



ISSN Print: 2664-8717  
ISSN Online: 2664-8725  
Impact Factor: RJIF 8.00  
IJRE 2024; 6(2): 394-396  
[www.englishjournal.net](http://www.englishjournal.net)  
Received: 19-10-2024  
Accepted: 20-11-2024

**Sudipta Dutta**  
Assistant Professor,  
Department of English, Swami  
Vivekananda University,  
Barrackpore, West Bengal,  
India

## Docile body and vulnerability of marginal women: reading Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* and Manik Bandopadhyay's *The final solution*

**Sudipta Dutta**

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26648717.2024.v6.i2f.259>

### Abstract

This paper examines the intersection of body politics and feminist theory in the portrayal of marginal women in Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* and Manik Bandopadhyay's *The Final Solution*. Through an in-depth analysis of the characters Dopdi Mejhen and Mallika, this study explores how their bodies become sites of both vulnerability and resistance within oppressive socio-political contexts. Devi's *Draupadi* depicts Dopdi as a subaltern figure whose physical body is subjected to state violence, yet she subverts her docile status through an act of defiance that challenges patriarchal power structures. Similarly, Bandopadhyay's *The Final Solution* portrays Mallika as a woman caught in the web of societal expectations and class-based oppression, leading to her ultimate sacrifice. By employing a feminist theoretical framework alongside concepts of body politics, this paper argues that both characters embody the silent yet potent struggles of marginal women against the forces that seek to control and erase them. Through these narratives, the authors critique the pervasive violence against women and highlight the resilience inherent in the female experience, offering a profound commentary on the ongoing battle for bodily autonomy and agency.

**Keywords:** Vulnerability, marginal women, *devi's draupadi*, manik bandopadhyay

### Introduction

The representation of marginal women in literature often serves as a powerful critique of the socio-political structures that perpetuate their oppression. In the Indian context, where issues of caste, class, and gender intersect, the bodies of women are frequently depicted as sites of both subjugation and resistance. This paper explores these dynamics through the analysis of two seminal works: Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* and Manik Bandopadhyay's *The Final Solution*. Both stories, while distinct in their narrative approaches, delve into the lived experiences of women who navigate the harsh realities of their marginalized existence.

In *Draupadi*, Mahasweta Devi presents Dopdi Mejhen, an Adivasi woman and a Naxalite revolutionary, whose body becomes the battleground of state power and patriarchal control. The narrative foregrounds the brutal violence inflicted upon her by the authorities, yet it is her refusal to conform to the victimhood expected of her that subverts the notion of the docile body. Dopdi's naked defiance, where she confronts her oppressors without shame, challenges the traditional dynamics of power, turning her body from a site of victimization into one of resistance and agency.

Conversely, in Manik Bandopadhyay's *The Final Solution*, the character of Mallika exemplifies a different form of subversion. Unlike Dopdi, Mallika's struggle is rooted within the domestic sphere, where she faces the dual pressures of class exploitation and gendered violence. However, the narrative takes an unexpected turn as Mallika enacts poetic justice by killing Pramatha, her would-be oppressor from the moneyed class. This act not only serves as a retribution for the wrongs committed against her but also disrupts the power dynamics typically associated with class and gender, positioning Mallika as an agent of her own destiny rather than a passive victim.

By situating these narratives within a feminist theoretical framework, this paper seeks to unravel the complex layers of body politics at play in the portrayal of Dopdi and Mallika. It argues that both characters, in their respective contexts, embody the silent yet potent struggles of marginal women against the forces that seek to control and erase them.

**Corresponding Author:**  
**Sudipta Dutta**  
Assistant Professor,  
Department of English, Swami  
Vivekananda University,  
Barrackpore, West Bengal,  
India

Through their resistance, they not only challenge the hegemonic structures of power but also offer a profound commentary on the ongoing battle for bodily autonomy and agency in a society that continuously marginalizes their existence.

### Theoretical Framework

The analysis of marginal women's bodies in Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* and Manik Bandopadhyay's *The Final Solution* is grounded in a feminist theoretical framework that intersects with the concept of body politics. This section outlines the key theories and concepts that inform the interpretation of Dopdi Mejhen and Mallika as embodiments of both vulnerability and resistance.

Feminist theory has long engaged with the ways in which women's bodies are sites of control, oppression, and resistance. Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity is particularly relevant here, as it emphasizes the ways in which gendered bodies are produced and regulated through repeated social practices. In *Draupadi*, Dopdi's body is subjected to state violence as a means of enforcing her subjugation, yet her refusal to conform to the expectations of docility subverts this process. By standing naked before her captors, Dopdi disrupts the performative scripts that would otherwise render her powerless, transforming her body into a site of defiance rather than victimhood.

The concept of the "docile body," as theorized by Michel Foucault, also provides a crucial lens through which to examine these narratives. Foucault argues that power operates through the disciplining of bodies, rendering them docile and compliant within societal structures. Both Devi and Bandopadhyay depict the bodies of their female protagonists as subjected to various forms of social and physical control, yet they also highlight the potential for resistance embedded within these same bodies. Dopdi's naked defiance and Mallika's act of poetic justice both represent moments where the docile body is reappropriated as a tool of resistance against oppressive power.

In *The Final Solution*, Mallika's character is shaped by the intersection of class and gender, where her body is not only a site of potential victimization but also of agency. The narrative critique of class-based violence is underscored by Mallika's ultimate rejection of her prescribed role as a passive victim. Instead, she turns the power dynamics on their head by killing Pramatha, an act that resonates with Spivak's exploration of the subaltern's capacity for agency within restrictive societal frameworks.

This theoretical approach highlights how both Dopdi and Mallika navigate the oppressive structures of caste, class, and patriarchy that seek to control their bodies. By employing feminist theory and body politics, this paper argues that these characters exemplify the complex ways in which marginal women resist and subvert the forces that seek to render them invisible and powerless.

### Analysis of *Draupadi* by Mahasweta Devi

Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* is a profound exploration of the intersection of gender, caste, and state power, with the body of the protagonist, Dopdi Mejhen, serving as the central locus of this exploration. As an Adivasi woman and a member of the Naxalite movement, Dopdi embodies the subaltern resistance against oppressive state machinery. Devi's narrative foregrounds the brutal violence inflicted upon Dopdi, particularly the sexual violence that aims to

break her spirit and reinforce her subjugation. However, it is through this very violence that Dopdi subverts the expectations placed upon her, challenging the notion of the docile body.

Dopdi's body is portrayed as a site of both vulnerability and defiance. The state's use of sexual violence against her is a deliberate tactic to silence and humiliate her, reflecting the broader societal tendency to control women's bodies as a means of maintaining power. As Foucault suggests, the body is often disciplined through various forms of social control, rendering it compliant to the dictates of power structures. In Dopdi's case, her body is subjected to this disciplining force in an attempt to break her revolutionary spirit. However, Devi's portrayal of Dopdi's response to this violence is what sets *Draupadi* apart as a narrative of resistance.

The climax of the story, where Dopdi is brought naked before her captors, marks a pivotal moment in her transformation from victim to agent of resistance. In this scene, Dopdi refuses to cover herself, standing defiantly before the military officer, Senanayak. This act of naked defiance challenges the power dynamics at play, as Dopdi reclaims control over her body and refuses to be shamed. By refusing to conform to the role of the docile, compliant victim, Dopdi subverts the power that seeks to dominate her, turning her body into a symbol of resistance rather than submission.

Devi's narrative also critiques the complicity of the state in perpetuating violence against marginal women. The character of Senanayak, who represents the state's military power, is depicted as both fascinated and threatened by Dopdi's defiance. His inability to comprehend her resistance reflects the limitations of a power structure that relies on physical domination to enforce compliance. Dopdi's refusal to submit not only disrupts this dynamic but also exposes the fragility of the power that seeks to control her.

Through Dopdi Mejhen, Devi highlights the resilience and agency of marginal women in the face of systemic oppression. Her defiance serves as a powerful critique of the societal and state mechanisms that seek to render women's bodies docile and compliant. By reclaiming her body as a site of resistance, Dopdi challenges the very foundations of the power that oppresses her, offering a profound commentary on the potential for subaltern agency within even the most oppressive structures.

### Analysis of *The Final Solution* by Manik Bandopadhyay

In Manik Bandopadhyay's *The Final Solution*, the character of Mallika offers a nuanced exploration of the intersection between class and gender within a patriarchal society. Unlike Dopdi Mejhen in *Draupadi*, Mallika's struggles are rooted in the domestic sphere, yet they are no less significant in their portrayal of the vulnerability and resilience of marginal women. Bandopadhyay's narrative presents Mallika as a woman who is initially positioned as a potential victim of the systemic violence perpetrated by the moneyed class, but who ultimately subverts this role through an act of poetic justice.

Mallika's character is emblematic of the ways in which women's bodies are often commodified and controlled within patriarchal societies. As a woman of lower social standing, she is subjected to the dual pressures of class exploitation and gendered violence. Pramatha, the antagonist, represents the predatory upper class that seeks to

exploit Mallika, seeing her as a mere object to satisfy his desires. The power imbalance between them is stark, with Pramatha embodying the entitled authority of the elite, while Mallika is depicted as vulnerable to his advances.

However, Bandopadhyay's portrayal of Mallika is far from that of a passive victim. Instead, the narrative builds towards a moment of profound reversal, where Mallika takes control of her fate by killing Pramatha. This act of violence is not merely an expression of personal vengeance but a significant disruption of the power dynamics that have long oppressed her. Mallika's decision to murder Pramatha can be interpreted through the lens of Spivak's concept of subaltern agency, wherein the marginalized subject, despite systemic constraints, enacts a form of resistance that challenges the hegemonic structures of power.

Mallika's act of killing Pramatha is also a critical commentary on the limitations of the docile body. As theorized by Foucault, the docile body is one that is regulated and controlled by societal norms and power structures. Yet, in *The Final Solution*, Mallika rejects this imposed docility by taking a radical action that reclaims her body and autonomy from the clutches of patriarchal and class-based oppression. The murder of Pramatha, who epitomizes the predatory upper class, is an assertion of Mallika's agency, signaling her refusal to be a victim within a system that dehumanizes her.

Bandopadhyay's narrative also critiques the broader social structures that facilitate such exploitation. By focusing on Mallika's internal struggle and ultimate decision, the story underscores the pervasive nature of class and gender violence in society, while simultaneously highlighting the potential for resistance within the very bodies that are subjected to these forces. Mallika's victory over Pramatha is not just personal but symbolic of the broader resistance of marginal women against the forces that seek to control them.

Through Mallika, Bandopadhyay offers a powerful narrative of empowerment and resistance, one that contrasts sharply with the more overt forms of resistance seen in characters like Dopdi. While both characters ultimately subvert the power structures that oppress them, Mallika's method is rooted in the domestic sphere, highlighting the diverse ways in which marginal women navigate and resist the forces that seek to render them powerless. Her story challenges the perception of the docile body, instead presenting a narrative where the marginal woman reclaims her agency through an act of decisive and transformative violence.

### Conclusion

The analysis of Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* and Manik Bandopadhyay's *The Final Solution* reveals the complex and multifaceted ways in which marginal women resist and subvert the oppressive forces that seek to control their bodies. Both Dopdi Mejhén and Mallika serve as powerful representations of this resistance, albeit through different means and in distinct socio-political contexts.

In *Draupadi*, Dopdi's defiance of state power through the reclamation of her body challenges the deeply ingrained patriarchal and caste-based structures that render her a target of violence. Her naked confrontation with her oppressors is a radical rejection of the docility imposed upon her, turning her body into a site of resistance and empowerment. Dopdi's story underscores the potential for subaltern agency within even the most repressive conditions, offering a poignant

critique of the societal mechanisms that seek to dehumanize and silence marginal women.

Conversely, *The Final Solution* presents Mallika as a figure who navigates the intersection of class and gender oppression within the domestic sphere. While initially positioned as a potential victim of the predatory upper class, Mallika ultimately reclaims her agency by enacting poetic justice against her would-be oppressor, Pramatha. This act not only disrupts the power dynamics between the classes but also challenges the notion of the docile body as a site of control. Mallika's story emphasizes the possibility of resistance within the private sphere, highlighting the diverse ways in which marginal women assert their autonomy and challenge the structures that seek to render them powerless. Together, these narratives offer a profound commentary on the ongoing struggles for bodily autonomy and agency among marginal women. Both Devi and Bandopadhyay use their characters to critique the pervasive violence against women and to highlight the resilience inherent in the female experience. Through their acts of resistance, Dopdi and Mallika embody the silent yet potent struggles of marginal women, providing a powerful reminder of the capacity for agency and defiance within even the most oppressive circumstances.

In conclusion, the exploration of body politics through the lens of feminist theory in these stories reveals the enduring relevance of these narratives in contemporary discourse. As societal structures continue to evolve, the themes of control, resistance, and empowerment depicted in *Draupadi* and *The Final Solution* remain crucial to understanding the complex dynamics of gender, class, and power in literature and beyond.

### References

1. Bandopadhyay M. *The Final Solution*. In: Sengupta D, editor. *Mapmaking: Partition Stories from Two Bengals*. New Delhi: Srishti; c2003. p. 19-36. Translated by Rani Roy.
2. Butler J. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge; c1990.
3. Devi M. *Draupadi*. In: Spivak GC, translator. *Breast Stories*. Kolkata: Seagull Books; c1997. p. 19-36.
4. Foucault M. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books; c1995. Translated by Alan Sheridan.
5. Spivak GC. Can the Subaltern Speak? In: Nelson C, Grossberg L, editors. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana (IL): University of Illinois Press; c1988. p. 271-313.