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A Feminist Reading of Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi", "Breast Giver", and "The Hunt"

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Abstract— *This paper examines Mahasweta Devi as both a writer and activist, highlighting her profound compassion for the issues faced by tribal and subaltern women in post-colonial India. This paper analyses "Draupadi", "Breast Giver",and "The Hunt" from a feminist perspective to understand how these stories portray women's agency and resistance. It discusses how Mahasweta Devi's stories enable marginalised tribal women to question postcolonial and patriarchal power structures to assert their independence. The present study interrogates how Mahasweta Devi's stories depict the subjugation of marginalised women and how her writing enables them to regain agency in confronting oppressive social structures. This study explores themes of the body, violence, silence, resistance, and survival through the prism of postcolonial perspectives, feminist theory, and subaltern studies, with a particular focus on subaltern studies and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theoretical findings. It aims to highlight how Devi challenges the limits of representation and shows how agency operates within constraints. In doing so, Devi redefines female marginalization as a complicated, situation-specific form of resistance rather than a sign of powerlessness.*

Keywords— ***Subaltern Studies, Postcolonial Feminism, Tribal Women, Body Politics, Sexual Violence, Motherhood.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature in Indian English deals with the theme of caste, class and gender, particularly through narratives centred on oppressed communities. Mahasweta Devi has wrestled with these issues in her works to offer a sustained critique of the existing systems of power, which include patriarchy, caste hierarchy, class oppression, and state violence. Mahasweta Devi was born in Dhaka and grew up in a literary family that shaped her beliefs at a young age, as her father, Manish Ghatak, was a well-known poet and novelist. Her upbringing introduced her to humanism, liberal ideas, and an awareness of injustice, each of which afterwards influenced her art and activism. In contrast to many of her contemporaries, Mahasweta Devi did not treat literature as separate from everyday life or social struggle. From early on, she chose to write for those whose experiences were most ignored, especially tribal and rural women, who faced exploitation, poverty, gendered violence, and the loss of dignity and human rights. She drew inspiration for her writing from those people who are exploited and used and yet are not defeated. To her, the infinite source of inspiration for her writing comes from these profoundly noble yet suffering individuals. (Devi7).

Her commitment to tribal lives is rooted in both conviction and responsibility—she wrote not to evoke pity but to affirm resistance. Devi's stories are grounded in her work and experiences with marginalised

communities. She was deeply involved with sex workers and tribal struggles, which led her to write about things that are not discussed or written about in the mainstream.

Devi wrote more than 20 collections of short stories covering fiction, journalism, essays, and activism, in addition to more than 100 novels. Her portrayals of tribal women and rural communities are particularly well-known, even though her stories touch on a variety of marginalized groups, including denotified tribes and bonded laborers. Hajar Churashir Maa (1974), Rudali (1979), Aranyer Adhikar (The Right to the Forest) (1977), and Chotti Munda Ebong Tar Teer (Chotti Munda and His Arrow) (1980) are among her most important works. Her narratives draw from shared experiences, folklore, and historical events, but most importantly, they are told from the perspectives of subaltern resistance groups that are frequently excluded from official histories and literature.

This paper focuses on three of Devi's texts: "Draupadi", "Breast Giver", and "The Hunt", which bring together the issues of gender, caste, class, and power, revealing how women's bodies and lives are sites of violence as well as strength and resistance. In "Draupadi", a tribal woman named Dopdi stands naked before state officials after sustained sexual violence, transforming her body into a symbol of resistance; "Breast Giver" explores how women's physical labour can both sustain life and become a site of exploitation, and "The Hunt" shows how social power structures continue unequal gender relations in rural settings.

Devi's contributions were widely acknowledged. She received the Sahitya Academy Award in 1979 for Aranyer Adhikar, the Jnanpith Award — India's highest literary honor in 1996, the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1997 for her "compassionate crusade" on behalf of tribal peoples, as well as the Padma Shri (1986) and Padma Vibhushan (2006). Her work was not limited to writing; she worked directly with grassroots groups, edited tribal magazines like Bortika, and spoke for denotified tribes.

Mahasweta Devi's writing treats literature as a means of protest and solidarity. Her ideas about feminism do not come only from theory. They are shaped by the everyday lives of local communities and focus on bringing change, not just speaking about problems. In this context, her fiction relates to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's central inquiry,*"Can the Subaltern Speak?"* published in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture (1988)*, by illustrating that subaltern women speak for themselves outside the control of mainstream narratives, but through those that centre their own struggles, physical presence, and resistance, challenging the structures that have historically silenced them. The selected stories "Draupadi", "Breast Giver" and "The Hunt" hence become powerful texts not only to represent the subaltern but to make their voices heard within and against established power structures.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mahasweta Devi's texts have received significant critical attention for speaking directly to real political issues and giving voice to people often overlooked by society. Critics have studied her works from feminist, Marxist, subaltern, and postcolonial perspectives. Readers see her not only as an author but as someone who turns fiction into acts of defiance. Her Stories stand in opposition to deep-rooted patterns like caste, patriarchy, economic hardship, and state violence.

Feminist scholars closely examine how Devi presents women across different social conditions, including gender, caste, class, and tribal identity. In "Draupadi", Devi shows how attention turns to power struggles around abuse, and critics read Draupadi's bold exposure not just as suffering but as subversion. Her act of standing naked in front of everyone changes the meaning of violence and shame. Her action transforms her suffering into resistance. Similarly, we notice that "Breast Giver" has widely discussed issues about control over women's bodies and how reproductive labour gets sold like any other product. These readings show a pattern as to how women's bodies are placed within systems that exploit people into hardship for survival or gain.

Recent research discusses Devi in relation to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's well-known essay, *"Can the Subaltern Speak?"* Scholars discuss whether Devi's portrayal of tribal women challenges Spivak's claims about the silenced voices. At the center of this debate stands the collection *Imaginary Maps*, where Devi's stories appear alongside Spivak's interpretive essays (Devi). From fiction like "The Hunting", "Douloti the Bountiful", and "Pterodactyl, Pirtha, and Puran Sahay", a difference grows - not between art and idea, but between lived experience and academic interpretation. These

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stories show that tribal exclusion did not vanish after independence. Instead, new ways of losing land emerged through state projects, market forces, and the ways development policies are discussed.

The strong connection between Devi's fiction and her public endeavours is one notable feature. Her works have value not only as stories but also as writings influenced by social realities, shaped by her close interactions with tribal communities. By following Spivak's argument, some scholars question and even wonder if any writer can truly represent and speak for marginalized people without mediation.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's work in *Under Western Eyes*: *Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses* influences how critics view Devi. Mohanty argues against treating women in the Global South as a single and uniform group (Mohanty 65). Devi's portrayal of tribal women is based on actual struggles like displacement, inequality related to caste controlled by the state authority. These lives are shaped by specific historical contexts rather than general ideas.

In "Draupadi", "Breast-Giver",and "The Hunt", we see how women's bodies are shown as sites where control and power interact. Violence, motherhood, and labour are not only personal experiences and struggles, but theyalso reveal the dark reality of society. Although Devi's stories are widely known for their feminist and subaltern frameworks, there is still limited discussion of how her selected texts relate to Spivak's argument about who gets heard and who stays silent. This paper therefore aims to examine stories not just for representation but also for action and resistance. Here we see how marginalized women resist societal restrictions and break norms to claim presence even when they are suppressed by thesociety. Rather than attempting to resolve this question of whether the subaltern can speak, this study explores how the stories create space for forms of resistance that are rooted in time.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative, text-centred methodology used in this study is based on feminist and subaltern studies. It mostly depends on a detailed textual analysis of the short stories "Draupadi", "Breast- Giver", and "The Hunt" by Mahasweta Devi, looking at the representations of the female body, symbolism, and narrative techniques. Investigating how subaltern women negotiate agency within patriarchal, caste-hierarchical, class-exploitation, and state violence structures is the goal.

The theoretical framework for this paper is based on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's argument in "*Can the Subaltern Speak*?" that demonstrates the power structures that silence marginalised women's voices. The study considers represented rebellion, silence, determination, and revenge as other subaltern expressions and sees Devi's fiction as challenging this claim rather than treating it as the ultimate. The framework is further elaborated in the scholarship of Indian feminist work. Discussion on the function of power through control over women's bodies is informed by Nivedita Menon, who argues that gender is a political construct (Menon). Uma Chakravarti's concept of caste-based patriarchy can provide us some narrow way to these intersections of social hierarchy and gender oppression (Chakravarti), specifically when we listen to Jashoda, as well as Mary Oraon. In postcolonial India, the constitution of motherhood and female legitimacy is elucidated in the context of Kumkum Sangari's work on gender and nationalism (Sangari).

This research's methodology combines comparative analysis, theoretical application, and close reading. It identifies different subaltern female responses, such as rebellion, mental suffering, and direct retaliation, by setting the three stories in dialogue. To investigate how literature serves as a platform for the representation, criticism, and rewriting of structurally silenced voices, the research remains interpretive rather than empirical.

The present study compares all three stories to illustrate how subaltern women in Devi's fiction respond to oppression differently based on their circumstances. According to this analysis, Devi's work shows a variety of forms of resistance. Some women fight back violently, some openly challenge power, some suffer, and some choose to keep quiet. Their environments affect their agency, thereby demonstrating how women as gendered subalterns negotiate with existing social hierarchies.

"*Draupadi*":The Violated Body as Political Speech

Mahasweta Devi's fiction "Draupadi" (translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak) is one of the most powerful literary representations of subaltern resistance in

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postcolonial Indian literature. The story centres on the arrest, rape in custody, and eventual defiance of Dopdi Mejhen, a tribal woman revolutionary, against the historical backdrop of the Naxalite movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, especially the Naxalbari uprising. Devi offers a profoundly feminist reworking of myth and history through Dopdi's character, challenging patriarchy, nationalism, state violence, and feudalism.

The story's setting is one of violent state repression and agricultural exploitation. Tribal peasants Dopdi Mejhen and her husband Dulna Majhi join a revolt movement against landlords like Surja Sahu, who maintain hereditary debt bondage and monopolize resources and water during drought. Because an ancestor once borrowed "a bit of paddy," Dulna's family has been stuck for generations (Devi 399), and the unpaid debt serves as a means of perpetual servitude. Lower-caste workers' denial of access to water represents the unequal distribution of power. Dopdi and Dulna openly oppose feudal authority when they take part in the murder of Surja Sahu. But the structure of the contemporary postcolonial state is invited by this revolt. Villages are "cordoned off and machine-gunned" during "Operation Bakuli" (Devi 396), placing the narrative in actual accounts of brutal repression that followed the 1971 Indo-Pak War, in which the Indian government stepped up its attack on Naxalite rebels (Spivak 386). According to the narrative, independence has led to new kinds of marginalization rather than justice for tribal communities.

With a price of one hundred rupees on her head, Dopdi is turned from a peasant woman into a "most wanted" insurgent within this political framework (Devi 396). Her identity is objectified, criminalised, and reduced to a reward value. This is where Spivak's theoretical intervention in Can the Subaltern Speak? comes into play. Spivak argues that the subaltern is structurally excluded from dominant debate in addition to being oppressed (Spivak 271). Dopdi's struggle is dismissed as criminal rebellion rather than being heard as a valid protest, and she is not acknowledged as a political subject. She is not part of patriarchal or national narratives.

When Dopdi is captured and betrayed, the plot becomes more intense. The logical, educated face of state power is displayed by Senanayak, the army officer in charge of the operation. He studies tribal psychology because he thinks that by analysing insurgent behaviour logically, he will understand it (Devi 394). But in the end, his strength shows up as cruelty. He orders his men to "make her. Do the needful," (Devi 401) after Dopdi is brought before him. Take the necessary action. This official expression points out the institutional character of violence: rape is a purposeful weapon of war rather than an uncontrolled act. Devi speaks of the attack without hesitation: "Her nipples were torn, her breasts were bitten raw" (Devi 401). The state marks dominance on the female body, turning it into a battlefield.

This episode dramatises the relationship between nationalism and patriarchy from a feminist standpoint. Group rape by the conquerors serves as a "metonymic celebration of territorial acquisition," (Spivak, Critique 103) as Spivak states in A Critique of Postcolonial Reason. The state aims to retake control over territory and rebellion by violating Dopdi, whose body represents tribal land and insurgent resistance. Furthermore, patriarchy silences the subaltern woman, and nationalist rhetoric removes her. This double marginalisation is carried out by Dopdi's rape, which removes her of her political and physical rights.

The story's climax, however, completelydisregards this reasoning. Dopdiis instructedto appear before Senanayak the morning following the attack. A guard offers her clothing to cover herself. Rather, she rips them with her teeth and approaches the officer nude. Her words of rebellion echo:

"পাকড়কে লানেকা কপড়া? ওয়াশ করকে ভি কপড়া পহনা পড়েগা, লেকিন ওয়াপস কপড়া পহনানে কা কোই মতলব নহী হোতা হৈ"

What are clothes for? I can be stripped, but how can I be dressed again? (Devi 402) further: "There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed of."And finally, she confronts Senanayak directly "Are you a man?" (Devi 402)

The violated body becomes political speech at this point. According to patriarchal morality, sexual assault results in silence and shame. Dopdi declines both. She rejects the idea that men who have mistreated her have a right to respect. Instead of being humiliating, her nudity turns into an act of resistance. Once self-assured and analytical, Senanayak is now "afraid to stand before" her (Devi 402). The power dynamic is reversed as the naked woman challenges armed authority. Once a place of dominance, her body now serves as an object of conflict.

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Devi's intentional rewriting of the Mahabharata mythic figure is indicated by the title "Draupadi." Draupadi is disrobed in a royal court in the epic, but she is saved by divine intervention when Krishna miraculously delivers an endless supply of cloth. Devi's Dopdi is not saved in this way. There is no miracle, no Krishna. Rather, she saves herself by refusing. By situating Dopdi first in a single, friendly marriage and then in the horror of multiple rape, Devi challenges the accepted uniqueness of the epic Draupadi, revealing how patriarchal and nationalist myths construct female honor, according to Spivak. By covering herself, Dopdi refuses to represent purity or to restore patriarchal morality. Her nudity turns into a weapon.

Nidhi Sharma notes that the story retells the epic tale from the view point of marginalised voices. In contrast to the mythical Draupadi, who is frequently depicted as relying on divine male intervention, Dopdi is shown to be independent, self-respecting, and in rebellion against patriarchal conventions. She becomes an agent of empowerment and cultural voice rather than being passive or powerless. Devi reclaims the passed-down myth for subaltern feminist politics by destroying it through this contrast (Sharma 6).

Here, Spivak's claim that *"the subaltern cannot speak"* takes on a new meaning. The statement suggests that subaltern speech is not acknowledged within dominant structures, but it does not imply literal silence. Dopdi does not communicate through institutional discourse or legal complaints. Her speech comes alive instead. Her nudity conveys a message that official language cannot capture. However, the narrative avoids romanticising resistance. The state is not over thrown by Dopdi's disobedience; the military system is still in place. The story's unresolved conclusion highlights the boundaries of resistance within long-standing power structures.

Therefore, “Draupadi” provides a radical feminist examination of victimization and subversion through its storyline and characterization. Dopdi Mejhen is a symbol of both extraordinary rebellion and extreme vulnerability. Sexual violence, state repression, and patriarchal exploitation highlight the vulnerable status of tribal women in postcolonial India. However, her rejection of shame reveals the frailty of masculine authority and challenges patriarchal logic. Her body serves as an appeal and a battlefield. By doing this, Devi challenges readers to examine the gendered and political systems that result in her silence rather than just recounting the pain of a marginalized woman. Although Dopdi is unable to engage in official discourse, she can challenge and disturb it. Through fearless presence and embodied resistance, she transforms violation into defiance, leaving behind a powerful feminist reimagining of myth, nation, and subaltern agency.

“BreastGiver”:The Exploited Female Body and Economic Patriarchy

“Motherhood is not merely biological destiny; it is a social institution shaped by power.”

—Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born (Richchapter1)*

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's translation of Mahasweta Devi's “Breast-Giver” is a revolutionary breakdown of the myth of sacred motherhood. Devi challenges the ideological celebration of motherhood and reveals the devaluation of the female body within patriarchy, caste hierarchy, and nationalism through the life of Jashoda, a poor Brahmin woman who pursues a career as a wet nurse. The story becomes a symbol of the subaltern maternal body consumed by social structures when read alongside Spivak's theoretical interventions, particularly her essay "The Breast-Giver" and “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *(Spivak 287).*

The narrative follows Jashoda’s life from domestic hardship to bodily ruin. The turning point comes when her husband, Kangali Charan, suffers a severe injury in an accident, requiring immediate financial survival. She works as a wet nurse for the wealthy Haldar family, and the narrator says sarcastically,"Jashoda was a professional mother"(Devi1073). Motherhood, which is typically idealized as sacred, is turned into labor by this phrase. Jashoda's main asset is her breasts. To ensure an ongoing supply of milk, she gives birth twenty times, and Haldar children continue to feed on her body for generations. Jashoda is "a mother by profession" (Devi 1073), as Spivak observes in her essay "The Breast-Giver," and the "political economy of the female body" is evident in this commercialisation of maternity. The structure of motherhood is based on exchange systems; her body enters a market economy where milk is money. This dynamic reflects what Spivak identifies as the commodification of the maternal body within a broader political economy. She is invaluable so long as she makes milk. She loses her importance when she is unable to.

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Devi's use of religious and political imagery in giving the lead character the name Jashoda heightens the irony. Jashoda sees herself as a nurturing, almost goddess-like figure and considers her fertilitya divine gift.

However, by materially describing her breasts as heavy, full and functional, the narrative destroys this illusion. Jashoda "becomes the object of a certain kind of nationalist allegory," according to Spivak (Spivak 250). She is materially exhausted, yet she represents the ideal of Mother India: endless nutritionand sacrifice. The mother is physically worn out but symbolically uplifted, exposing what Spivak calls the "excess of signification" in maternal imagery. This ideology is absorbed by Jashoda, who connects virtue with suffering. Given Spivak's argument that "the subaltern cannot speak," structural silencing appears in Jashoda's situation. Although she speaks in the context of the home, she is unable to describe her exploitation as a form of systemic injustice because the ideology that consumes her shapes her consciousness.

Despite being Brahmin by caste, caste privilege is erased by Jashoda's poverty. Her labor is controlled by the economically dominant Haldars, showing the intersection of class exploitation and caste. To maintain milk production, Kangali Charan promotes repeated pregnancies and maintains patriarchal authority despite his disability. Her ability to procreate is essential to his survival and masculinity. Jashoda's bodyis turned into family property, and the story implies that society "milks" the mother rather than the child. Jashoda is caught in "the circuits of reproductive heteronormativity," according to Spivak, maintaining class and genetic continuity for others while continuing to be economically insecure. Devi therefore criticizes systemic patriarchy as opposed to personal cruelty.

When Jashoda suffers from breast cancer, the story reaches its most tragic point. The once-nourishing breasts fall apart and develop ulcers, turning into "lumps of flesh" that are painful and ill. The once-life-giving milk is replaced by blood and pus. The admired mother's organ turns disgusting. According to Spivak, this turn of events shows the failure of nationalist

Representation. If Jashoda is Mother India, then her cancer is a symbol of the decline of acountry that takes advantage of its mothers. The Haldars pull away from her as her illness gets worse. The children she cared for do not take on the role of caretakers. Professionally, the "professional mother" loses her value. "Good food and constant sexual servicing are provided so that she can be kept in prime condition for perfect breastfeeding" (Mahasweta Devi, *Breast Giver*) explains how she was kept in the best breastfeeding condition, but she is abandoned once her milk loses its value.

As the woman who fed dozens of children passes away without receiving proper care or nutrition, the irony develops. Caretakers disappear as the "running sores" across her breast become sour. Her husband even with draws. She raises sons and daughters, but none of them help her. As "the sore son her breast kept mocking her with a hundred mouths, a hundred eyes,"(Devi1085) she experiences disbelief and illusions. She finds her betrayal unbearable:

রোপ্তোকন্তর,রবোবুরোপোতোরোস্তন্বৃন্তনুখপস্নবোতুকোরোবোন্কোঃ
স্তন্দুটিন্কোরপইস্তন্তোরএন্পবস্টৈনোকন্কোরপকন্?

(Jashoda had forever scrubbed her breasts carefully with soap and oil, for the master's sons had put the nipples in their mouth. In the end,why did those breasts betray her? (Devi 1085)

Jashoda's passing exposes the "violence of the production of the mother as pure signifier," according to Spivak. She is materially abandoned but symbolically honored. Because she feeds the rich but gets no structural support, her tragedy becomes a metaphor for the postcolonial nation. Nationalist discourse is dominated by the image of "Mother India," but actual mothers do not have access to health care, financial stability, or recognition. The country does not defend her body; it feeds on it.

Jashoda doesn't put on an act of resistance as Dopdi did in *"Draupadi."* Her tragedy is slowly absorbed and buried. Until the very end, she maintains that her role is sacred. Spivak's claim that "the figure of the woman disappears between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitutionand object-formation" (Spivak 102) is supported by this lack of rebellion. Jashoda's subjectivity disappears into function; her breasts, not her voice, define her. Instead of a revolutionary climax, her death is quiet and characterized by decline in health and abandonment. Devi declines sentimental resolution. Jashoda passes away in pain and neglect rather than in glory.

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The story emphasises reproductive labour—childbearing and nursing—as labour that supports social structure but is still invisible and undervalued when viewed through a Marxist-feminist lens. Spivak highlights the "political economy of the breast" (Spivak 243), which holds that systems of class privilege and exchange are the means by which milk is exchanged. Devi exposes the material exploitation of motherhood and strips it of its romantic aura by portraying it as wage labour.

In the end, "Breast-Giver" provides an awful feminist critique of the way the maternal body is exploited by patriarchal and nationalist frameworks. The continual claim that Jashoda is a "professional mother" emphasises how nurture becomes work and symbol becomes resource. The price of endless kindness is exposed by her diseased breasts. Spivak's claim that "the subaltern cannot speak" sheds light on Jashoda's structural silence, as she has internalised her exploitation and is unable to identify it. She represents the disposable character of the societal mother, revered in theory but abandoned in practice. Mahasweta Devi eliminates sentimentality myths and reveals the harsh political economy hidden beneath the revered image of motherhood through the life and death of Jashoda.

Gender Agency, Tribal Justice, and Sexual Violence: An Analysis of Mahasweta Devi's

'The Hunt'

"The Hunt", a short story by Mahasweta Devi, vividly portrays tribal existence, sexual exploitation and feminine retaliation. Set in a Santhal tribe, the story revolves around Oraon, a young mixed-race woman. Mary Oraon, of Santhal origin, is shown killing her landlord, Tehsildar Singh, when he forces sex on her. "The Hunt" emphasizes direct retaliation, in contrast to "Breast-Giver" where the female body is gradually consumed by exploitation, and "Draupadi", where the female body becomes a site of political confrontation. Devi redefines justice and female agency in subaltern space through Mary's murderous act. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's postcolonial feminist framework, particularly her argument in *"Can the Subaltern speak?"* makes it difficult to understand the story's subaltern woman's ability to speak; in this case the speech is embodied in violent acts.

Mary Oraon, the daughter of an Australian father and a tribal woman, as Devi states, "Mary Oraon was the daughter of an Australian sahib and an Oraon woman." (Devi 2) is at the center of the story. She is in a bordering position, both insider and outsider, because of her mixed identity, which makes her stand out in her community. Although she works in the city, she travels back to her village every year for the tribal hunting festival, a custom that is closely associated with community identity, masculinity, and collective memory. Devi does not romanticise the tribal way of life; rather, she shows how vulnerable it is to royal invasion. Tribal communities remain economically marginalized; the government ignores them, landlords take advantage of them, and they are excluded from nationalist debate. This multi-layered marginality gets worse by Mary's hybrid identity, which places her at the center of colonial history and current class oppression.

Tehsildar Singh is a symbol of masculine power, upper-caste status, and royal authority. His desire for Mary comes from authority rather than love. The narrator plainly states, "Tehsildar Singh had long wanted Mary" (Devi8). As a logical extension of his power, he seeks access to her body. The narrative emphasises his ruthless stare, portraying him as someone who finds Mary exotic, accessible and peaceful. Her obvious differences and tribal identity boost his desire to control her. The intersection of patriarchy and colonialism, where the subaltern woman becomes territory to be claimed, is reflected in this dynamic, according to Spivak. Here, sexual violence is structural rather than accidental as feudal masculinity tries to prove itself on Mary's body.

The story's main symbolic framework is the hunting festival. In tribal culture, hunting is a traditional way for men to demonstrate bravery and maintain their masculine authority. Devi flips this symbolism completely. The hunter turns into the hunted when Mary uses an axe to kill Tehsildar Singh the night ofthe hunt. "That night Mary went hunting." This reversal represents a significant transformation of gendered power rather than just personal retaliation. A male-dominant ritual is appropriated by Mary, who turns it into a place of female justice. Originally used for hunting, the axe now serves as a weapon for self-defense and independence. She didn't act impulsively; she did it on purpose. Mary decides to remove the threat directly, in contrast to Dopdi, who rebels by confronting the naked, and Jashoda, who internalizes exploitation.

According to feminist theory, Mary's acts of

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violence operate as subaltern speech. Since the institutional justice system is unavailable and uninterested with her situation, she chooses not to

Pursue legal action. Rather, she applies tribal justice within her community's cultural framework. She doesn't openly defend herself after the murder. Just as important as her action is her silence. The community, which reflects a different moral framework outside of state authority, is aware of what has happened but chooses not to expose her. Mary's violence thus turns into language, a rejection expressed by actions rather than words. Spivak warns against romanticising subaltern rebellion, but she also acknowledges that rebellion may appear in real forms when specific subjects are left out of centralised discussion. Mary's action questions royal entitlement and exposes the weakness of masculine power.

The female body is highlighted in the narrative as a debated area. Singh's attempted attack is an act of ownership declaration and follows patterns of territorial control. Mary gains control over her body by killing him. Class, caste, and gender are all symbolic structures of power that are broken through by the axe strike. Devi, however, refrains from portraying this action as a revolutionary shift. The state does not vanish; feudal systems do not. Instead of creating a systemic change, Mary's action causes chaos. But the change in mindset is important. Singh's claimed vulnerability challenges the notion that subaltern women are naturally powerless.

In the larger context of Devi's portrayal of women from deprived backgrounds, Mary's reaction is a unique form of choice. In “Breast-Giver”, Jashoda represents slow elimination through industrialized motherhood. In “Draupadi”, Dopdi turns violation into aggressive rebellion. Mary, on the other hand, decides to strike back quickly. Any one depiction of subaltern womanhood is complicated by these differences. Devi presents a variety of survival strategies, including resilience, confrontation, and threat elimination, rejecting victimization as the sole narrative accessible to tribal women.

Ultimately, “The Hunt” offers a feminist reimagining of justice within subaltern space. Through the plot of attempted sexual domination and retaliatory killing, and through the characterization of Mary Oraon as neither passive nor remorseful, Devi reverses the symbolism of the hunt and destabilizes patriarchal hierarchy. Read through Spivak’s theoretical lens, Mary’s act becomes a form of speech that cannot enter institutional discourse yet powerfully disrupts it. In this narrative, the hunted becomes hunter, and in that inversion, Mahasweta Devi challenges entrenched assumptions about justice, gender, and agency in marginalized communities.

Mahasweta Devi as Writer–Activist: Intertextual Resistance and Political Commitment

Mahasweta Devi is a writer and activist whose work is inextricably linked to her political activism, as demonstrated by the three stories examined in this study. Because it is based on her own experiences with neglected tribes, bonded laborers, and tribal communities, her fiction serves as both representation and action. Author and social activist Mahasweta Devi uses storytelling as a platform for ethical and political responsibility.

Intertextuality plays an important part in this process. By retelling the epic heroine from the Mahabharata, “Draupadi”, patriarchal and nationalist ideas of female honor are put on trial. By demonstrating the distinction between nationalist ideals and real life, Jashoda's material suffering in “Breast-Giver” destroys the symbolic image of Mother India. “The Hunt” subverts masculine power structures by changing tribal rituals. By employing intertextual strategies, Devi can question contemporary myths, historical narratives, and ideological frameworks.

When read in in the light of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theoretical issues with representation, Devi's fiction reveals how subaltern women fight through lived acts, silence, endurance, and confrontation even though they may not participate in official discourse. She thus puts literature in relation to political resistance and moral witnessing.

IV. CONCLUSION

Together, Devi's "Draupadi," "Breast-Giver," and "The Hunt" provide a powerful revision of subaltern female identity in post-colonial India. Devi goes beyond simply presenting marginalized women as helpless victims of oppression with these stories. Rather, she portrays them as complex people who overcome resilience, complicity, survival, silence, and rebellion within firmly established systems of caste hierarchy, patriarchy, class exploitation, and state violence.

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Dopdi Mejhen's naked rebellion in "Draupadi" turns the female body that has been violated into a site of political resistance. By turning vulnerability into confrontation, her refusal to perform shame challenges state authority and patriarchal morality. Jashoda's life in "Breast-Giver" illustrates how the maternal body has been gradually commercialized within patriarchal and nationalist economies. Her absorbed devotion and long-lasting silence reveal how ideology enters consciousness and shapes subaltern subjectivity from within. The cycle of exploitation is clearly broken in "The Hunt" when Mary Oraon's revengeful behavior destroys feudal entitlement and reclaims her own body.

When juxtaposed with Spivak's claim that *"Can the subaltern cannot speak,"* these tales contribute to rather than challenge the argument. The subaltern woman may continue to be ignored in nationalist history, legal frameworks, and official discourse. Devi's fiction, on the other hand, shows how resistance can take onreal, violent, and oft unsubtle forms. Here, speech manifests as rebellion, enduring silence, or violent interruption rather than always logical declaration. Such expressions indicate agency even though they might not be readable within dominant structures.

Hence, this study claims that the agency of subaltern women is neither common nor sexually satisfying. It is shaped by material limitations, fractured, and context bound. Sometimes it explodes in open rebellion, and other times it stays self-destructive or tragically internalized. Devi, however, forces readers to address the systemic factors that give rise to both resistance and silence in each case.

Furthermore, Devi does not make the suffering of the subaltern woman more beautiful; rather, she humanizes her. She rejects stories of successful revolution or effortless power. Rather, she emphasizes the price of surviving in harsh frameworks. Despite being violated, exploited, and abandoned, these women fight against being erased.

In the end, this study argues that even when the subaltern's speech is structurally limited, literature can serve as a critical space where her presence is made visible. Devi's fiction maintains the crisis of representation as a moral and political issue rather than resolving it as Spivak noted. Bydoing this, it calls on readers and academics to pay closer attention to forms of resistance that have long been suppressed by dominant histories.

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