



## **The psychological exploration of women in the novels of Mahasweta Devi**

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### **Abstract**

Mahasweta, who considers herself to be more of a humanist than a feminist, maintains that a woman should be evaluated only on the basis of her humanity, and not in relation to her gender, ethnicity, caste, or social status. In contrast to Draupadi, who used her completeness of mind and body to combat her excluded status, Devi exemplifies the authentic representation of female assertion. The tales written by Mahasweta Devi reveal the unspoken reality of women's suffering as well as their capacity for surviving and resisting oppression. The voices of the characters are provided by Mahasweta. She reveals the 'unspeakable' reality about these personalities to the audience. In this paper, I'm going to talk about a few of her short stories, specifically Breast-Giver, Draupadi, The Hunt, and Behind the Bodice, in order to demonstrate that the women in her works are powerful, that they have a tremendous sense of self-respect, and that they are willing to fight all of their battles until the very end, even if that means death.

**Keywords:** Humanist, feminist, ethnicity, oppression, unspeakable

### **Introduction**

"I often say that my world is divided between two things - the needful and the needless. I am interested only in the former. I don't have much use for the needless".

-- "Mahasweta Devi"

Feminism, as a revolutionary movement, is necessary for restoring societal harmony. Giving women the same legal protections and professional possibilities as males is one way to help them find their identity in the world. When we say "true equality and opportunity," we mean just this. Feminism, which is led by women again for purpose of supporting other women, is also a sort of Living beings Resistance movement since this aims to convince the world that women deserve the same rights and opportunities as men. Feminism can only be implemented if men and women alike see women as whole human beings with valid concerns, goals, and needs.

Women are born free, yet throughout our society, they are discovered to be enslaved in many capacities. They are seen as subpar members of the human race and are consistently stigmatised in society. They have been ground down over the course of aeons by the grinding stone of a civilization that is ruled by men. A woman does not have the same level of liberty or safety that a male does. She has suffered from a variety of illnesses, both physical and mental, throughout her life. Many people perceive her to be weak and delicate. Since the dawn of time, males have been able to achieve and maintain a position of superiority in society, relegating females to a position of subordination.

Feminism has historically been and will continue to be seen as a movement in its own right, at the same level as any other movements, whether it culturally or technically. Sometimes it finds a home in literature alongside all of the other ideas that tackle the topic in a manner that is less emotionally charged. [Citation needed] However, the most of women, that make up a neglected section of society,

who shifted very little throughout the course of several years despite the notion of feminism having been handed down onto us or having grown over time as nothing more than a theory. The age-old fight of subjugation and oppression is still going on between us; we are still subjected to the same mental and physical humiliation; we are still required to endure the same pain just because we were born female.

The struggles and the shame that come along with being humiliated as a woman are timeless. There does not seem to be any way out of the mental and physical abuse that women are subjected to in today's culture.

In her writings, Mahasweta Devi elucidates the challenges that women face and the suffering that they go through as a result of living in a society that is controlled by males. In her writings, she has addressed the predicament of women and their inferior status in society. Her writing is factual and without of hyperbole, thus there is no room for sentimentality in her portrayal of the predicament of women who are most severely and directly impacted by patriarchy. Her protagonists come from lower-class socioeconomic backgrounds, and they are believable, multifaceted, and completely fleshed-out individuals. They constitute an essential component in Mahasweta Devi's eyes.

In the tales of Mahasweta Devi, we see a diverse group of women, from women of lower castes to women from higher castes, and from wealthy to impoverished backgrounds, all of them are attempting to navigate the hypocritical actions of their families and the larger society. Not only did it was an instance of how a dictatorship functions, in which women plus their physical characteristics are simply considered to be things to "consume" and "mutilate." The parallelism or double normal of society wrecked their existence, while it also acted as an indication of how a democracy operates. At add to this, their outer appearance is hidden, and their human body is considered as an object to be duplicated, sometimes even despite the full consent of the individual being studied.

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She has a peculiar capacity to interact with individuals who have been unable to speak, and she saves her most eloquent words for those who have been ignored. She is regarded as a unique creative writer because of her ability to bring difficult tales from underrepresented communities to light. The narrative of Mahasweta is an example of feminist appropriation in literature. As an Indian intellectual, Mahasweta Devi became well-known for her feminist perspective with the publication of her book *Breast Stories*. These tales, written by Mahasweta Devi, depict the reality of the circumstances in which women find themselves. The figure of the female without a voice has her own awareness, which develops in tandem with the tales she tells.

For readers interested in delving into Indian feminist literature, *Breast Stories* is a book that offers a welcome change of pace.

*Breast Stories* was first published in Bengali, but in 1997, feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak translated it into English from the Bengali version. *Draupadi*, *Behind the Bodice*, and *Breast Giver* are the names of the tales that make up this collection. They are connected by a single theme, which is the breast, which is a symbol for the exploitation of women who come from communities on the margins of society. These illuminating narratives bring attention to the pervasive discrimination that women experience on a daily basis. There have been reports of rape being utilised as a military tactic in the countries of Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, and Nepal. No matter whether you're in the capital of Delhi or the state of Kerala, women are subjected to persistent sexual harassment on the streets. Not just monstrous people, but even persons with good intentions manipulate and objectify our bodies. They do this in the name of "progress."

A significant focus of *Breast-Giver* is on the struggle to achieve equality through triumphing over the tyranny of males and of society as a whole. The main character, Jashoda, is a lady of the Brahmin caste who lives on the margins of society. As a result of the tragedy that left her husband paralysed, she has no choice but to take a job as a wet-nurse for the rich Haldar family. After an accident leaves her husband Kanganalicharan unable to work, she decides to become a wet nurse so that she may continue to provide for her family. She provides food for twenty youngsters in order to maintain her family. In spite of the fact that her new job requires her to get pregnant on a regular basis, she is now regarded as a significant figure in both social and political circles since she is known as the Mother of the World. In this version of the narrative, Jashoda's family relies on breast both as a means of subsistence and as a means of making a living. The household of Haldar was making use of Jashoda's corpse. The many children that belong to Jashoda's owner and mistress pay her to milk them. Her spouse and children are able to generate an income thanks to her copious amounts of milk. It is not because Jashoda is a woman that she is exploited; rather, Despite the fact that she is the primary breadwinner for the household, Jashoda does not absolve herself of her obligations as a wife and mother to her own children. She can't choose between the two careers, which is indicative of the difficulty that many women face in their

daily life. At the very beginning of the tale, Jashoda is presented to the reader as:

Motherhood had always been her method of life and of keeping alive her universe of uncountable people. She had been Kanganalicharan's wife from the day she was born, and she counted on her fingers her twenty offspring, whether they were alive or dead. Motherhood had always been Jashoda's chosen vocation, therefore she was known as a "professional mother."

Even when a woman earns her income outside the home, this does not imply that she is any less concerned with the activities that take on inside her own home and with her own family. Even if she may be absent from her family for part of the time, a woman who has a job still has a responsibility to be a strong provider for them. It is a well-known fact that women are capable of being both caring and powerful at the same time. In order to fulfil an essential component of the feminist ideal, Jashoda must also triumph against the constraints imposed on her by a society that is primarily patriarchal. In a variety of ways, Jashoda is able to triumph over her status as "different." The culture in which Jashoda was raised places a bigger value on males than it does on females. As well as being the leaders of the home, the males are responsible for providing for their families. This conventionally patriarchal order is flipped upside down by Jashoda. She rises to the position of leader and finds a job outside the house so that she can care for her family financially. She takes on chores that are traditionally assigned to the male head of the household and does them with aplomb. Both Jashoda and Kanganalicharan take on the 'roles' of the opposite gender at various points in the story. While Jashoda is out at work, Kanganalicharan manages the household responsibilities. This inversion of customary duties is illustrative of Jashoda's business acumen as well as her standing within the family and the community as a whole. When you take into account the labour that is done at home, which is typically the responsibility of the woman, she and her husband are on equal footing.

Because of her breast cancer, Jashoda is known as the "Milk mother" for the Haldar family, and she passes away while suffering in solitude. She is given a private cremation by the medical personnel despite the fact that there are many children there. The exploiters were content with her output so long as she remained fertile; but, as soon as she was diagnosed with cancer, they distanced themselves from her completely. As a result, Mahasweta Devi demonstrates how the "Milk mother" has to pay a high price for her ignorance and ultimately passes away in excruciating agony. She brings to light the covert exploitation of Jashoda, a low-income lady who is also a devoted wife and wonderful mother.

Mahasweta Devi is appalled by the game of politics, which aims to stifle the spirit of men and women who fight for emancipation from slavery on defense of their caste and clan. Those individuals include Mahasweta Devi. It has a terrifying effect on her. As a consequence of this, she makes the decision to begin working on a project with the objective of depicting the horrifying facts that happens of behind sociopolitical and socioeconomic iron doors, and she achieves this via the medium her best influential body of work, which is titled *Draupadi*.

*Dopdi* is a local woman of 27 years of age. In fact, it was her mistress who bestowed upon her the moniker. She is wanted for the assassination of Surja Sahu, a planter and

moneylender, while he refused to allow untouchables access to his water. His wife's lover was the landlady's husband. They're being hunted by the law enforcement, so they've had to go underground to avoid detection. The protagonist, Dopdi, is fleeing from the law enforcement, but is captured by the military, who then torture her to get information. When she is able to withstand all of the tortures without giving the authorities the information they were seeking, they subject her to the harshest type of torture: a vicious gang rape that lasts all day and night and leaves her bloodied and damaged. A rape of a woman might happen for any number of reasons. In other words, this is a weapon. Women often bear the brunt of male aggression, whether it is between individuals or between groups or even between nations. Whether the hostility is between individuals or between groups, communities, or countries, this is true. Assaulting and destroying the women of a civilization is an effective way to inflict vengeance on a whole community or culture and bring that culture into disrepute. In Indian culture specifically, women are held to higher standards and given more respect.

The name Draupadi is really pronounced differently in certain rural or tribal areas, which is how the moniker Dopdi came to be. Even though the characters of Draupadi in the Mahabharata and Dopdi in Mahasweta devi are so unlike to one another, there is a point of convergence between the two in which they both strive to fight against the injustice that has been done to them in their own unique way. Draupadi is a queen, regal, and gorgeous; despite the fact that she is only wedded to one, she has five husbands. Dopdi, on the other hand, is a destitute tribal lady who has been treated unfairly by the feudalistic authority in the community during her whole life. In the story of the Mahabharata, Lord Krishna, who represents God, is the one who arrives to save Draupadi after she has been humiliated, but there is no God to rescue Dopdi. The theme of exacting retribution is highly strong in both stories; nonetheless, there is some type of distinction between the two. One of the motivations for the Mahabharata war was Draupadi's desire for vengeance. In Mahasweta devi's Dopdi, she chooses her own form of retaliation rather than seeking vengeance for the humiliation she suffered. She makes an effort to exact vengeance on those who have harmed her. She seems to be a new species of female.

She will not dress herself in the morning, she will rip her garments to shreds with her teeth, and she will not wash her hands or face. Her conduct is confusing, somewhat weird. As a result of her refusal to execute the order, she makes a favourable impression on Senanayak, the leader of the army, who is known for being too rational. She marches towards Senanayak in the broad sunshine without any clothing on, exuding an air of confidence and assurance. She utters the following:

".....what's the need of clothes? You are free to disrobe me, but I do not see how you could ever dress me again. Are you a man? She glances around and decides to spit the bloody gob onto the front of Senanayak's white bush-shirt, saying at the same time that there isn't a guy in this room about whom I should be embarrassed. I will not consent to having you drape my clothing over me. What more is there for you to do? Come on, contradict me Come on, contradict me..... Dopdi pushes Senanayak with her two wounded breasts, and for the first time in Senanayak's life, she is terrified to stand

in front of an unarmed target. She is horribly afraid." (p. 196)

Unfortunately, the concept that we will eventually be able to stand up for retribution for rape victims remains a faraway dream, since we haven't yet accepted the idea that men and women are equally crucial in the home and in society at large. As a result, fictional characters like Dopdi—who ultimately chooses her own means of retribution—are not uncommon. She doesn't sit about hoping some male ally or more powerful force would take care of things for her. After enduring a particularly heinous kind of group sexual assault, the fact that she is able to find it within herself to speak up is an astounding demonstration of the limits to which a woman may be pushed. Dopdi is a new woman who has been born, and although if she cannot convey the perspective of a woman, she is still a woman. The patriarchy has been challenged by this new lady, who has done so without making any sound or movement. She goes about it in her own stealthy way to start a new conflict.

The Hunt also focuses a lot on the topic of sexual harassment in the workplace. The author, Devi, focuses her attention on the violence that is often used to dominate and control women. In this scene, a wealthy guy allows his lustful cravings to be satisfied by a native lady. But Mary, the semi-subaltern protagonist, uses physical force to put a stop to his sexual advances, which would have otherwise gone unchecked. She uses her machete to execute the perpetrator of the crime. After a period of thirteen years, gender roles are suddenly flipped during a tribal spring celebration, and women take on the role of hunters while men play the part of clowns. This event marks the turning point in Mary's life, and it takes place on the night of the festival. By participating in the ritual and taking on the role of a hunter, Mary is able to find the fortitude she needs to get rid of the danger that was hanging over her head and save her own death. In *The Hunt*, Mary exacts her vengeance on what she calls "sexual tyranny." The tales of Devi bring to light the deplorable situations that lower-class women are compelled to live in, where they are forced to constantly endure humiliation on several levels, including the personal, the socioeconomic, and the political. However, her work also draws attention to the reality that the woman is the primary agent of change in her own life, and that she has the power to go from being a victim to a victor by having the confidence to act on her beliefs and bringing about a transformation in her circumstances.

The song "Khalnayak" from the Bollywood film Mahasweta Devi's *Breast* serves as the inspiration for the last installment of the series, which is titled *Behind the Bodice*. The author herself poses a thought-provoking question at the beginning of the tale, asking

"What is there," which refers to the national issue of that particular year. This was not quite as significant as *choli ke piche*, which literally translates as "below the bodice."

Freelance writer and photographer Upin snaps a picture of Gangor, a low-income migrant worker from a tribal community, as she breastfeeds her child. He takes many pictures of Gangor's breasts and then submits them to a well-known newspaper for publishing consideration. A photo of Gangor's breasts with a statement that reads, "The half-naked ample-breasted female figures of Orissa are set to be raped." Keep them safe! "We must protect the breast!" These photographs are brought to the notice of the Jharao police force after arriving there in some mysterious manner.

The cops apprehend Gangor, throw her in jail, and then rape and sexually assault her there. After Upin found out about the terrible end that Gangor was about to meet, he made it his mission to go and save her. He learns that she has begun engaging in prostitution in order to support herself financially. Gangor has been cast off by her family and friends, leaving her with no other options. This is her last remaining option. When they finally meet face to face with one another, Gangor identifies Upin as one of the individuals who molested her. Upin is taken aback when she sees Gangor's breasts in their altered state. The terrifying image hammers home the point that he has been trying to ignore the Nothingness all this time, even though it is now impossible to do so. He is now fully aware that his pleading with people to "rescue the breasts" is completely pointless. Because those who are tasked with protecting society are, in reality, the ones who are carrying out violent acts. Upin, who is in a state of shock, walks onto the railroad tracks in Jharaa, where he is fatally injured by being run over by a train.

### Conclusion

Her tales provide the foundation for justifying localised characters in which the woman takes on the role of a societal and family rescuer. Her works form the basis for local folklore. She instills the qualities of a female, including their tenacity and ways of being, inside them. Her tales have not only played a role in the process, but they have also been a driving force behind the transformation. Alter explains:

Her protagonists often come from disadvantaged or oppressed social strata, and their fight for justice frequently has mythical connotations. Within this vast cosmos, every person and object is unique in comparison to one another from a certain point of view. So discrimination is not unlawful if it is used as the grounds of categorisation of person or things; however, disparity is unjust once it oppresses people based of "cast, class, creed, religion, colour, and gender and gives a vertical division of society; it also distinguishes individuals' ups and downs on the ladder of hierarchy-based patriarchal social systems where lower is always dominated by upper". To put it another way, when there are variations, there will also be hatred, and whenever there is bigotry, there will also be an avenue for exploitation or oppression. In this sense, prejudice is not only morally but also socially undesirable since it contributes to an unfair allocation of resources. This is the case because it leads to an unequal distribution of income.

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