CHAPTER - II

VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS

The blacks in America and the tribals in India are the marginalized and exploited people, as their marginality is being primarily social and economic. One could hear their protest voices in their literatures. The black American asks a pertinent question to Providence in his baritone:

What did I do
To be so black

Indian tribal says:
What did I do
To be so outcast

J.M. Waghmare in his *Literature of Marginality* says, “American blacks as well as Indian Dalits were the sons and daughters of darkness journeying through untold sorrows and sufferings” (20). Though the Indian tribals are not actually Dalits, they are also treated as people from a different world. In India they are the most affected sectors of the society parallel to Dalits.

Subaltern people were the salt and savour of this ancient land’s voice, were passive in the past. Both African- American women and Indian women are still under the sway and sweep of inequality. And it has struck a keynote to awake their consciousness for forging their identities. It has given ample inspiration and insight to the writers emerging from the tribal and nomadic communities. Marginalized sections of people are the social milieu. The female writers are redefining their identities after fifty years of the independent India.
Subaltern women are the victims of the post-colonial India. Post-colonial Indian woman that Devi reflects is the one, whose reality cannot be contained in mere Manichean Binary opposites. A.S. Dasan says that the,

Manichean binaries are Eurocentric and stop at/with ideological abstractions and theorizing. In the colonial context, they may be tenable modes of apprehending reality. In Devi’s sociological imagination, the notion of nation and national identity as one unified entity collapses under the weight of displacement and dislocation of the tribal identity (80).

Guha who criticizes Indian Nationalism for its elitist bias, considers the peasantry as the principal representatives of the subaltern. Gayatri chakravorty Spivak has rightly modified Guha’s proposition by making clear the relationship of the peasantry to the proletariat. Although Gramsci’s concept of hegemony is fundamentally “a generic and formal theory of social power” as Thomas Peter mentions in *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism* (220).

Women in India and elsewhere do not enjoy equal status and individual dignity in the male dominated world. That makes them marginal- socially, politically, sexually and culturally. Their sexual exploitation ultimately leads to social, political and economic exploitation. Women who belong to the weaker sections of society such as Dalits, Adivasis (tribal people) etc. face double exploitation, double inequality and double injustice. There is a double jeopardy. Gender is at the base of their marginality. They face domestic violence too.

Husbands and wives are unequal partners in family life. One of the best creations of man is the relation to relationship: mother, father, sister, son, daughter, husband, wife and in-laws. This gives some protection to women. Otherwise, women would have been victims of male lust. And yet they suffer
a lot at the hands of men. They move under the dark phallic shadow of man’s lust. Feminism deals with all these problems. Gender inequality has become the worst device in the lives of women. The democracy has made them to understand their rights (franchise) and laws. And their freedom of expression and education give voice to the voiceless.

The Centre, Peripheral dichotomy has never left the commonwealth country like India. The upper caste and elite people exercise their power against the tribal, poor people. The indigenous people are pushed towards the margins by the atrocious nature of the bourgeois people. Most of the commonwealth countries are divided into two extremes. One is power and another one is poverty. The second one is always estranged, engulfed and suppressed by the first one. Inequality is the main cause of marginality. J.M. Waghmare opines in *Literature of Marginality* that Marginalized and indigenous people are left with fear, insecurity, exploitation and injustice. Marginalized sections of society are generally beyond the pale of the dominant culture. Their existence is, by and large, peripheral. All cultures and societies, advanced or dis-advanced have power centers in their corpus. (16).

The marginalized people lack cohesiveness and strength as they consciously or unconsciously part themselves from the power centres and so they grope in the dark for survival and they struggle for their empowerment as well. Mahasweta Devi’s *Breast Stories* is one of the finest examples of the centre and peripheral antagonism that affect the lives of the poor subaltern tribal women. The predicament of the extremity of suppression on women is absolutely their resistance. These women are the voice for other voiceless women in the patri-focal society.

Mahasweta points out the need for change in Indian system against the marginalized people in her *Introduction to the Collection* as, “Life is not mathematics and the human being is not made for the sake of politics. I want a change in the present social system and do not believe in mere party
politics” (4). The first story in *Breast Stories*, *Draupadi* is caught between two constructive formulas: the first one is the law that is fabricated with a view to its own transgression, and the other is the undoing of the binary opposition between the intellectuals and rural struggles. *Draupadi* revolves around the female character named Draupadi. Devi introduces her heroine, “between two uniforms and between two versions of her name” (19). Though the name Dopdi remembers the mythological Draupadi, it is tribalized.

The ancient mythological Draupadi, is a most popular heroine in *Mahabharata*. *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are the cultural credentials of the so called Indian Aryan civilization. The tribes predate Aryan invasion. And all the more they have no right to use heroic Sanskrit names. The domesticated Hindu names were given Dopdi at birth by her mistress, in the usual mood of benevolence felt by the oppressor’s wife toward the tribal bond servant. To speculate upon this role, *Mahabharata* itself is in its colonial function with the interest of the so-called Aryan Invaders of India.

Indian culture is noted for monogamy. But in *Mahabharata* the woman character ‘Draupadi’ is the only person to look at example for polyandry, unlike a common system of marriage in India. She is married to the five sons of the impotent Pandu. “within a patriarchal and patronymic context, she is exceptional, indeed ‘singular’ in the sense of odd, unpaired, uncoupled” says Spivak in *Draupadi: Translator’s Foreword*. Her husbands, since they are husbands rather than lovers, are “legitimately pluralized” (10).

Devi’s story questions this ‘singularity’, by making ‘Dopdi’ first in comradely activist, monogamous marriage and then in the situation of multiple rape. The ancient “Draupadi” the possession of five men, and a single mother, is used to explain male glory. She is in a very embarrassing and critical situation for any girl that her eldest husband is about to lose her by default in a game of dice. He had staked all he owned, and “Draupadi belongs within that all” (Mahabharata 65:32). Because, “The scriptures
prescribed one husband for a woman; Draupadi is dependent on many husbands; therefore she can be designated a prostitute. There is nothing improper in bringing her, clothed or unclothed, into the assembly” (65:35-36).

Mahasweta Devi’s tribal Dopdi is fighting for her survival, food and water. The writer etches out the plight of the tribals in words. She depicts how utter helplessness can finally lead to resistance or even rebellion. Twenty seven year old Dopdi Mejhen has a connection with a Naxalite Movement in India and is on the wanted list for her role in Operation Bakuli in 1971. She even has a police dossier:

Dossier: Dulna and Dopdi worked at harvests, rotating between Birbhum, Burdwan, Murshidabad, and Bankura. In 1971, in the famous Operation Bakuli, when three villages were cordoned off and machine gunned, they too lay on the ground, faking dead. In fact, they were the main culprits. Murdering Surja Sahu and his son, occupying upper-caste wells and tubewells during the draught, not surrendering those three young men to the police (Draupadi 19-20).

Their fight was for survival and when that is at stake than any action and every action is justified. The feudal and imperialist mindset fails to give a human character to a tribal who is perceived only as a dark bodied and wild untouchable who can’t even have the right to draw water from the wells. He is the proverbial ‘other’ who has been given a marginalized identity by the dominant hegemonic Hindu society.

The concern for the subaltern people is explicated in her *Introduction to Agnigarbha* (1978). Devi says, “I find my people still groaning under hunger, landlessness, indebtedness, and bonded labour. Anger, luminous, burning and passionate, directed against a system that has failed to liberate my people from these horrible constraints is the only source of inspiration in
all my writing........ I do not hope to see in my lifetime any reason to change this conviction of mine. Hence I go on writing to the best of my abilities about the people, so that I can face myself without any sense of guilt or shame. For, a writer faces judgment in his lifetime and remains answerable (2).

After escaping from Bakuli, Dopdi and Dulna have worked at the house of virtually every landowner and hence they can inform their comrades about their targets. In their movement they too are soldiers, and they too are fighting for their rights. But Senanayak and other real soldiers act like hunters and the tribals are the hunted. The wild animal can easily be located and hunted down near a water hole so the “soldiers in hiding guard the falls and springs that are the only source of drinking water” (Draupadi 23).

All the measures are taken for Dopdi’s entrapment. Senanayak uses the body of Dulna as bait thinking that Dopdi will surely come to take the body but she doesn’t fall prey to this trap. Senanayak works by the motto of “apprehension and elimination” (23) and like any imperialist understands that he is performing a superior duty by which the bloodshed and atrocities committed by him are justified and will be erased from the memory with passage of time. Senanayak constructs a different story. He is an army officer, captures the degraded Dopdi in order to fulfill the law.

Devi portrays Senanayak “as the pluralist aesthetes of the First World”. He maintains and believes what he is taught and follows his duty without any hesitation. In this he not only shares kinship with Shakespeare’s Prospero but also with Conrad’s Kurtz who declared in Heart of Darkness, “Exterminate all the brutes” (50). And it is his soul’s duty to civilize them even by killing them. Writing about Senanayak the villain of the story, Gayatri Spivak reflects that “in Senanayak I find the closest approximation to the First World scholar in search of the Third World” (Draupadi 01).
It is said that Senanayak looks to decipher Draupadi’s song. For both sides of the rift within himself, he finds analogies in Western Literature: Hochhuth’s *The Deputy*, David Morell’s *First Blood*. He will shed the guilt when the time comes. His self-image for that uncertain future is Prospero. Spivak’s approach to this fiction is “deconstructive practice”. She clearly shares it in *Translator’s Foreword: Draupadi* as, “and unease that would declare avant-garde theories of interpretation too elitist to cope with revolutionary feminist material. The aspect of deconstructive practice that is best known in the United States is its tendency toward infinite regression.” (2)

Dopdi, on the other hand, a Santal woman is considered as marginalized. Her actions made Senanayak and his government uncomfortable, so that he operates the hunt mission. His role in the story is assumable. He willingly wants to participate in so-called civilizing mission because for him it is duty and only truth to deal with. Spivak mentions that he follows the necessities and contingencies of what he sees as his historical moment that reflects his character clearly. He constructs his own story from his point of view where his counter Dopdi has a different version to tell.

Dopdi is made as naked in public. After the captivation she expects that she will be tortured to the core and will be killed. But she could not have expected that she will be unclothed and gang raped. She stands in front of the enemy group that reminds the incident where Draupadi is brought to stand among the men in the palace. Both Draupadi and Dopdi are in utter shameful place, wherein the first one is frightened and started praying God to save her modesty. But the latter one is waiting for the enemy group to torture her. After the gang rape, and gets her consciousness; she slowly comes to know what has happened to her actually.

Senanayak’s target is Dopdi (a woman); on whom he can apply the tactic of rape for ‘elimination’ (23). In a bid to subjugate her body, mind and soul Dopdi is raped repeatedly as she loses and gains consciousness during
the ordeal. Her oppressors believe that this form of oppression will weaken her and will force her to name her comrades. Although scarred for life, she still possesses an indomitable spirit and thus refuses to ask for water when her throat is parched. Very soon Dopdi Mejhen is apprehended and understanding her defeat she readies herself for the next action of warning her comrades:

Now Dopdi spreads her arms, raises her face to the sky, turns towards the forest, and ululates with the force of her entire being. Once, twice, three times. At the third burst the birds in the trees at the outskirts of the forest awake and flap their wings. The echo of the call travels far. (34).

On being ‘apprehend’ Senanayak wants a complete submission from Dopdi and for that she is shamed to the core and turned into an object of gaze and derision. When the dinner hour approaches Senanayak walks out of the camp after ordering his men to “Make her. Do the needful.” (35)

Though the body is feeble and painful, she makes her mind to stand stubborn. She goes directly with her naked body to the camp, where Senanayak stays. She wants to stop the sheer atrocity that has provoked and exercised by the male power on so many women tribal victims. She wants to teach a lesson to Senanayak, who is considered as an embodiment of the patriarchal society and the Government who tend to control subaltern women through the sets of laws (makes women are in their shoes) that cannot be suitable for men. Dopdi has never tried to save her modesty, which is often questionable for Indian women.

Dopdi’s position in the story is the position of a marginalized who will never speak or who cannot be spoken. However, she breaks this thought and raises her voice. She stops Senanayak to move further and let him know the ‘unspoken’ voice of a woman. Her struggles to become independent or liberates her country gets a shape while she stands in-front of Senanayak that
makes him scared. She is free from her worries. She is an epitome of sacrifice and courage. As an unyielding person, she does not respond to the crowd and does not give up her ideologies that results heavy wounds in her body and removal of clothes from her body. As Devi says, “Draupadi pushes Senanayak with her two mangled breasts, and for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target, terribly afraid.” (37)

Dopdi rewrites the story that tells the story of a marginalized woman who instantly turns herself into ‘subject: I’ from being ‘object: her’. Yashode Bhatt says in her *The Image of Women in Indian Literature*, “Violence, in general, is a coercive mechanism to assert one’s will over another, in order to prove or feel a sense of power. Those in power against the powerless can perpetuate it. Any individual or group facing the threat of coercion or being disciplined to act in a manner required by another individual or group is subject to violence.” (67)

Spivak says, “Rather than save her modesty through the implicit intervention of a benign and divine (in this case it would have been godlike) comrade, the story insists that this is the place where male leadership stops” (11). She also adds:

I think, to read the modern story as a refutation of the ancient. Dopdi is (as heroic as) Draupadi. She is also what Draupadi-woven into the patriarchal and authoritative scared text as proof of male power- could not be. Dopdi is at once a palimpsest and a contradiction (11).

In *Draupadi*, Dopdi Mejhen the tribal revolutionary is arrested and gang raped in custody, turns as “the terrible wounds of her breasts into a counter-offensive.” Spivak rightly has pointed out in her *Introduction to Breast Stories*, “The breast is not a symbol in these stories. In ‘Draupadi’ what is represented is an erotic object transformed in to an object of torture.
and revenge where the line between (hetero) sexuality and gender violence begins to waver” (vii). Additionally, her female body projects the idea of materialization of marginalized woman that counts as resistance. She breaks the customary belief of womanhood or womanly behavior and stands against this believe. Through her physical presence, she projects the figure of the mother that is assembled with motherhood, but not in a motherly way. She is not as simple as the reader cannot “similarize/non-similar her with ‘mother’ or ‘wife’ or ‘daughter’ but her body represents “the last instance in a system whose general regulator is still the loan: usurer’s capital, imbricated, level by level, in national industrial and transnational global capital” (112) as Spivak opines. She performs both the roles, as marginalized and as a woman. As a woman she becomes the active agent in performing the protest even giving away her ‘body’.

Similarly, as a marginalized, she becomes an alternative voice to stand out. Moreover, her naked-mutilated physical appearance draws a picture of a bold protest of being ashamed because of gang rape. She does not consider any man as a man because she is brutally gang raped and when Senanayak asks her to get dressed, she objects and then abject as she is resisting/ refusing to take the essential needs of human being of being cover up. She becomes a part of subservient or docile, but proposes herself on a different level. Her abjection of shame and hesitation as woman reveals her strength. It is true that her course of action was instructed by Arjit, the leader of a movement; however, it is she who stands against Senanayak. Devi’s portrayal of Dopdi is not only as an activist but also an agent who asserts her own story that challenges the general thought of Indian history.

Female body and gender consciousness are more focused in the works of Devi. She has depicted in her works how the subjective possession of female body gazed by the male dominant society as an objective one. It becomes a metaphor, at times an image. Devi’s women characters are passionate enough to confront with the realities of social exploitations that
deny them the power to define (identity) themselves. The unyielding laughter and the dark (grey) but visible (utter) nakedness with which Dopdi “Kounters” (read as encounters) and accosts Senanayak, the instigator of her torment, flatten to the ground and also is made to stand before her defenseless (body).

The unclothed or naked or nude female body is considered as a powerful and multivalent symbol. The unclothed Dopdi in Draupadi is compared with Draupadi in Mahabharata paradoxically. The mythological Draupadi has got a person, Kannan, the incarnation of Lord Krishna to save her modesty. In contrary Dopdi has not got such person to save her from the gang rape. Lis Wilson of Miami University, Oxford, emphasizes the significance of the display of “exhibitionism” (144) in both the characters-Vyasa’s Draupadi and Devi’s Dopdi. He also adds that Dopdi “nerver challenges the pre-supposition that it is shameful for a woman’s body to be exposed to gaze of them (144). Dopdi feels that it is a way of shaming their tormentors. In the case of Dopdi, the display is more telling and sharp. Dopdi is fully aware of Senanayak’s contribution or inclination to the gang rape of her body. Dopdi, Wilson mentions, “refusing to cover herself, she uses her ravaged body as a weapon by which to censure the man who has sanctioned the gang rape as a weapon against her” (144).

From Devi’s statement of “there isn’t a man here that I should be ashamed” (36), one could perceive that there is no shame in being naked in front of the men of questionable virtue and integrity. Devi’s reversal of the meaning of gaze and shame is another instance of the dialogic imagination that the writer is capable of effecting within her narratology. It is not Dopdi who should feel ashamed rather it is men like Senanayak-men of no virtue-who should. Liz Wilson says, “It is not the presence and status of a male spectator that determines the subjectivity of the female spectacle” (149). In Devi’s portrayal of women’s liberative proxis, all shame is decoded and deconstructed as groundless.
Dopdi Mejhen’s avant-garde tribal revolutionary stance, despite her terrible predicament turning the terrible wounds of her breasts in to a counter-offensive may be cited here as a fine example of an art-emotion that projects and romanticizes activism as a role-model, as an instance of transcendence and triumph of the human spirit. Devi’s portrayal of the tribal subalterns is a parabolic representation of post-colonial India is a mere complex and complicated phenomenon. Resil B. Mojares comments, “Exploitation, debt bondage, and the state’s apathy and neglect had reduced people to a subhuman existence” (2). The predicament of an essentially unorganized women who are robust even in their suffering and pain, and of course in their resistance too that are exposed in the fiction. Devi’s fascination with the idea of resistance gives a glimpse of what the victims are capable of despite their predicament, capable of rising like the apocryphal phoenix.

Devi highlights this at the concluding part, “For the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target, terribly afraid” (37), is a powerful and evocative statement that suggests that her Dopdi is not same all the way to the Mythological character Draupadi in Mahabharata (who tried to save her modesty with yards of miraculous sari supplied by Kannan, believed as the incarnation of Krishna). The army officer, Senanayak is dumb-founded in front of the tribal rebel, and failed to ask the authoritative ontological questions, what is this? (or) How dare you come?. Senanayak, the Bengali army officer in Draupadi is portrayed as a Willy, imaginative, corrupt and of course has full of Keatian Negative Capability.

Dopdi’s attitudes are not ‘historically implausible’. The reading of the story shows that she is an amiable woman, who does her household works passionately like all women in the male dominating society, loves her husband so much, and keeps political faith as an act of faith toward him. She adores her forefather (has a respect and regard), since they have saved their women’s honour. But when she crosses the binary opposition between gender,
she becomes as a powerful subject who is willingly for the honour of her gender which makes her body as a weapon to accelerate.

Dopdi, “emerges as the most powerful ‘subject’ who, still using the language of sexual ‘honour’, can derisively call herself ‘the object of your search’, whom the author describes as a terrifying super object- ‘an unarmed target’”. The voice of Dopdi vanishes the voices of male power structure. When Dopdi comes into the concluding part the postscript area of lunar flux and sexual difference, she is in a place where she will finally act for herself in not ‘acting’ in challenging the man to (en) counter her as unrecorded (or) mis-recorded objective historical monument.

Dopdi Mejhen, her tribal female protagonist, may be seen as the modern Draupadi in both Devi’s fictional and theatrical presentation of the predicament of the marginalized tribal poor in postcolonial India. Modern Draupadi confronts realities, resists oppression, and acts unlike Draupadi of the \textit{Mahabharata}. She is also in a helpless condition, and is left as a prey for the lustful soldiers. The ancient Draupadi has only one villain, who is dared to pull her sari to confiscate her modesty whereas the tribal Dopdi has to face so many villains who are eagerly taste her body. The second is in an unsafe, cruel situation. She is almost lost both her energy and consciousness.

Draupadi is in a state of seclusion and insists that she should not be taken away but is dragged to the assembly hall by her loose hair which is tantamount to rape in symbolic terms. Duriyothanan, the chief of the hostile group, starts pulling the sari of Draupadi, “there seems to be more and more of it”. Draupadi is infinitely clothed and cannot be publicly stripped. Spivak writes this in her \textit{Draupadi: Translator’s Foreword} as, “Devi rewrites this incident in her story \textit{Draupadi}. “The man easily succeed in stripping Dopdi-in the narrative it is the culmination of her political punishment by the representatives of the law” (11).
Draupadi plays a pivotal role in the epic as she is the one who was responsible for the great battle *Mahabharata* between Pandavas and Kauravas. Mahasweta Devi reconstructs the myth of subaltern woman as her protagonist breaks away from the shackles of false notions of shame. Appreciating Devi’s skill of envisioning myth Radha Chakravarty writes in *Mahasweta Devi Critical Perspectives*:

One of the most notable features of Mahasweta’s writing is the visionary, utopian or myth-making impulse that acts as a counterbalance to her dystopian, ‘forensic,’ critical perspective on the contemporary world (108).
The realization of one’s own status proves the identity of them. One can reveal his/her own identity when they come to know their importance in a particular scenario that creates a possibility or viability to exhibit the best of her. Devi’s all the women characters have tried to understand their ability to help in a situation which is a way to reveal their identity. One fine example among the three characters is Jashoda (Breast – giver) who is in a dire need to help both her family and the Haldar’s. When her husband become jobless due to the accident done by the last son of Haldar who has an aspiration to ride a Studebaker that belongs to the Newphew of Haldar end in an accident which engulfs the legs of Kangalicharan. “Shakespeare’s welkin breaks on Kangali and Jashoda’s head” (46).

Kangali is unable to bear the burden of the family. She is ready to carry the burden on her shoulder. She feels happy and prestigious to work and feed for her family and becoming a professional mother. She could recollect the joy when she has become a mother of the first child. Devi mentions this joy in the initial part of the story Breast-Giver. Motherhood was always her way of living and keeping alive her world countless beings. She is not an “amateur mama” (40) like the daughters and wives of the master’s house. But she is a professional mother, who has got a responsibility and privilege to feed and bring all the children up in her master’s house. By feeding them, she feeds her family; she has taken motherhood as her profession.

Jashoda is a loyal wife to her husband. And she has lots of love and respect for him. She is a woman of typical Indian, who wants to be at the bosom of her husband forever.

Jashoda is fully an Indian woman, whose unreasonable, unreasoning and unintelligent devotion to her husband and love for her children whose unnatural renunciation and forgiveness, have been kept alive in the popular consciousness by all Indian women from Sati-Savitri-Sita.
through Nirupa Roy and Chand Osmani. The creeps of the world understand by seeing such women that old Indian tradition is still flowing free (47).

Since Jashoda lives in a male dominating society she is taught to be submissive in front of her husband like her neighbouring women friends. Husbands are related with God, and so they are willing to serve their husbands to be blessed. Women are the epitome of Sacrifice. They have to burn themselves, and should not reveal their whims and fancies in addition they should not utter a word. This is the state of postcolonial society. Devi depicts it by giving aphorisms as:

A female’s life hangs on like a turtle’s’-
‘her heart breaks but no word is uttered’-
‘the woman will burn, her ashes will fly/ only then will we sing her/ praise on high: (47).

Woman and man are like body and soul. Emphasizing this Kamala Das writes in his Poem The Suicide:

Bereft of soul
My body shall be bare
Bereft of body
My soul shall be bare (www.poemhunter.com).

Jashoda assumes her husband and herself are the body and soul. She also never once wants to blame her husband for the present misfortunes. She has such a quality of endurance in her life. Another incident for her nature of patience is, once she is conceited by her husband Kangali. He asks Jashoda, “What? When I wasn’t there, you were getting it off with Nabin?” (43). Jashoda becomes upset. She tries to convince him by saying, “Two maid servants from the big house slept here every day to guard me. Would I look at Nabin? Am I not your faithful wife?” (43). But this same Kangali leaves
Jashoda alone and runs behind another girl. She remains as a woman of endurance. Women’s chastity is always questioned by men but their values cannot be questioned by any one in the society.

The instinct of motherhood is revealed when she becomes the earth and feed for her crippled husband and helpless children with a fulsome harvest (whole heartedly). Devi appreciates and acknowledges this in a passage

Sages did not write of this motherly feeling of Jashoda’s for her husband. They explained female and male as Nature and the Human Principle……. Such is the power of the Indian soil that all women turn into mothers here and all men remain immersed in the spirit of childhood. Each man the Holy Child and each women the Divine Mother (47).

Here, Devi has not given women the equal status with men. Instead she gives the superiority or power to women by calling them as Divine Mother, compared with immortal God.

Jashoda never minds to beg and please the mistress for her husband and family. She is ready to do any kind of menial job for the sake of her off-springs. She says to Mistress,

Mother! The Master said many things. He is gone, so I don’t think of them. But Mother! Your Brahmin-Son does not have his two feet. I don’t think for myself. But thinking of my husband and sons I say, give me any kind of job. Perhaps you’ll let me cook in your household? (49).

And she is not at all shocked when her mistress says, “The good Lord sent you down as the legendary Cow of Fulfillment” (49-50). The second son of Haldar who always has an appeal to the beauty of his wife and he impregnates his wife. “He thinks a lot about how to combine multiple
pregnancies and beauty.” (50) But after the arrival of Jashoda, he finds a way to it. So Jashoda thinks that her breast is the most precious object with which she can satisfy the family needs.

Kangali who has spoken against the will of Jashoda to become a professional mother earlier feels proud about Jashoda, when she is praised by the neighbours, “Mistress Mother said right. We serve the Cow Mother as well-your woman is the Mother of the world” (52). The maid in the Mistress’ house also says, “Joshi! You came as The Goddess! You made the air of this house Change!”(54).

Jashoda acts as a wet nurse for the new born children of the Haldar family just to earn livelihood for her invalid husband, her own children and for herself. Her breast, which is a gift of nature and a source of nourishment, thus becomes a commodity. When breast is the source of livelihood for babies, it also gives an umbilical push to the victims, who were once breast-fed by the mother to resist and act against oppression.

In a divided society the empowering agent everywhere is money. Money can earn status and social respectability. Despite her upper caste birth, Jashoda in Breast-giver is not in a dominating position because her family is awfully poor. On the other hand the Haldars, who hold lower position in social hierarchy, can dictate terms because of their affluence. It is her stark poverty that compels Jashoda to earn her living by breast-feeding the children of the Haldar family where the daughter-in-laws can afford to refuse to suckle their own children for keeping their figures attractive.

‘There is no East and West for Brahmin. If there’s a sacred thread around his neck (the sign of being a Brahmin) you have to give him respect even when he’s taking a shit.’(45) This two-step standing in for identity is a cover for the brutalizing of the Brahmin when the elite in caste are subaltern in class. In the case of class-manipulation, ‘poverty [is] the fault of the
individuals, not an intrinsic part of a class society’; in the case of caste-manipulation, the implicit assumption is the reverse: the Brahmin is systemically excellent, not necessarily so as an individual.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay, *A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: Mahasweta Devi’s Stanadayini (Breast-giver)* has justly commented on the role of economy in defining subalternity. She argues that even the Brahminical identity of Jashoda is brutalized in this story:

This…..identity is a cover for the brutalizing of the Brahmin when the elite in caste is subaltern in class. In the case of class-manipulation, poverty (is) the fault of the individuals, not an intrinsic part of a class society, in the case of caste manipulation, the implicit assumption is the reverse; the Brahmin is systemically excellent, not necessarily so as an individual (114).

Thus even being an upper-caste Brahmin, Jashoda is a subaltern figure because she is economically impecunious as well as gender-marginalized in patriarchy. It is true that femininity in *Breast-giver* is exclusively ‘submissive’. But it is difficult to agree that one cannot undermine authority figures merely by ridiculing or playing tricks. Dominant upper-castes, as Khare acknowledges it in his *The Body, Sensoria and Self of the powerless: Remembering/ Re-Membering Indian Untouchable Women*, *New Literary History*, “…. Still control and variously constrain untouchables life events” (148).

In the caste-based Indian society, upper-caste women, despite being women, are more advantaged than lower-caste men. But the condition of lower-caste women is worse because apart from caste discrimination, they are the victims of gender discrimination in the domestic as well as social spheres. And in most cases the empowering agents are inaccessible to most of them. A
close reading of *Breast-giver* reveal that gender discrimination worsens the state of the female subaltern in every society. Jashoda in Devi’s story is a “gendered subaltern” perse. Spivak writes in *Introduction to Breast Stories*:

“In *Breast-giver*, it (the breast) is a survival object transformed into a commodity, making visible the indeterminacy between filial piety and gender violence, between house and temple, between domination and exploitation” (Vii).

In a patriarchy, women are mostly treated as child-producing machines, and this makes no distinction between whether they are well off or they are economically under-privileged. The attitude of Jashoda’s husband and that of the men of Haldar family are gender discriminatory in the same way. If Jashoda’s husband Kangalicharan is illuminated by the spirit of Brahma the creator, the Mistress’s son “become incarnate Brahma and create progeny” (BG52). A victim of patriarchal ideology, Jashoda shows “unintelligent devotion to her husband” and ignorantly accepts the subordinate role as natural:

You are husband, you are guru. If I forget and say no, correct me. Where, after all, is the pain? ... Does it hurt a tree to bear fruit? (51-52).

In Devi’s stories one can witness the detritus of that competition. In Marxist-feminist thematic, one can identify that the text *Breast-giver* reverses generalization that, “It is the provision by men of means of subsistence to women during the child-bearing period, and not the sex division of labour in itself, that forms the material basis for women’s subordination in class society” as advocated by Lise Vogel.
Marxist Feminist Critiques of Labour theory is applied here. In the story Jashoda, the protagonist becomes the bread winner of her family, when her husband’s leg is crippled. She has opted the noble but diplomatic profession as a wet-nurse. Her repeated gestation and lactation help her family to withstand in the odds and trials. ‘By the logic of the production of value, they are both means of production’. By the logic of sexual reproduction, he is her means of production (though not owned by her) as the field-beast or the beast of burden is the slaves’ (85). As it reverses the Marxist feminist generalization, Jashoda’s predicament also undoes, by placing within a gender-context, the famous Roman distinction, invoked by Marx, as Perry Anderson says, between “instrumentum vocale (‘the speaking tool’- Jashoda, the woman-wife-mother and instrumentum semi-vocale (the working beast) – Kangali the man-husband-father)” (24-25).

In Mahasweta Devi’s stories one can observe a wide range of women from tribal women to upper caste women, from rich to poor who are dealing with the hypocritical behavior of the family and society. The dualism or multi-behavior of society not only ruined their lives, but also set an example of despotism where women and their physical attribution are only considered a product to ‘consume’ and ‘mutilation’. Besides, their appearance is submerged and their body is regarded as a subject of reproduction without their proper consent.

The Second Sex of Simon de Beauvoir helps the readers to understand the condition of women. Beauvoir mentions that, men, particularly society believe that, it is “best to keep women in a state of dependence; their codes of law have been set up against her; and thus she has been definitely established as Other” (171). The process of ‘othering’ women is a part of a discourse to discuss where women should not have any voice to raise rather they will be subjected to become the ‘object’ of naivety and exploitation. Julia Kristeva’s Approaching to Abjection explains the matter of the female body in terms of defining their power, resistance and rejection.
As a Brahmin woman she is portrayed as “goddess” (BG 51) and “a portion of mother” (BG 61). However, in the long runs her position has changed due to her inability to continue the job. She becomes like other maids in the family. She does not belong to the class of ‘goddess’. It is noticeable that she ‘becomes the infants’ suckling mother’ (BG 51) to save the ‘figure shape’ of the daughter-in-laws of Haldar family. It is very ironic that Jashoda is sacrificing her own body, to support her employer in return for nothing only a good amount of food. She demonstrates how a subaltern woman’s reproductive body is employed to create economic value. As Spivak argues, *quoted in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* by Stephen Morton,

Jashoda’s sale of her maternal body to the household of a wealthy Brahmin family to support her own family effectively reverses this traditional sexual division of labour between men and women (126).

Ranajit Guha mentions this as the ‘exploitation of productive labour’ (5) in his analysis of subaltern studies and also said that this is the part of a system to subjugate the ‘other’ or ‘subaltern’. He said that these conditions of exploitation come within the domain of elite historiography in which, the subaltern classes were subjected in varying degrees of domination [....] [particularly in the sector of] productive labour [in which] workers and peasants [do not have any voice to arise] (5).

She spends most of her life-time for her own family and the master’s family, but in return she does not receive anything from them. Even in her dying situation nobody from Haldar family receives the phone call from the hospital. She is ignored and erased as if she does not exist and ever existed. She is manipulated in two or more layers, first as a woman and second as a subaltern. She is a Brahmin but poor that determines her as ‘other’ or ‘marginalized’ in society. On the other hand, her cancer represents her ‘abjection’ means rejecting the burden of her circumstances that grows as a
parasite in her body. Her disease can be referred as hatred towards the manipulation of her reproductive body. Her hatred magnifies through her bearing the deadly disease which is the result of an incessant domination of her reproductive body, and becomes as mentioned by Kriesteva Julia in *Approaching Abjection, Power of Horror*:

Mute protest of the symptom, shattering violence of a convulsion that, to be sure, is inscribed in a symbolic system, but in which, without either wanting or being able to become integrated in order to answer to it, it reacts, it abjacts. It abjacts (1-31).

Consequently, Jashoda is dominated by the society, by her husband and right now she is being dominated by her own body. This point is different from the outlook of western feminism and as Spivak outlined this as “Third Worlds’ Women Feminism”. Once her body glorifies her position in the society and later, this body snatches her down. Her position becomes subverted and changed. Moreover, Spivak also focuses on the last phase of Jashoda’s dying. She especially centers the phrase, “The sores on her breast kept mocking her with a hundred mouths, a hundred eyes” (BG 67). Her female body symbolizes the exploitation of labor that constantly, Spivak wants to say. It seems to me that subaltern sacrifice is never been told.

Though it is said that Devi’s portrayal erases the materiality of Jashoda’s (mother’s) body that precludes the possibility of projecting her body as a subject or agent of action, for emancipation from the oppressive paradigms of male- gendered society. Spivak applies too much of Marxist and Western feminist modes of criticism in the backdrop of Lacanian psychoanalysis while critiquing Devi’s authorial interpretation. The Lacanian definition of jouissance as a “radical marker of female gendered subjectivity” may be a far-fetched allusion to be applied to Devi’s female protagonists in the Indian context. Yet Spivak’s subaltern approach to Devi’s characterization
substantiates the view that Devi’s texts are complex and are open to dialogic and discursive readings and multiple provocations.

In her *Introduction to Breast Stories* Spivak comments as, “In Breast-giver, it is a survival object transformed into a commodity, making visible the indeterminacy between house and temple, between domination and exploitation” (vii) “The object”, Spivak has explained it further, “is the source of nourishment, deprivation and sensuality. At weaning and before, the breast and, secondarily, other part objects- become ‘symbolized’ and recognized as whole persons. Our sense of what it means to be human is played out in scenarios of guilt and reparation where the object is the primary part object incessantly transmogrified into people and other collectivities”. (xiv)

The plausibility of Jashoda in *Stanadayini* or *Breast-giver* ....... is that they could have existed as subaliters in a specific historical assumption. (BS 77) The reflection of contemporary politics and history are woven around Devi’s stories. When the subalternised historian imagines a historical moment, within which shadowy named characters, backed up by some counter- insurgent or dominant- gender textual material, have their plausible being, in order that a historical narrative can coherently take shape, the assumptions are not very different.

By Mahasweta Devi’s own account, *Breast-giver* is a parable of India after decolonization. Mahasweta Devi says, “All classes of people, the post-war rich, the ideologies, the indigenous bureaucracy, the diasporics, the people who are sworn to protect the new state, abuse and exploit her”. Jashoda is abandoned by everyone the God, the Haldars family her children etc. and she dies atlast. As she is compared to India the mother, if it nothing good is done to her, she will be lost or spoiled. “As long as there is this hegemonic cultural self-representation of India as a goddess-mother (dissimulating the possibility that this mother is a slave), she will collapse under the burden of the immense expectations that such a self-representation
permits” (78-79) “If the story of the rise of nationalist resistance to imperialism is to be disclosed coherently, it is the role of the indigenous subaltern that must be strategically excluded”. The innumerable subaltern example of resistance is ignored by the hegemonic power.

Though Haldar is a patriarch, it is through their access to the circuit of his political, economic, and ideological production (‘he had made his cash in the British era… [his] mentality was constructed then’) that the Haldar women move into a species of reproductive emancipation seemingly outside of patriarchal control. Jashoda the ‘proletarian’ is only useful at the first stage:

Jashoda’s worth went up in the Haldar house. The husbands are pleased because the wives’ knees no longer knock when they riffle the almanac. Since their children are being reared on Jashoda’s milk, they can be the Holy Child in bed at will. The wives no longer have an excuse to say ‘no.’ The wives are happy. They can keep their figures. They can wear blouses and bras of ‘European cut.’ After keeping the fast of Shiva’s night by watching all night pictures shows they are no longer obliged to breast-feed their babies (BG 54).

Parvathy Hadly says in her book The Betrayal of Superwoman:

We must learn to be vocal in expressing, without guilt or embarrassment, what our careers mean to us. It is not something on the side that we can abandon at will to take up career moves of a husband that we were not included in discussing … We must reach out to other women who think they are alone, share our experiences and be each other’s support. We need to accept ourselves as Women Who Never Learned To Do Macrame and Do Not Plan Their Weekend Social Life until Friday Afternoon.
We are sad. But we are glad. This is what we will always be (18).

When the woman’s body is used only as metaphor for a nation, feminists correctly object to the effacement of the materiality of that body. Mahasweta’s own reading, taken too literally, might thus transgress the power of her text. But, in that shadow area where Jashoda is a signifier for subalternity as such, as well as a metaphor for the predicament of the decolonized nation-state ‘India’, the readers are forced, once again, to distance themselves from the identity of Woman with the female copulative and reproductive body. The solution to Jashoda’s problem cannot be mere reproductive rights but productive rights as well. And these rights are denied her not just by men, but by elite women as well. This is the underlying paradox of population control in the Third World. To oppose reproductive rights with the casuistical masculist pseudo-concern about the ‘right to life’ cannot be relevant here or elsewhere. Yet to oppose productive rights with the so-called ‘right to work’ laws cannot be the only issue either, precisely because the subject here is female, and the question is not only of class but of gender.

All classes of people, the post-war rich, the ideologues, the indigenous bureaucracy, the diasporics, people who are sworn to protect the new state, abuse and exploit her (Jashoda). Spivak highlights it in *Breast-giver: for author, reader, teacher, subaltern, historian*...the extension of the parable ends the story like this:

The ideological construct ‘India’ is too deeply informed by the goddess-infested reverse sexism of the Hindu majority. As long as there is this hegemonic cultural self-representation of India as a goddess-mother (dissimulating the possibility that this mother is a slave), she will collapse under the burden of the immense expectations that such a self-representation permits (78–79).
The text to be more focused on the subaltern as gendered subject rather than as an allegorical some for Mother India.

When Jashoda develops a lump on her breast which is diagnosed as breast-cancer, even the surgeon is shocked to know that in her life Jashoda has breast-fed over fifty children. She dies a painful death, thrown off both by the Haldar family and her own husband. Towards the end of the story, she is thrown off by Kangalicharan as well as by her own children:

His mind had already rejected Jashoda….. His sons are his sons. Their mother had become a distant person for a long time. Mother meant hair in a huge topknot, blindingly white clothes, a strong personality. The person lying in the hospital is someone else, not Mother (73).

Devi’s Breast-giver where is Jashoda, the protagonist stands for “India as mother by hire”, courtesy the abuse and exploitation by the postcolonial Indian elite classes-may be construed as the predominant metaphor for dialogic discourses her writings imply. In Breast-giver, the pathetic but pride death of Jashoda due to painful breast cancer indicates how she has been betrayed by her breasts which were for years her chief identity by virtue of being constrained to be a professional wet-nurse to support her family and the dozens of ‘sons’ she suckled. Insightful question arises in Jashoda, “Is a Mother so cheaply made? Not just by dropping a babe” (54). Jashoda’s last sentient judgement, “If you suckle you’re a mother, all lies. Nepal and Gopal don’t look at me, and the Master’s boys don’t spare a peck to ask how I’m doing” (67).

Jashoda is a victim of the exigencies of the Haldar household; Devi also suggests how Jashoda is in a mood and mode of confronting. The death of Jashoda at the end of the story due to Breast Cancer marks also the death of God because Jashoda is seen as “God manifest” (75) at last. A.S. Dasan
mentions in The Subaltern as Metaphor as “Spivak’s interpretations make the readers to see the juxtapositions Devi brings in Vis-à-vis Jashoda’s position/fate as constituted by patriarchal ideology and her capacity to resist, a position constituted by the evolution of a feminine subjectivity within the narrative”. (88)

The speech of the other is recorded in a cryptic, sentence. It is a response to Jashoda’s last ‘conscious’ or ‘rational judgement’: “If you suckle you’re a mother, all lies”… The sores on her breast kept mocking her with a hundred mouths, a hundred eyes.’ (67) This is the only time the Other speaks. The disease has not been diagnosed or named yet. The other inhabits a hundred eyes and mouths, a transformation of the body’s inscription into a disembodied yet anthropomorphic agency, which makes of the breast, the definitive female organ with the circle of reproduction, (a) pluralized almost-face.

As listed in Susan Sontag’s Illness as Metaphor, Cancer is invading the metaphor of the sexually undifferentiated body politic. It is interesting to see how different the history of cancer as metaphor is in the context of the last couple of centuries in the Anglo-U.S. The emphasis there is basically psychological: ‘the disease is what speaks through the body, language for dramatizing the mental.’ (43) From within this history, Sontag calls which is quoted by Spivak in her essay Jouissance in general: Jashoda’s body for a ‘de-metaphorization’ of the disease. (110)

The figure of the all-nurturing Jashoda provides the active principle of patriarchal sexual ideology. As in the case of her earlier short story Draupadi, Mahasweta mobilizes the figure of the mythic female as opposed to the full-fledged goddess. Kristeva points at the Virgin’s asymmetrical status as the Mother of God by constructing the imaginary father and the abject mother. She adds:
Mahasweta introduces exploitation/domination into that detail in the mythic story which tells us that Jashoda is a foster mother. By turning fostering into a profession, she sees mothering in its materiality beyond its socialization as affect, beyond psychologization as abjection, or yet transcendentalization as the vehicle of the divine (105).

Their story is hidden and can never be the part of history. Her experiences cannot tell everything about subaltern women, but can demonstrate brief scenery of their life. Besides, Devi presents, “Jashoda as constituted by patriarchal ideology” (265) who barely speaks and even she speaks her story comes out from this ideology. She does not reject to intercourse with her husband and bear children, even if it is a burden for her because it is her husband, who is like god to him, wants to do. Her image is made up through this ideological feature as the “Divine Mother” (48) that bears anything. The generalize feature of woman has come out from the thought of ‘patriarchal domination’ and that actually construct the ‘self’ of the woman.

*Breast-giver* is the story that builds itself on the cruel ironies of caste, class, patriarchy. Devi keeps Jashoda’s name unchanged from the Sanskrit scriptural form. Although the orthodox Hindu middle class nominally reveres the Brahmin, the prerogatives of economic class are in fact much more real for it. The underclass ‘Hindu female’ (*Breast-giver*), as long as she credits Hindu materialism and family values, is unable to save her. Even in her lonely death, she remains ‘Jashoda Devi’ --- literally, the goddess Jashoda, honorary goddess by caste. (The mythic Jashoda’s story is also well known. She is the foster-mother of Krishna, in Hindu Bengal a famous erotic god; in his role as strategist and adviser, it is he who saves Draupadi from dishonor.)
A John Q Public should come forward to give something to the nation rather than mere taking out from it. *Breast-giver* is “one of the many slogans of a militant nationalism” (p-80). This accommodation of sentiments extending from “Sat koti santanere he mugdha janani, rekhechho Bengali kore manush karoni” meaning Fond mother, you have kept your seventy million children Bengalis but haven’t made them human’ Tagore to ‘Ask not what your country can do for you’ (80) (Jhon F Kennedy, Inaugural address). In spite of best possible personal politics, the reading Mahasweta Devi offers of her own reading, entailing her subject-position as a writer, signifies that narrative of nationalism that is perceived as a product of the culture of imperialism. Devi’s works help us to understand the narratives of nationalism have been and remain irrelevant to the life of the subordinates. The elite culture of nationalism has been participating with the colonizers in so many ways.

As Morton points out, Spivak critiques the limitation of Devi’s interpretation. In her view, Devi’s interpretation does not go beyond the already gendered terms of dominant nationalist rhetoric. It ignores the embodied experiences and history of the subaltern protagonist, Jashoda. Spivak feels that Devi fails to “highlight the failure of postcolonial elitist nationalism to transform the lives of the subaltern women” and “postcolonial nationalism in India has worked to suppress the innumerable examples of resistance throughout the imperialist and pre-imperialist centuries” (36).
Mahasweta Devi’s stories do exemplify the minor details of these women living, suffering and enduring the suffering. Her stories inform the readers this unspeakable truth of women’s misery and their power of enduring and resistance. In her stories, readers get the linear natured story which is derelict in mainstream literature. Her fiction offers an array of female’s figurative situation/position in society as well as their materialistic use of the body for the social and economic purpose. Moreover, her stories exhibit the subverted gender role and consequences of this subversion. It also apprehends the vivid layers of domination and resistance. *Behind the Bodice* by Mahasweta Devi reflects the reality of women’s position in post-colonial India. As Vandana explains in her research study:

Mahasweta’s fiction aims at inverting such hegemonic, over-privileged, ever-signifying system of relationships and attempts to bring low what was high through the strategies of subversion and reversal. Her stories come across as the post-colonial, subaltern, gendered responses that serve to topsy-turvy such hierarchical structures, generating aesthetics of opposition in the process (2007, 6).

The tragedy unfolds in Upin’s life during 1993. His photographic effort to represent the pathetic conditions of the nation is, however, not given much attention by the public. In fact, the public places it under the category of ‘non-issues’ (BB 138). These non-issues include crop failure, deaths due to natural calamities, terrorist attacks, caste-related deaths, rape, murder, custodial torture, etc. However, the public is in an uproar over a Hindi film song *Chholi Ke Pichhe* translated into English as *Behind the Bodice*. The song has become a serious issue for the media, the censor board, feminists and various organizations. They are engrossed in uncovering the mystery of the thing that lies behind the bodice.
Politicians as well as intellectuals claim that it was this vulgar song that distracted the entire nation and allowed the Middle Eastern terrorists to blow up parts of Bombay and Calcutta. Intellectuals believe that the song represents cultural invasion. For them, behind the bodice lies the Middle East that vainly tries to conceal its violence. It is mentioned in the story about the country wherein the sense “Behind the Bodice or Choli Ke Pichhe is an elixir for the times” (140) which is highlighted by another character Shaili’s mother as “Never dragged on a belouse [blouse] in my life, how to put on a choli now!”(140). It means that it is preferred that all violence remains concealed behind a socially defined normalcy. Upin too attempts to highlight the mystery that lies under cover but manages to unleash violence all around him.

Gangor the protagonist in *Behind the Bodice* is observed by the readers as a poor tribal woman of a rural India in a ‘semi-famine condition’ (BB 144). She works as a group and “work on a piece wage basis in the kilns for light bricks and tiles” (144). The migrant labourer Gangor’s ‘statuesque’ breasts excite the attention of “itinerant ace photographer” (141) Upin Puri, who captures albeit thoughtlessly her “Konark” (145) breasts while she is nursing her child. The exposure of her breasts makes her the object of disgust in her own community as well as a sexual object in the eyes of the police. Her own community people yell at her as they hear that she has got money for posing to a photographer. Ujan, Upin’s companion says, “You gave her sixty-seventy rupees? What a shameless girl!” (144). The Caretaker also says:

…..Shameless country girl…..jiggling her body all the time…. Saying to the market people, didn’t snap your photos, snapped mine. See!..... Gangor made everyone sin against God (152).
As Ayasha Matthan adds *Behind the Bodies*:

delves deep into the layers of the breast as the object of gaze especially during the British Era in India where the blouse was ‘introduced’ as a covering cloth of mortality only for the upper-castes (www.hindu.com).

In Devi’s radical Indian Imagination, the breast is more than a symbol. It is weapon to slam, indict, and impeach the exploitative social system prevailing in the so-called “unified or united” postcolonial India.

Upin is an urbane man who relies on the violence occurring in backward and rural areas of Bihar and Orissa to earn his livelihood. His photography is of an investigative nature as he explores and represents the misfortunes experienced by people, such as drought, famine, pesticide-infested water etc. Upin sells his pictures abroad on huge prices to leading newspapers and magazines like National Press and ‘Lens Magazine’ (143). His representations of violence undergone by the Third World are readily received and appreciated by the West. Upin has “matrimony of arrangement” (154) to Shital who is a famous Himalaya-climber.

In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard observes that marriage can be attributed to “social convention rather than to any real need” (286). Marriage, in his view, becomes an arbitrary system of representation and may not be the spontaneous development of a real situation. The point of commonality between Upin and Shital is that they both thrive in a violent environment. However, despite the similarity they are not able to spend even a full month in each other’s company. They communicate with each other via their friend Ujan who is paid for his mediating efforts. Shital’s visits to their marital home are mostly viewed by Upin as being “problematic.” This problem, according to Upin, emerges from the dichotomy in Shital’s personality. He believes that his wife is, in fact, supposed to be two people.
There is a “violent and aggressive” Shital who attacks the Himalayas again and again (141). On the other hand, there is a “calm and soft” Shital who likes to spend time in a remote house near a dead-end road with silence all around. According to Upin, the temperament of Shital suggests that she has no place in the present. He says that Shital would have been at home in 2094 – somewhere in the far away future. A suitable time for the “symbolic identification” (57) of Shital’s existence has not yet arrived as Žižek mentions in Tarrying with the Negative. However, Upin fails to grasp the dichotomy in his own personality.

The subaltern Gangor’s character is contrasted with the elite Shital, the wife of Upin Puri. Gangor is also living in the same country that gives Shital to live her liberated life. As a mountaineer, Shital goes out of home for her passion to be fulfilled whereas Gangor works for her survival. She is the bread winner of her family as his husband caught by the police for theft case, and also a drunkard who is reluctant to earn for his family. Shital leads a peaceful life with her husband though both ‘don’t spend even a month and a half out of the year together’ (141). On short ‘Shital is a girl of 2094, or rather Shital’s century has not yet come’ (141).

Ujan admires Upin for being an “Esperanto man” (142) who adjust himself according to the drastic situations he confronts in the places he travels to (BB 142). In his study of the Kantian and Hegelian philosophy, Žižek states that the feminine universe is the “universe of boundless dispersion and divisibility” and can never be rounded off into a universal whole. On the other hand, the masculine universe involves the “universal network of causes and effects” founded in an exception which enables him to assume fully his symbolic mandate (Tarrying with the Negative 58). In other words, man is able to find his identity in the symbolic but woman is condemned to “hysterical splitting” and to wearing masks (BB 57). One can argue that it is for this reason that the split in Shital’s temperament is mocked by Upin. But a similar split in Upin’s personality is admired by Ujan.
The photo he takes of Gangor, when she lodges her breast in child’s mouth, is published in the front page of the Lens Magazine with the caption ‘The half-naked ample breasted female figures of Orissa are about to be raped. Save them! Save the breast!’ (142) which is a sensational news of Jhora and Seopura, rather than sensitizing the people. After identifying Gangor’s photo with her mangled breast, her own country people do not come forward to rent her a house. The pictures of Gangor’s bare breasts entice the police. They stalk her and she is said to be teasing them by constantly evading their path. They kidnap and gang-rape her. Heidegger in Off the Beaten Track states that the “world becomes a picture is one and the same process whereby, in the midst of beings, man becomes subject” (69). This subject may either represent a dominant self or the subjection of the other to violence of the gaze.

Instead of backing down, Gangor chooses to file a police complaint against the offenders. Now Gangor’s entire clan stays away from her lest she unleashes her evil upon them. After learning about the violent fate of Gangor, Upin takes it upon himself to go and save her. She goes village after village to save the life of her and her child. Upin comes to know that his portrayal of Gangor in the newspaper has spoiled her livelihood; he goes in search of her. He finds out that she has started to earn her living through prostitution. It is the only alternative left for Gangor as her kith and kin have abandoned her.

At last when he finds her, she is gang raped, and seeming her in an utter helpless state. When the two come face-to-face, Gangor names Upin as one of those who violated her. In her view, Upin too has taken the advantage of her by clicking photographs of her half-bare chest to earn money. He is as good as the contractor who sells her to other men for money. Gangor takes off her bodice and reveals the evidence of the violation of her body. Behind the small piece of cloth lie the bitten, torn and shriveled remains of her once “statuesque breasts.” The two wounds that have taken the place of Gangor’s breasts are hallmark of the violence wrought upon her. The site of Gangor’s
mutilated breasts is a shock for Upin. Gangor becomes furious on seeing Upin.

The mammal projection of Gangor in *Behind the Bodies* is assumed as an object to get released in the front page of a magazine by the protagonist Upin which Spivak mentions in the *Introduction to Breast Stories* as Mahasweta Devi bitterly decries the supposed “‘normality’ of sexuality as male violence” (vii). She also says that aboriginal Dopdi and Gangor are the subjects of “resistant rage” (vii). In Behind the Bodice, “There is no non-issue behind it, Upin would have known if he wanted to, could have known” (x).

Gangor asks several questions, which are left answered by the Photographer triggering of a train of violence that ends in tragedy. She roars,

You snapped many many times my chest, Sir. But I knew your plan. Otherwise would you have given so much cash? ...
Don’t you hear? Constantly playing it, singing it, setting the boys on me… behind the bodice… the bodice… choli ke pichhe… choli ke… (156).

By the way of Foucault Devi has taken effort to explain the portrayal of the subaltern as gendered subject rather than an allegorical some for mother India. Michel Foucault, French historian in the context of Critique of imperialism. For ‘Gana’ is, of course, ‘demoes,’ –people, Ganatantra-democracy. ‘Rape of the people’- ganadharshan. The name Gangor is derived from the name of the Goddess of Maharashtra Ganagauri, and the name of the river which is believed that it was flowing in that state once upon a time. Here the name Ganagauri has quite another resonance.

*Behind the bodice* is a ‘rape of the people’. Here the breast becomes a concept metaphor (rather than a symbol) of police violence in the democratic state. “In a comparable though not identical way, Buchi Emecheta will not let the rape of Ayoko ‘Stand for’ collaborative colonial exploitation in ‘The rape
of Shavi’, (x) says Spivak in her Introduction to Breast Stories. The follower of Foucauldian institution, Spivak says that US feminism names social constructionism as “anti-essentialism” and polarizes it against ‘nature’. Because she adds this is how their discursive formation de-fangs Marxist-materialist radicalism. *Behind the bodice* is a rape of the people.

Upin made Gangor self-conscious about the unique beauty of her breasts, without any thought of the social repercussions. His political correctness ended with personally not lusting after Gangor’s breasts: ‘Learn to praise and respect a beautiful thing,’ he chides. Credit-baiting through women’s ‘micro-enterprise’ while removing infra-structural supports in the society at large: rape of the people. There is no figure of violence in such a global case to make the disaster immediately visible. And the most active collaborators, to keep the violence invisible by ignorance or design, or the ‘New Women’ of the South, ‘cultural interpreters,’ hybridists or popular culturists when necessary, environmentalists when possible, quite like Shital Mallya or Gayatri Spivak.

Two connotations are there for ‘Nature’. In Bengali Shobhab (Sanskrit) means swabhava which is characteristic behavior. And the other is Prakriti—a part of the animate universe, which is taken to be without reasonable consciousness. Marx has used this split to explain “value”: a contrast between the ‘raw’ (material=nature) and the cooked (fabricated=commodity, the German Gabrik being, also factory) (xi& xii). Spivak also says that the same sort of problem might arise from an impatient (or) careless reading of Upin’s anagnarisis: Gangor’s developed breasts are natural, not manufactured. Why did he first think they were the object of photography? Why did it seem that the chest was endangered? Upin is not portrayed to be participated in a celebration of “natural”. Because he assumes that the chest is just an object to be amused and it is not more than the object of photography. For his it is just made up of “silicone implanted (149) … Not a breast blessed by liquid
silicone, but natural, hence unique. He felt that Gangor and her chest were endangered.” (150)

Upin is not shown to be engaged in a celebration of the ‘natural’. His realization is that he has made a mistake in assuming that the part object (‘that chest’) is no more than the object of photography as prosthesis for permanence, a species of silicone implant, as it was. There is a moment, earlier, when even the superficial contrast is undermined--- even stone sculpture, erodes, for erosion is ‘natural’. But is it, with chemical pollution in the air? The thoughtful reader enters a labyrinth here that can deroute Plato’s critique of writing as hypermnesis or ‘memory implant’ and accommodate Marx’s critique of mistaking the social (rational, abstract average, spectral) relationship between human beings as the relationship between things.

To preserve the breast as aesthetic object by photography or implant is to overlook its value-coding within patriarchal social relationship: it is ‘natural’ that women should be modest, and not provoke, by making the living breast dance. The readership of these stories (though not necessarily of all her work) will contain many such figures. Puran in ‘Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha’ writes two reports, one suppressed in the imagination, and leaves the valley, forever marked in his being, Upin, too, is marked by Gangor’s case and rage; and dies, either by chance brought on by confusion, or by choice. Here a word on nature, artifice, or prosthesis may be appropriate.

It is the Aboriginal Dopdi and the migrant proletarian Gangor who are the subjects of resistant rage. Their names bear the mark of their distance from the top: the Aboriginal’s immediate (‘Dopdi’ although she was named Draupadi by her Brahmin mistress) and the Dalit’s historical: Gangor from Ganagauri, ‘corrupt’ through usage. Here, too there is a difference. We are sure of the derivation of Dopdi from Draupadi as the readers are of the author’s hardly implicit point of view.
Although the power of Gangor’s resistance and rage is, if anything, worked out more explicitly than Dopdi’s – Gangor explicitly accuses the police—the staging of the provenance of her name is interestingly obscure. ‘Ganagauri’ as the origin of ‘Gangor’ is a bit of documentation offered by the most problematic character in ‘Behind the Bodies,’ Shital Mallya, the ‘new’ Indian woman, the mountain-climbing individualist in a liberated marriage, official interpreter for ‘The Festival of India’ (an elaborate museumized international self-representation of Indian ‘culture’ as arrested precapitalist tradition of folk-artisanal ethnic simplicity). It is quite certain that her explanation, given in tones of contempt to an ‘uncultured’ Indian, is ridiculously wrong. The name Ganagauri has nothing to do with the river Ganga.

This is a new object of critique for Mahasweta: ‘Indian intellectuals not knowing a single Indian language meet in a closed seminar in the capital city and make the[ir] wise decision known.’. The custodians of Indian culture Mahasweta is altogether uninterested in fragmenting India along language lines. Her extraordinary command of Dalit Indian heteroglossia is proof of how far she has expanded her own Bengali language base. She is, however, equally uninterested in handing over India’s heterogeneity to this new consumerist class, politically correct by international coding, full of a class contempt that is either open, or disguised by impersonal benevolence. ‘There is no non-issue behind the bodice, there is rape of the people behind it, Upin would have known if he had wanted to, could have known’ (x) as Spivak says in her Introduction to Breast Stories.

The rich and the poor are not equally free to sleep under the bridges of Paris. Mahasweta Devi will continue to write her ‘breast’ stories, for the breast is indeed a powerful part object, permitting the violent coming-into-being of the human, on the uncertain cusp of nature and culture. In 1986, writing on Breast-giver, she had invoked Lacan. Klein’s work has been almost fully appropriated by the patriarchal maternalist establishment of
British Kleinian psychoanalysis. If, however, Klein is read without fear of that authoritative restricted interpretation, the following summary can be made:

This object is its source of nourishment, deprivation, and sensuality—usually the breast. At weaning and before, the breast—and, secondarily, other part objects—become ‘symbolized’ and recognized as whole persons. Our sense of what it means to be human is played out in scenarios of guilt and reparation where the object is the primary part object incessantly transmogrified into people and other collectives (xiv).

To tie human subject formation to Oedipus was to tie it to the patriarchal nuclear family. To make it depend upon the primary part object (overwhelmingly still the breast) as chief instrument for the production of truth and lie (signification) and of good and evil (responsibility) is to free it from that historical bondage.

Stuart Hall says that within the dominant tradition of the female nude, patriarchy power relations are symbolized by the binary relation in which men assume the active role of the looking subject while women are passive objects to be looked at. According to him, the image of a naked female must be understood not so much as a representation of sexual desire. But as a form of sexual objectification which articulates masculine hegemony and dominance over the apparatus of representation itself (286).

The breasts of Gangor too become the target of the patriarchal gaze of the policemen. Here Gangor’s half-covered breasts completely overtake her identity. Moreover, Gangor’s “mammal projections” (145) highlight the reality of the mystery that is behind the bodice. According to the contractor who hires Gangor’s clan, behind the bodice lies pure evil in the form of the
Gangor’s breasts. He says that Gangor has made “everyone sin against God” (152).

The horrific vision drives home the reality of the Nothingness that he has tried to ignore all this time. He realizes that his plea to people to ‘Save the Breasts!’ is utterly futile. For those who are assigned to protect society are, in fact, the perpetrators of violence. In a state of shock, Upin steps on the railway tracks of Jharoa and is crushed under the wheels of a train. In Behind the Bodice, Mahasweta Devi conceptualizes the mangled breasts of Gangor as a metaphor of the violence, especially custodial, that has become an everyday occurrence in our democratic India. In his essay Critique of violence, Walter Benjamin highlights the law-preserving violence that is conservative, protective and “threatening,” designed to preserve or reinforce a pre-existing legal order (242). But the legal order too is infested with patriarchy.

The violence of the police exposes the measures that ensure domination of the other in the phallocentric society. The raw and bitten breasts of Gangor signify that it is criminal to ask the question about the breasts that lie behind the piece of cloth, for these breasts provide an image of the harsh reality about the lives of the subaltern. The rape of the aboriginal Gangor by the police signifies the rape, torture, humiliation, manipulation and exploitation carried out by the institutions and protectors of law. Yet her victimization remains a “non-issue” in a postcolonial nation where the government has de-notified the subaltern, failed to provide them the right to be heard, to settle somewhere permanently, and to be protected under the law.

The victims have the verve and energy to stand up against when that is the only alternative to counter exploitation and oppression. Resistance is a concrete and ethical way of naming and defining the sufferer’s identity. It is in such naming and defining moments that the redemption of the sufferer lies. The immediate environs of the victims and the politics of postcolonial elitist, male-centered hegemonic agencies that tend to operate to ignore the
aspirations of the excluded and the marginalized, propel the aesthetically, ethically and morally conscious artists to project resistance as a viable option. Therefore, Devi’s idealization of subaltern resistance in order to awaken the people to the injustices endured is a legitimate act of poetic justice.

The last part of the story comes with Gangor’s conscious on how she is exploited by the elite society. Her utterance with a heavy heart is a moving one for the readers. She says:

You are a bastard too sir… you took photos [photos] of my chest, eh? OK… I’ll show… but I’ll take everything from your pocket, a-ll…. 

In the silhouette cast by the hurricane lantern two shadows act violently. Gangor takes off her choli and throws it at Upin. Look, look, look, straw- chaff, rags- look what’s there.

No breasts. Two dry scars, wrinkled skin, quite flat. The two raging volcanic craters spew liquid lava at Upin – gang rape… biting and tearing gang rape… police… a court case… again a gang rape in the lockup…now from Jhara to Seopura… Seopura to Jhara… the Contractor catches clients… terrorizes a public… plays the song, the song…

Upin comes out, Gangor is still screaming, talking, kicking the corrugated tin walls with abandon. Upin runs. There is no non-issue behind the bodice, there is a rape of the people behind it. Upin would have known if he had wanted to, could have known. (157)

*Behind the Bodice* is therefore the long-ago part object that plays in the constant dynamic of the construction of whole persons. One can see Gangor first with her breast carelessly lodged in the child’s mouth. And it is the child,
crying, that brings Upin’s guilt home to him. Commenting on this Spivak clearly says that these are not logical but figural connection and adds that this is not maternalism but a reminder of the line from the breast as part-object to the ‘whole person’ who is the impossible presupposition of all ethical action. To ‘save’ the part object (save that chest, ‘save the breast’) as art object (is Mahasweta thinking of ‘save the dance no the dancer?’ – the slogan that led to the simultaneous establishment of kalakshetras and the Indian classical dance forms as such; and the devastation of devadasis into whores’ colonies?) is to short circuit that presupposition. By the time Upin knows this, the breasts are destroyed Gangor, the agent of resistant rage, finds him guilty. Upin Puri, technically innocent but judged by his victim, encounters his sentence upon the tracks. Senanayak in Draupadi had only been afraid.

The breast is not a symbol in these stories. In Draupadi what is represented is an erotic object transformed into an object of torture and revenge where the line between (hetero) sexuality and gender violence begins to waver. In Breast-giver, is a survival object transformed into a commodity, making visible the indeterminacy between filial piety and gender violence, between house and temple, between domination and exploitation. Devi’s mature fiction never romanticizes the socio-libidinal relationship between the sexes.

In Behind the Bodice, she bitterly decries the supposed ‘normality’ of sexuality as male violence. In the eyes of the Caretaker, it is just that Gangor’s breasts have been destroyed. If ‘the girl doesn’t understand the police are men too, they will craze if you tease them.’ (152). In the process Mahasweta fixes her glance at art, ‘popular’ and ‘high,’ pulp filmmaker and archivalist photographer. The point is not just aesthetics and politics, but aesthetics and ethics, archivization and responsibility.