha entitled "Narasingh Avataar" which the king longs to see. As the play unfolds the narrator speaks of the tyrannical rule of irreligious king Hiranyakashipu when he oppressed and plundered his people. As they prayed to the Almighty, Lord Vishnu revealed himself and promised that he would take birth on this earth and bring deliverance. When people rejoiced at the prophetic incarnation, the king Hiranyakashipu became most violent, but people continued to pray. A lotus grew in the mud and an ascetic Prahlada, was born in a demon's house. Though the king raged in his fury, he was unable to harm the ascetic. In the end when the king raised his sword to kill the child, Narasingh burst out from a pillar and held the king by his stomach from where blood began to flow. At this juncture, King Kans screams and orders that no plays would be performed in his kingdom. He forbids all forms of worship in the land. As the actors are taken captive, Baahuk arrives bringing bad news of the Yaadav revolt. The soldiers had set the temple on fire as the people had taken shelter in it.

In act II Pralamb brings news to the king that temples have been deserted with the ban on prayers and singing, driving God out of the kingdom itself. Kans promises to give them a new God in his own person and declares: "People can put Kans on the throne of their hearts as God, in both his forms, those of the benign and the angry destroyer...Let it be declared that from today in the kingdom of Mathura God Shri Kans alone will be worshipped...He who defies shall be put to death" (161). Pralamb prostrates before him and promises to execute the orders. Pradyot comes in to inform that the images of God Shri Kans have been installed all over and masses are worshipping him. Kans appoints

Pralamb the High Priest of his religion. Baahuk enters with a poor and scared fisherman who reveals to the king that while fishing in the river he was swept away by the undercurrent. Uttering the God Shri Kan's name in prayer he was saved from drowning. An elated king rewards him with his ring.

Swaati suddenly appears carrying a new-born baby, in the company of the officials. When Kans decides to kill the child, she tells him it is a girl. Without heeding her plea, he dashes the child to death. Suddenly an explosion is heard which the king thinks is that of the goddess his destroyer being annihilated. Meanwhile news arrives that a child had been born to Nand, the chief of Gokul village, whom the people considered the incarnated one.

In the following sequence Kans is found in the company of Swaati. She admires him as the most glorious and brave King of Kings. He confesses his helplessness though mighty in power, groaning in loneliness. He finds comfort only in her presence. He asks her to go to Gokul and kill the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. She decides to execute his orders to kill Krishna. Pralamb comes in to inform the king that the new-born baby sucked the life out of Swaati's poisoned breasts. To appease the people, the King ordered that the body of Swaati, considered the killer of Yaadav children, be hung in public. Then he went on to make peace with his father-in-law, the ruler of Magadh. Entrusting his kingdom to his officials, Kans went to Magadh to fight for the king. The army chief of Magadh informs Kans that he is surrounded by enemies and his own people wished him dead. His officials Pralamb and Pradyot too joined the rebels against Kans. Viritrighn, Army Commander of Magadh gives information received from his spies that the rebellion has been full grown with the young people at the vanguard. Kans is told of the latest developments:

Viritrighn: Lord, you have prohibited music on the kingdom of Mathura; now every rebel carries a flute with him, as a sign of protest.

Kans: Flute?

Viritrighn: A symbol of their rebellion against the ban on music.

Kans: A musical instrument.

Viritrighn: Who is the leader?

Kans: Krishna: (*recollecting*) Krishna! The son of the Yadav – chief Nand of village Gokul?

Viritrighn: Yes, the son of Nand. But the Yaadavs consider him to be the eighth son of Devakee (170).

Kans asserts that Devakee never gave birth to the eighty son and calls it superstition. But Viritrighn claims that such superstition has become reality as the notes of the flute are more powerful in Mathura than the call of the conch-shell for war. He reiterates that the flute is the symbol of their rebellion under the leadership of Krishna. He has been very charismatic in collecting people for *raasleela* with the objective of music and love-making.

In flashback VI Swaati enters limping, complaining of a thorn in her foot.

When Kans looks at her foot in his hands, she laughs away saying that she would tell everyone that the King had touched her feet. As Kans remains lost in his reverie, the flashback ends with Asti limping into his presence, asking him to take out the thorn on her foot. When Kans shows reluctance to look for the thorn, she insists that he searches her leg. When he releases her foot, she laughs away and shows her ruby necklace presented by her father, the king of Magadh. With the pretence of showing the necklace, she comes close to him to draw his attention to her full round breasts. She appeals passionately with her beauty to arouse his carnal desires, but he brushes her aside as nonsensical. When questioned why he can't make love to her, he claims his Godly position. As he pushes her out she taunts him saying: "I know why the God is so worried. The leader of the Yaadav youths, Krishna is organising resistance against god Shri Kans's despotism... He is dark-complexioned but his figure is so winning that all girls go mad after him. I also want to see him once....Resistance against God Shri Kans! God who is impotent!" (174). In utter disgust Kans attempts to strike her, but refrains from such a hasty act of violence. Instead, he begins to admire her beauty and then all of a sudden grabs her and strangles her to death. He throws her down and kisses her on her forehead. He begins to say that he had rendered her a service, freeing her soul: "I have only murdered that counter-ego which my ego could not brook, be it of wife or friend, sister or father. That has to be destroyed" (174).

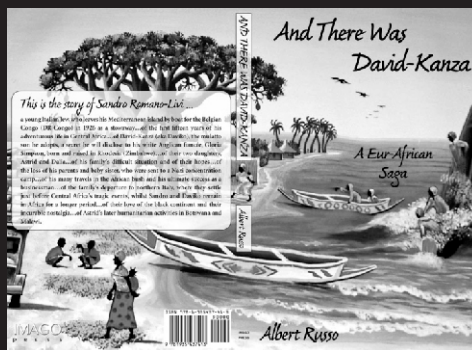
When Pralam is brought before him, Kans queries if the flute-wielding Yaadav youths are organising themselves to destroy his power. Pralamb declares his open enmity with the king as the illegitimate son of King Ugrasen their common father. Being the eldest son of the king, he claims that he should have been made the chief of the Yaadav confederacy. When Kans threatens to kill him for his conspiracy, Pralamb declares that he has achieved his mission in hatching the plot to destroy him with the popular rising under the leadership of Krishna. He happily goes to his death as the hang-men lead him to his execution.. Meanwhile, Kans is haunted by Krishna's flute playing in the palace. He sends the guards to search every nook and corner for Krishna. Pradyot tells the king that the sound of music could be a making of his imagination. Suddenly Kans threatens him with dire consequences for being a traitor. Pradyot keeps his cool and tells the king that he is prepared to face death and regrets for having served a tyrant all his life like a slave. He takes his own life by stabbing with a dagger. Kans keeps listening to the flute-playing which communicates fear to every fibre of his being. Still he puts on a brave face and declares himself the brightest God Shri Kans who is invincible. But the recurring flute-playing drives him crazy and as he breaks down he pleads, "No-no Krishna! No! No!" (178).

Kans is the epitome of a person suffering from Megalomania which is a psycho-pathological condition characterized by delusional fantasies of wealth, power, or omnipotence. He is characterized by an inflated sense of self-esteem and overestimation of his powers and beliefs ("Megalomania." <http://en.wikipedia.org>). Freud's concept of *repression*

by ignoring one's unresolved conflicts or traumatic past being forced out of conscious awareness into the realm of unconscious, could be applied to Kansa's life. Freud's idea of *ego*, *super-ego* and the *id*, corresponding to *consciousness*, *conscience* and *unconscious* (Barry 97), delves deep into Kansa's life whereby he kills his conscience which eventually suppresses his consciousness and returns him to the stage of the unconscious. It is this that makes him a monster until the end of the play. Being forced to repress his childhood dreams, the echoing music of the flute which runs like the leitmotif finally crushes him to his own destruction.

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And There Was David-Kanza

A Eur-African Saga

Albert Russo

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This is the story of Sandro Romano-Livi, a young Italian Jew, who leaves his Mediterranean island by boat for the Belgian Congo (DR Congo) in 1926 as a stowaway...of the first fifteen years of his adventurous life in Central Africa...of David-Kanza (aka Daviko), the mulatto son he adopts, a secret he will disclose to his white Anglican fiancée, Gloria Simpson, born and raised in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe)...of their two daughters, Astrid and Dalia...of his family's difficult situation and of their hopes...of the loss of his parents and baby sister, who were sent to a Nazi concentration camp...of his many travels in the African bush and his ultimate success as a businessman...of the family's departure to northern Italy, where they settle just before Central Africa's tragic events, whilst Sandro and Daviko remain in Africa for a longer period...of their love of the black continent and their incurable nostalgia...of Astrid's later humanitarian activities in Botswana and Malawi.

Social Commitment in Mahasweta Devi's *Jamunabati's other* and Ambai's *Milechan*

- G Sathya

Abstract: The stories under study show how economic – oppression brings great impact in the lives of protagonists of the stories and how they are either forced to limit their desires or to accept their sufferings.

Keywords: Activist, economic-oppression, social commitment and ironical acceptance.

Mahasweta Devi, a great activist and committed writer that West Bengal ever produced proudly proclaims that as a creative writer she has a sense of duty towards society. In her interview with Enakshi Chatterjee, she says “that –every creative writer should have a social conscience “(173) Mahasweta Devi to whom action is the by- word emerges as the champion of poor by writing about the downtroddens, tribals and the other oppressed classes of society. She has been endowed with great respect by the tribals living in the districts of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal. C.S. Lakshmi who writes under the pen name Ambai is considered to be one of the most original of Modern Tamil writers and she is rooted in the literature and the modern culture of Tamil Nadu. Her social commitment is evident through her varied roles as a historian, creative writer and Postcolonial feminist. Reviewing the stories of Ambai, Kalyani Dutta comes out with the remark that “ rarely do one's life convictions and Creativity fall into a seamless unity, Ambai, the Tamil novelist has achieved this unique balance”(48)

The present paper sets out to study the effects of economic oppression brought out in Mahasweta Devi's “Jamunabati's Mother” and Ambai's “Milechan” .The Protagonist of Devi's story is Jamunabati's Mother, who is referred to as Jamunabati's Mother throughout the story and not by her name. She belongs to the ever suffering lower class community. In Ambai's “Milechan”, Sambu, the protagonist, who has gone to Delhi from a village in Tamil Nadu to do research belongs to a middle class Brahmin family. The title is suggestive of the low economic status of the protagonist and the whole story expounds on the theme of the effects of economic Oppression on the protagonist in particular and the middle class society in general. The title also brings home the writer's view that it is not one's class or community but one's economic status which brings all the differences in the society.

In “The Metamorphosis of *Rudali*”, Devi has firmly rejected the idea that the text *Rudali* to be identified with women. She has strongly

expressed that men and women in her stories are alike and belong to different classes. When I write I never think of myself as a woman. I have written a story called *Chotty Munda and His Arrow* which is about a tribal man. *Aranyer Adhikar* is about male tribals so what? These are stories of people's struggle their confrontation with the systems... I look at the class, not at the gender problem. Take a story like *Ganesh Mahima* – it is about a woman. But I have written it from the class point of view. (Katyal 16) Taking this argument as the basis, the struggles of Jamunabati's Mother could be considered as a poverty ridden human being's struggle against the consumerist society which ever ignores and neglects the economically backward community.

It is generally considered that Ambai has explored many forms of oppressions in her stories. In the short story, "Milechan" she has dealt with the problems of economic oppression in the middle class society of Tamilnadu. In her conversation with Sue Dickman, Ambai has come out with a clear idea about her position in the literary scenario. She does not "want to belong to any ghetto of women writers, classified and given the position of only a woman writer" (32). In the same interview she has ironically argued that "When a man writes, even when he writes about a woman, it has universal qualities. But when I write, if it is about a woman, it gets particularized. Even if I write about a man it will be a particular attitude of a woman towards a man. It won't speak of universal qualities." (32) Thus her clear views about herself as a writer and her writings enable one to consider the sufferings of Sambu, the male protagonist of her story "Milechan" as the problems faced by middle class people in general. The openings of both the stories are striking and exposing the theme of economic oppression which runs through the stories. In Devi's *Jamunabati's Mother*, the writer's indictment on the mainstream society sounds sarcastic and forceful out and out. Through the very introduction of Jamunabati, "An endearing name, but the girl is wholly expendable. If she had never been born, it wouldn't have mattered to anyone, anywhere" (45), Devi exposes the unwantedness of this child to the society. Not only the child even her parents "too are expendable." (45) Even they "don't seem to be of any apparent use to either society or the world at large" (Devi 45)

In Ambai's "Milechan", the protagonist Sambu who has come to Delhi to do his Ph.D. considers himself as an outcaste in Delhi. "In that place, at that time, he felt himself to be a low- Caste soul that is at the outskirts and can't be touched." (Ambai 14) In Delhi, he was trying hard to mingle with other researchers. It was his poverty ridden middle class background that pushes him back and makes it impossible for him to be one with other scholars. The economic sufferings of both the protagonists make them bold. Jamuna Bati's mother who longed to get a fine doll for her daughter gives up that idea as her child falls sick and she has to spend her savings done with much hardships to treat the baby. The doctor advises the parents to give nutritious food to the sick baby. In order to get nourishing food items, besides hawking incense sticks, she chops betel nuts and makes paper bags. By working hard with meager food and weak body, she goes thinner than before. Even this "money is

spent to get tonic for her daughter whose marrow in the bones does not have proper formation, liver is bad and lungs are weak. No longer she dreams of a doll or a dress. Now she thinks of all the fruits and good food in the market. If she has no money, why is the market so full of vegetables, fruits, fish, grains and other eatables. Her inability to get such things makes her angry and jealousy. When talking to the employer about her daughter's illness, the timid and meek mother's "tone is brusque. The employer is surprised. Jamunabati's mother had always sounded meek, her eyes pleading, tearful like the eyes of a beggar. Remembering those eyes, the employer gives her a ten-rupee note". (Devi 52)

As Sambu is from a middle class family, he has witnessed the problems faced by her family members and people like him. He knows how long they have to stand in a ration shop queue to get kerosene. Though he has felt himself to be an outsider among other scholars, by one of his friend's compulsion, he accepts to take part in a strike to protest against Govt. regarding the hike in prices of various basic things. It is his experience of middle class poverty which induces him and makes him raise slogans boldly and ferociously. Listening and looking at Sambu, two of his friends talk to each other like this: Look at Sambu. How ferociously he shouts. Only during situation like this, one's restrained savagery comes out. Hasn't he become one with the crowd? (Ambai 16, My Translation)

In both the stories the protagonists are aware of the factor that their society is not constituted by only people like them. It is with haves and have nots. This awareness dawns on Jamunabati's mother when she looks all sorts of fruits, vegetables, grains, fish etc in the market. She longs to be one such person and at times she dares to daydream to feed herself and her family on such healthy and delicious things. Ambai's protagonist fights with his friend who asks him to take part in the strike. He says to his friend Mani that he will take only *moongdhal* porridge as his breakfast not the delicious as well as costly items such as egg, toast, jam, coffee and banana, taken by rich people. Sensing Sambu's anger about the participation of rich persons like Mani in the strike, Mani argues with him that it is not necessary for one to show one's protest against certain serious social and economical issues like hike in prices by undergoing the sufferings. Seeing the sufferings of other person is enough. He says that a doctor who cures cancer need not to suffer from that disease and he is of the opinion that poverty is the illness of a society. To this remark, Sambu says that not only he, even members of his family and people like them have been experiencing it.

Jamunabati's Mother and Sambu are with expectations and desires which are their due, but due to their backward economic status, they can't even think of getting them fulfilled. The mother's desire to get nutritious food for them goes unfulfilled. Sambu's dream of completing Ph.D gets shattered. All these are because of their poor economical background. Because of their inability to compete with the economic status of the mainstream society, these protagonists are forced to accept unwillingly their oppressed and deprived positions. Their heart rending lamentations at the end depicts their agony, vexation and inability on the one hand and the negligence of people like them by the mainstream

society on the other hand Jamunabati's Mother feels that she is alien to that society. She and people like her are obstacles to the development of society. As if understood the feelings and thoughts of Jamunabati's Mother, the author herself satirically comments that "Several lakhs of people like them must be immediately discarded. So that this country, this city might become beautiful". (Devi 46)

After losing her child and spending the precious savings for the cremation, a terrible change comes over on her face. There have been no questions, no anger and no jealousy. No longer has she looked meek and timid. Though her eyes are swollen, bloodshed, stupefied, disturbing and frightening, her eyes look truly amazed. The amazement in her eyes expresses her realization, in other words her ironical acceptance of her poverty ridden status. Now she has realized that unless she and people like her are discarded, there is no future for the city and this country. Seeing the names on the walls in memory of the people cremated there, she thinks why people like her should live. Now she neither looks expendable nor useful. As she can't get a solution for her life from the consumerist society, she offers a suggestion to it: "It seems that for people like her, some immediate, emergency measures are necessary. With so many scientists, so much planning, such a lot of gas and so many chambers—was it not possible to arrange something?" (Devi 55)

In Ambai's "Milechan" the problems of middle class people is presented through the protagonist Sambu as well as his friend Aarthi. Like Sambu, Aarthi is also caught into the web of economic oppression. When Sambu is full of complexes, Aarthi has understood how to lead a balanced life satisfying her family members. Like him, her dreams of completing Ph.D within three years, getting a good job and marrying a rich man were shattered. She has very well understood that she does not have rich dress to wear in order to go to high class restaurant or hotels. Even one third of her scholarship amount is sent to her family. Even namesake, if she goes out with someone to a restaurant, she cannot pay the bill. What she says about the love of middle class people is noteworthy. According to her, the affection that she has for anybody at that suffering moment would not be 'love' At that moment that kind of love will be considered only as a business done with selfish motives and plan. "There is no place for the term love in our life It is the sole right of some people". (Ambai 18, My Translation) It is this lady who boldly says that Sambu's intention of marrying Savitha, the rich research scholar is an outcome of his inferiority complex and of his hurry to get rid of that middle class feeling. She says further that this kind of action will leave him no place at both the sides at last.

Ambai is of the opinion that "she can't separate her political life from her creative one. But in the end, she moves out into a larger concern: most of stories are really about the quest for self-realization and liberation and out of the bondage of ideologies." (Holmstrom: 57) In the story "Milechan", the sufferings of Sambu turn out to be a kind of quest for self-realization. After talking to Aarthi, Sambu has been confused with very many passions. He asks himself who he has been without roots and with which experience he can force himself to go. A kind of realization

dawns over him He realizes that he does not have money as well as time to do research for seven years. Ignoring the passing of time is a luxurious thing meant for rich people and that is not with him. He understands that he is to be one with time. He also understands that he is to wrestle with it and to kneel down before it. Like Mahasweta Devi's protagonist, Sambu also accepts his limitations –but unwillingly. He understands he neither belongs to the elite research scholar nor the middle class society. In short, he feels that he is rootless. It is the economic oppression which leaves him rootless. Deshpande, Deshpande, I should not be here. I can't do Ph.D for seven years. My sister will be suffering without getting married. My mother will get shattered. To become an intelligent person is also a luxurious thing for me. I am an alien to my place. But still I'm needed there. (Ambai 21, My Translation)

In both the stories, the protagonists accept their positions ironically. In “Jamunabati's Mother”, her economical oppression forces her to put forward an ironical plea to the mainstream society to adopt some means to wipe away people like her to make their place beautiful. Ambai Protagonist, as he is from the middle class society, understands but is forced to accept that he, his family members and people like him should be within the limits of the middle class economy. He can't do anything differently.

That right is denied for him. He can marry the opposite house Sandhiya. He can lie with her as a good husband. He can rule over her. He can get children. He can suffer without money. He can get retired. He can die like a dead rat on the dustbin. These are the defined limits for him. (Ambai 23, My Translation)

A careful study of these two stories reveal the impacts of economic oppressions on the protagonists in general and the people of their respective economic classes in particular. Such presentations enable the writers to voice out their protest against such oppressions. Thus their stories become a kind of weapon for them to fight against the social injustice meted out to the economically deprived classes of our Indian society. In other words the stories are intended to bring about a kind of social change. Thus their social commitment expressed in these two stories can group them together as great activists.

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