

**Feeling the pulse of the downtrodden: a study of select
works of Mahasweta Devi**

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Abstract

Mahasweta Devi was one of India's foremost literary figures from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries—a writer and social activist in equal right. Though she had never declared anywhere that she is a feminist or a reformer but she dedicated her life to a cause – to fight for the cause of the welfare of the tribal, the downtrodden and the under privileged. She tried hard to protect the rights of the tribes, dalits and the rural poor and the helpless women and she also strove hard for the eradication of untouchability, bonded labour, the suppression of women. She wants human treatment to dalits and tribes and women and children. This paper deals with a collection of stories called "Breast Stories" in which three stories Draupadi, Behind the Bodice and Breast Giver are taken as a tool for research work. In one of her stories, Draupadi, the girl from the Dalit tribe who is subjected to brutal rape and inhuman torture is represented by Mahasweta Devi as the Dalit who can truly "speak".

Keywords/Phrases: Dalit, Social Activism, Exploited, Atrocities, Depressed Classes.

I. INTRODUCTION

In this article, the Researcher seeks to identify historical context in which Dalit Literature was born. Dalit literature is collection of works by and about Dalit community in India. There is no such thing as a "new" term for the Dalit. As a Hindi and Marathi version of "depressed classes," which the British used to describe what are now known as "programmed castes," was first used in 1930s. A new meaning was given to phrase later on, and it now encompasses all people who are victimised by religious and political oppression alike. As a result, the Dalit community is not classified as caste. Symbolic of revolution and transformation, the Dalit saint Kalavve, who lived in 12th century, used following phrases to take on higher castes:

“Those that consume goats, dirty animals, and little fish are referred to as caste people. There are others who devour holy cow that produces milk froth for Shiva, and therefore they are put out.”

The works of Dalit authors, such as poems, short tales, novels, and memoirs, have shed light on question of Dalit identity. As a result, lower classes have found new name by adopting "Dalit is dignified" viewpoint and rejecting the subhuman position placed on them by Hindu society. To acquaint reader with some of prominent and non-dominant topics of Dalit writer mahasweta Devi's Dalit works, this paper provides "content analysis." This paper deals with a collection of stories called "Breast Stories" in which three stories Draupadi, Behind the Bodice and Breast Giver are taken as a tool for research work. Mahasweta Devi, feminist writer & activist, collected her short tales under title Breast Stories. In today's flood of popular literature, Mahasweta Devi's work stands apart. In her writing, he avoids discussing minor everyday eccentricities of rich. Women who are directly and severely oppressed originate from the lowest rung of the socioeconomic ladder in his work. Mahasweta Devi sees them as most vulnerable. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a feminist critic, translated Breast Stories from Bengali to English in 1997. Draupadi, Behind Bodice, and Breast Giver are titles of three tales. Breasts, symbol for oppression of females in underprivileged areas, runs through all of these stories.

II. DRAUPADI

To set the scene for this tale, we need to go no farther than the 1971 war involving Bangladesh and Pakistan, during which countless numbers of women were raped to death. Thousands of Bengali people were slain by the Pakistani army. These victims included both civilian and military Bengalis. The fact that Draupadi is Dalit tribal lady separates her from the rest of Indian culture. Senanayak, Third World army commander and First World scholar, captures her and places her at bottom of social ladder. It is her command that leads to horrible rape in the army. In an ironic twist, rapists eventually instruct Draupadi to cover it up, yet Draupadi refuses and stays completely exposed in public instead. As he takes off his clothes and exposes his raw wounds, Senanayak is befuddled. To prove they can't mentally break her via the rape weapon, she boldly reveals herself.

There isn't a man here I should be ashamed of ... What else can you do?

This may be seen as parody of Mahabharata, in which Draupadi's oldest husband "bet" her away, as suggested by Spivak in an article that accompanies narrative. The more enemy commander strains and pulls on his sari, more there is. It is impenetrable because of Krishna's supernatural assistance. It is Draupadi's bravery and tenacity in rejecting patriarchy that puts history to close in Devi. Prior discovering phrase "feminist jargon," Devi was already familiar with concept of "rape culture." "Draupadi" was written by Mahasweta Devi to symbolise subordinated Indian society. Tribal Dalit women are subjected to economic, political, social, and sexual oppression. They are marginalised by caste, class, and gender in triple trifecta. Dopdi and Dulna Mejhen representing the tribal distress here find themselves leading the Naxalite movement. Draupadi's re-presentation in Mahasweta's story demolishes the traditional idea of the underling and the writer reinvents a new incarnation in the story's heroine.

III. BEHIND THE BODICE

Gangor, migrant low-wage labourer, and Upin, rich photographer, are at centre of Behind the Bodice. Upin photographs Gangor's breasts. Upin's irrational desire for Gangor's breasts is focus of narrative. he compared those to his wife Shital's silicone implant, that are artificial & lacking in his interest. The circumstances that led up to Gangor's breakdown, and eventually his own, are revealed despite his best efforts. Priyanka Bose and Adil Hussain starred in Italo Spinelli's film adaptation of Behind the Bodice, which was directed by Spinelli. Our community is built on backs of Dalit women. There is lack of attention in Dalit community's issues in women's movement. Women were marginalised in the Dalit struggle. Gender, class, and caste all need to be taken into account. Dalit women were active participants in this conversation. .. While women are already underappreciated, when they are Dalit women, they are completely ignored. A large number of rural prostitutes and urban prostitutes are Dalit women, as are the bulk of landless labourers and scavengers. As a result, they are more likely to come into touch with landlords and law police than their higher caste peers. They are abused by those in authority, whom carry out these assaults with impunity, because of their subservient status.

IV. BREAST GIVER

Outcast Brahmin lady Jashoda is the main protagonist of story. The rich Haldar family hires her as a nanny when her husband lost both of his feet. Despite its usefulness, patriarchal

society deifies and reveres it. Many people call her "Mother," "Milk-Mother," and so on. Because of her age and lack of usefulness, she is ostracised by her families and ignored by society. The same Unlike Draupadi, Mahasweta concentrates less on struggle of oppressed and more on underlying processes of oppression. As a whole, Mahasweta Devi's comment sums up not just her own narrative but that of many women forced into prostitution in remote or urban brothels. Owners employ sexual assault and other types of abuse towards Dalit women impacted by patriarchy are not romanticised in her rhetorical and pragmatic writing. Real, complex, and well-formed as strategies in this paper, according to researcher. As a result, they are more likely to come into touch with landlords and law police than their higher caste peers. They are abused by those in authority, whom carry out their assaults with impunity, because of their subservient status.

Such is power of the Indian soil that all women turn into mothers here and all men remain immersed in spirit of holy childhood.

These compelling tales, lacking of ambition, raise attention to systematic injustice that many women endure in Third World today. In Colombia, Iraq, Sudan, Nepal, & Afghanistan, rape is being utilised as weapon of war. The streets of Delhi, India's capital city, and its rural areas are rife with violence against women. Well-meaning guys as well as monsters manipulate and objectify our bodies. If you're afraid you'll forget them, this book will serve as constant reminder.

V. CONCLUSION

When it comes to Indian feminist literature, Breast Stories I hilarious read for those who are fortunate enough to be able to do so from comfort of their own homes. Readers who are fluent in Bengali will be able to appreciate this novel in its purest form, as it was originally written. It's not all bad news for those who aren't fluent in Bengali, since Spivak has done good job of translating each narrative, with lengthy introductions that may irritate some, yet are informative. Furthermore, the article investigates the place of Dalit women in contemporary India. The government's incapacity for prosecuting rape cases is subsequently shown to be worsened by corrupt and castes and gender prejudice, even at trial level, in multiple case studies. At times, Dalit women in Bihar and Tamil Nadu have been harassed or even tortured during aggressive searches and raids. To penalize their male relatives, Dalit women were imprisoned and raped in detention as several Indian women whose family

members are sought by police. They are coerced into temple prostitution at an early age by devadasi.

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