

Females As Heroic Figures: A Reading of Strong Women In Mahasweta Devi's *Breast Stories*



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DECLARATION

I do hereby declare that this Dissertation work entitled as “Females as Heroic Figures: A reading of strong women in Mahasweta Devi’s *Breast Stories*” is my own research work processed under the guidance of Dr. Pradip Kumar Patra.

I further declare that this dissertation does not contain any part of any work which has been submitted before or presented by any other researcher by this University or by any other University without a proper citation for the award of my degree either. It contains my full study and determination on it.

Signature of the Candidate

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Breast Stories

Abstract

Literature can be portrayed as the mirror of society where all the issues of life and society is being reflected. Different writers use different ways or ideas to discuss their works as per their own perspective. This study deals with the literature with reference to various impacts in society. Mahasweta Devi is one among those female writers who emphasizes the challenges of women in the Indian society through her literary works. This is a study of struggle of women in the Indian society relating the situation of women in the past and modern life with reference to the stories of Indian Mythological epic and Mahasweta Devi's book, *Breast Stories* where she highlights the conflicts of inequality in social, political and economic aspects, a woman has to overcome in the patriarchal society. This thesis is an interdisciplinary study to explore the clashes that women face throughout her struggle of existence. The main aim of this study is to focus on the promotion of challenges that women has been facing in the male dominated society in relation to gender inequalities and discrimination. This study comments on the social issues and raises voice towards awareness against the exploitation towards women who are being targeted in all types of societal disorders including the unequal treatment and injustices women are bound to endure and follow the tradition of being victimized and believed as the object to satisfy men's desire and play the role of dumb to raise voice against the inhumane deeds in the society. The word Breast symbolizes femininity and protest.

Keywords: Womanhood, Marginality, Breast, Issues, Discrimination, Victimization, Inequality, Gender, Patriarchal Society

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This study attempts to address the difference by exploring the complex nature of female heroism. In recent years, there has been a rising realization of the need to broaden traditional definitions of heroism to include a wide range of experiences and identities. This dissertation explores the study of how women are portrayed as heroes in literature, folklore, film, and other forms of media. This investigation's significance goes beyond mere representation; it addresses deeper social factors and the changing landscape of gender equality. Examining the portrayal of female heroes reveals typical beliefs toward gender roles, power dynamics, and the possibilities for empowerment and agency. This work takes an interdisciplinary approach, using elements from feminist theory, literary works and articles relating to marginalization of women. In history, stories of heroism are frequently told through the prism of masculinity, with male people serving as the principal protagonists of bravery and resilience, being portrayed as heroes and saviour to the common peoples. However, beyond the surface of these prevailing myths, there seems to be a wealth of unrecorded stories which remains untold and hidden that highlight female as heroic figures characterized with amazing courage, bravery, and ability to fight against. This dissertation sets out to investigate and appreciate the many facets and untold stories of female heroism across civilizations, diving into the nuances of their victories, hardships, and contributions to the tapestry of human history involving the classic hero paradigm. The traditional understanding and concept of heroism, which is based on physical might and dominance, frequently undervalues female characters' agency and worth as individuals. Throughout history and across civilizations, women have emerged as prominent figures in stories of

bravery, sacrifice, and empowerment. From famous individuals in mythology and folklore to unsung heroines, women's remarkable journeys are intertwined with strands of perseverance, compassion, and persistence. This dissertation intends to question traditional notions of heroism by investigating the various ways in which females embody and define the concept of bravery. It aims to shed light on the various manifestations of female heroism by conducting a thorough examination of literature, mythology, history, and contemporary stories.

Mahasweta Devi is a Bengali author and one among active feminist writers of India. She was born in 1926 in Dhaka, which is now a part of Bangladesh. Her real name was Mahasweta Chattopadhyay. She is often known for her works in Bengali literature authoring around 100 short stories and novels. Her works did own the capability of take away the attention of the readers connecting with the sense of real incidents. She received numerous awards for her literary contributions, highlighting the Jnanpith Award and Ramon Magsaysay Award. Devi talks about women empowerment in her works portraying the females as victims where subalternity doesn't own the right to play active role. She was also an Activism who engaged herself in advocacy, promotion of equality, protests etc. to fight for the rights of the suppressed community. She challenged societal norms with the dream of bringing up equality in the life of peoples and shed the light of positive change. She talks about the conditions of women through depiction of marginalization and struggles of women by facing and following the societal disorders and norms in her works. Devi in her works narrates her stories using the female body as a symbolism of power and voice against abuse in the society. Through her stories, she sheds light on resilience and challenges of disenfranchised women in the Indian society. Her works often debates on the inequality and celebrates the bravery of women by showcasing the ability to overcome the circumstances by portraying about women and their consequences. She highlights the trauma and conflicts women undergoes in the struggle of

survival drawing attention to gender issues that has been occurring since our past generations. Gender discrimination in our society is a complex issue rooted in the cultural norms, societal expectations and historical factors which seems impossible to have an end. The marginalization of women in our society often sets barriers opposing women's active participation in social, political and economic field, sustaining the cycle of inequality and injustice. It is a forever alive issue, visible in different forms such as unequal treatment, setting of limits in education, property and healthcare, avoiding of women's leadership position. Women are compelled by discrimination to view the world exclusively through the lens of their gender, rather than the perspective of humanity. In literature, body of women represents the symbolism of strength and power through womanhood and motherhood.

Mahasweta Devi can be proven as a feminist writer through the analyzation of the body of her works by the readers. She demonstrates herself as one among those who seeks equality and non-division state in not just gender basis but also other societal disorders. Her works pays attention mostly in:

1. Critique of Patriarchy: Through her authorization of certain works, Mahasweta Devi critiques the power dynamic and the gender based patriarchal structures that maintains the ongoing process of gender inequality. Her works often highlights the challenging situation of women in a particular society. Devi talks about the ways in which women are marginalized and suppressed to live their lives according to the norms of society tied up with all the unnecessary restrictions. She shows how women has to face the circumstances of being discriminated in their own surrounding by their own family, friends, relatives etc. being denied to own and enjoy the equal freedom and rights the males do. She also mentions the unsafe situation of women as how women are being targeted by the society to take

advantage of their helplessness where women are supposed to be treated with love and respect the same way as men are treated.

2. **Intersectionality and Class division:** Mahasweta Devi explores the intersectionality of multiple social identities, paying attention to most importantly class, status, caste and the rights of indigenous. Being a feminist writer, her argument doesn't end in just with her works relating to the rights for women. She often writes about the urge of women to rights and freedom. But at the same time, her works also depicts the struggles, sacrifices and discrimination faced by the marginalized community of certain parts of India. Her works delves with the subaltern community, particularly the peoples who are identified as belonging of low caste and tribals, who often becomes victim of exploitation. Through her literary works, she argues on the dominance and injustice that has been continuing by the system of political powers. Her works describes the complexities of societal disbalance and portrays the urge for dignity and equality to the subaltern community as they have their own human rights. Keeping aside her efforts and contribution in literary field, Devi was also involved in activism, taking part in the movements to bring above all the possible changes in social, political and economic related fields.
3. **Representation of Women:** Mahasweta Devi's works often symbolizes the representation of women regarding their experiences and conditions in the patriarchal society. She highlights the challenges and exploitation that women are being victimized with in her literary works by portraying her characters and showcasing their surroundings. She dares to confront patriarchal norms and authorities that manages to limit women's agency. The female characters in her works are often representation of bravery and heroism who emerges as voice against dehumanization and exploitation, advocating social changes and inspiring the

subaltern community to not let others dominate them. She represents women as symbol of power, who has their own rights and power to move forward towards their goals and fight against all the societal disorders in their way.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

This dissertation work aims to highlight the issues and conditions that women experiences in a patriarchal society by exploring the short stories collection of Mahasweta Devi's *Breast Stories*. The paper examines how Devi has portrayed the bravery and heroism of women showcasing their powerful actions by using their own body as weapon against dehumanization. Devi's most of the works sheds light on resilience and heroism by maintaining a positivity in within themselves with the ongoing spirit of raising voice and serving own selves despite of all the trauma and difficulties they undergo.

The paper would further highlight how the trauma that leads to depression and anxiety from which it seems possible an individual to come over throughout their whole life. India is a country filled with numerous religion authorities, rituals and norms which are somehow expected to be followed by the female community as whole. The societal norms, restrictions and rules are all seemed to have created only for women. The cultures of the country portray the male community to be as superior and better in compared to females which is how women are always victims of marginalization within their own surrounding.

Furthermore, the paper raises question on the existence of discrimination and domination of women's existence from the uncovered past generations. Despite of all the possible progress in the country and setting of records in the field of liberation and education by both males and females in equal heights, the society fails to accept the fact of offering equal treatment to both males and females. The generation has been evolved with ultimate upgradation in the country, but still due to the cheap mentality of peoples' negative impact and mindset of the society, the

country would still remain back until marginalization against gender issues keep existing. The paper examines how women gets targeted by the men sexually with the belief as women to be weak enough to fight against their physical disorder and humiliation. The paper broadly studies the struggles faced by the female's protagonist and their inevitable faith to prove their heroism and bravery. My research work would question the existence of discrimination and domination that women had to face and raise voice against such humiliation.

1.3 Research Methodology

To work throughout the research process "Females as Heroic Figures: A Reading of strong women in Mahasweta Devi's *Breast Stories*", qualitative research method has been applied along with the complete study of the short stories collection of Mahasweta Devi *Breast Stories* as the main aim of my dissertation work is to analyze the condition of women through women's situation and perspective.

To support my process, I have also added certain ideas and knowledge regarding my topic that highlights the issue I did mention in my argument. The process helped me in developing my inner strength, knowledge, humanity and history that shows the status and situation of women. I have also taken supplement of certain essays, articles, dissertation works and novels relating to my topic through online and offline process for further completion and perfection of my research work.

1.5 Literary Review

Mahasweta Devi's literary works earn strong response from the readers as it consists the real incidents and situations that actually happened. She highlights the inner trauma and anxiety that manages to haunt an individual throughout their lives. As the country has witnessed numerous of such incidents of discrimination and abuse cases, Devi portrays her characters and stories relating to the dark reality of India against women.

1. In the dissertation work *Ex Umbra in Solem: Understanding the breast in Mahasweta Devi's Breast Stories*, Sayendra Basu depicts the issues of women in Indian society relating the short stories of Mahasweta Devi's *Breast Stories* proving breast as a symbol of power and protest. In his research work, he highlights that female body are not object or commodity to be suppressed and treated unwanted in compared to men. He explores the issues women has been going through in their struggle of existence which exists even in the mythological stories of Indian. He adds that despite of change in generation, the mentality of the peoples did not happen have change in themselves of viewing women as a second option and inferior of the society.

2. In the article *Importance of Breasts in Mahasweta Devi's Breast Giver* (January-February 2024 in the International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research) by Nivethitha N and Guha Priya K S, the authors highlight the story of Jashoda a Stanadayini who has to serve over her family with the income she earns through her job as professional mother. The authors argue that women's body is not a commodity to use for business or earning purpose as shown in the story. Through their work they raise voice against the unwanted treatment offered to women and avoid judging women on their physic and appearance, also stop using women just to fulfill the needs of men and the family.

3. Tasnia Islam's research work named *Hajar Churashir Ma: A "Herstory" of Resistance and Emancipation* points out the issues that women faced during the Naxalite Movement. Islam

adds how a mother conquers her fear from the dark phase of her life avoiding the fear to deconstruct a new birth of her life and live with strong faith and determination. The way she executes against the armed revolution for the sake of her son highlights a remarkable journey to proof her heroism and mark a spot of bravery in the society against the domination of patriarchal norms.

4. In *The Other Side of Silence* (23 August 2017) Urvashi Butalia portrays the story of abusement where men rapes the women of other community and symbolizes themselves to be brave as for having the ability to shake the mindset of the men of their against community during the time of partition of India. They considered women as tool and weapon to make use of and prove themselves as man who have the guts to abuse the women of different community sexually. Their actions shows that women are always weak and can't take stand for themselves of their own and needs support of men all the time. Butalia, in her story draws attention of the readers towards the evil behaviours and treatment that happened to take place against women without their concern and acceptance. In the novel she manages to cover up the pain and struggle women underwent with certain circumstances that remained untold and unaware by the peoples of India.

5. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* also proves women to be as heroic by portraying the main protagonist Sethe as strong woman who despite of being a slave and victim of extreme sexual disorder against the whites still manages to survive. Morrison proves her heroism by showing her brave act of being able to kill her own child with the aim to not let her live the life of slavery as she was already aware and familiar with the struggles and disorder women has to undergo as being enslaved by the whites. Not every women and mother are characterized with such ability as to kill her own children in fear of living a harsh life. But Morrison here shows how a

mother goes beyond everything just for the sake of her children's freedom and safety. This novel marks a step of bravery in the society.

6. *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen portrays the situation that women undergo in a patriarchal society being tied up with limited rights and freedom. Ibsen shows the condition of women throughout her life and portrays the heroism of a woman presenting the main protagonist raising voice against domination and standing for her own rights and equality. The play showcases the urge for equality and freedom that women preserve within them as they are being kept under the control of men's domination and opinions.

Chapter 2: Female body viewed as Abjection

The topic of discussion in female body is a must to be debated of as the body of female itself is the reason as they are believed to be of a step backward in compared to male in the consent of power. There are never ending discussions when it comes to a female body as females are considered as an object to be marginalized and remain limited within the so called traditional rules and norms. Abjection defines the state of being cast off from being a member of the society or regarded as socially unacceptable or suppressed. Viewing the female body as abjection often seems to be existing from societal constructs that devalue and objectify women, reducing their rights and personifying them from equality. In our society, women have historically been seen through an abjection-centered lens, where we often witness control over them. Women has been facing systemic discrimination and exclusion in certain aspects of society, getting included as a part of it but not limited or deserving to politics, education and culture as equal to men including the unequal pay, limited access to leadership positions, lack of representation in decision-making roles and cultural stereotypes that restrict opportunities and perpetuate gender inequality. In the true sense women don't even own the identity of their own selves and their body as they are known by their father's surname before marriage and

then by their husband's. Even the children who would take birth from her womb would be named after their father, despite of her pain and sacrifice. A female body is seen just as a birth giver and to give satisfaction to men's every desires.

The word *Breast* in the title of the book depicts the woman body which is being used by Mahasweta Devi as a symbol of power in femininity. The term Breast in the book refers to the woman's body, which Devi uses as a symbol of power and femininity. Breastfeeding takes place from infancy. However, in the book's stories, the same breast is exploited as a means to ruin a woman's life. Devi portrays the story's characters as individuals who use their bodies as weapons to combat patriarchy in Indian society. We have witnessed women's victimization for generations. There are conversations about women being free and independent in today's world, but the unpleasant reality is that a woman's life choices are still suppressed. The breast nourishes an individual feeding from infancy. But the same breast is being used as a channel to ruin a woman's life in the stories of the book. Devi shows the protagonists of the stories as those who makes use of their body as their weapon so as to fight against the patriarchy in Indian society. We have been witnessing the victimization of women since generations. There are discussions in surroundings as women being independent and liberated in the modern society where the harsh truth is a life decision of a woman is still being tied by the patriarchal authorities. The society denies the total equality between men and women still by creating boundaries and setting traditional rules as so women be dependent upon or rely on men's hope and effort. Women are being treated as entity which has to be controlled by men. Also in the story of partition in the book *The Other Side Of Silence* by Urvashi Butalia, we come over the dark phase of the society where men raping women of other religion was a kind of symbolic relationship of men taking over the men of other religion by raping and sexually abusing their women. It was a sense of proving themselves to be more powerful then the men of the victim's community. They showed themselves to be powerful and brave by making use

of their evil male power over the women. These is perceived as women cannot protect themselves of their own and hence needs somebody to take care of them. As woman is being taught to be dependent on her father or brother before her marriage and thereafter on her husband. Women are seen as creatures which have to be tamed and deprived of their identity, opinion and rights as a woman would be defined by the man who will marry her where she changes from Miss to Mistress but the man would remain Mister throughout his life.

Devi's *Breast Stories* questions those identity through the representation of her female characters in her short story collection. She portrays the female characters in the stories to be heroic who fights against all the disabilities of their family and society, making use of their body as a weapon which is targeted by the man to lead a woman to her weakest version.

Draupadi, the first story in the book draws a connection with the ancient generation which is known throughout Indian mythology. The woman who was the only wife of five Pandav brothers fights back with her never-ending courage against the Kauravas despite of her husbands' being defeated in the Pasha game which resulted in putting Draupadi at stake hence she got humiliated in the Kuru Court when she was also in her menstruation period. However, the evil intentions of undressing her in front of everyone didn't succeed. She left her hair untied for thirteen long years for the sake of revenge against her humiliation to the Kauravas by washing her hair in the blood of the man who was the reason of her helplessness by being humiliated in front of her husbands and the Assembly court.

However, the story by Devi narrates a different story of different aspect of struggle. There seems to be a vast difference in the era and story, but what remains same is the patriarchal

dominance. Use of male power against woman's body and her dignity. Generations got changed, but the mentality and behaviour remained same and somehow even seems to remain same further. Dopdi Mejhen, the main protagonist of the story is being shown as a brave character from the beginning of the story itself who participates in a revolt against the political leaders and attacks Surja Sahu and bring back the water in the wells of their village which is the only source for them. She is a tribal woman who fought for the security and rights of her people accompanied by her husband Dulna Majhi. Senanayak is the male character who unfolds and develops the plot of the story. He kills Dulna and manages to arrest Dopdi who was a rebel and fighting against the system of corruption. From the very beginning, Dopdi was being portrayed brave, until Senanayak urge to use himself in weakening Dopdi by sexually assaulting her through gang rape along with his army who are vowed to protect the country against inhumanities. But the next day she doesn't fail to show her bravery in front of everyone, refusing to put on the clothes and go naked as there was no real man left in the crowd since they already lost their identity as a man by unclothing her. A man is not to be identified man the moment he uses his male power over a woman physically, emotionally or mentally. Draupadi's actions and naked body frightened Senanayak resulting in his defeat. The second story Stanadayini, meaning a professional mother woman is a representation of Yashoda, the foster mother of Lord Krishna, wife of Nandagopa who feed and brought up Lord Krishna despite of not being his biological mother. As so Jashoda, the main protagonist of the story Stanadayini by profession in the story belonging from a Brahmin background trades her milk to a family aiming to earn her living. She employs her breast in feeding the children of Haldar's house where she gets compared to a mother cow. But later she gets diagnosed by breast cancer, even gets denied for treatment from her own family and children believing that cancer doesn't own any cure. She becomes the prey of discrimination against the society and also those who happened to grow up with the milk she fed. She loses the rights of motherhood and wife. Her

life didn't any value for her closed ones as for them she was just a mother to take care of their hunger and other household needs. She was left to die alone losing her identity and memories despite of being mother to many children. Motherhood cannot be directed as a profession for earning method as it's a relation between a woman and her offspring whom she carries in her body, providing all the essential care before and afterbirth. Motherhood encompasses personal, emotional and familial dimensions. Gangor, the protagonist of the third story, Behind the Bodice: Choli ke Pichhe is shown as the one who happens to attract a journalist and photographer, Upin Puri who gets distracted by her breasts after his frustrated busy day. Mahasweta Devi here shows the difference in high class and subaltern by portraying female character, Shital who gets concerned about Gangor's physic where Gangor's worry was only food and shelter. Gangor gets blamed for being captured in a portrait as being blamed as prostitution which was none of her fault or awareness. Discrimination against women with respect to class and financial status is also seen to be strongly reflecting in the story. Gangor raises her voice against Upin by refusing his payment for clicking her pictures saying a recovery of humiliation against women is not money. Women's body is not an object to made use of despite of her refusal or unawareness. India is a country where our ancestors did worship women as an identification of Goddess *Shakti* meaning the power. Taking birth of a baby girl is taken to as a blessing of Goddess *Laxmi*, who is a representation of fortune and wealth in the house.

“During the Vedic age, women were held in high esteem. They enjoyed equality with men in every sphere of life. No religious rite could be performed without their presence. They occupied an important place in the social and religious life.” (Ahmed, P-3)

“The girls were married after attaining full maturity. The marriages were normally performed according to the wish of the parents, but the girls also had the rights to choose their own husbands with the consent of their parents in *swayamvara*. It is mentioned in

the *Rig Veda*, “The women, gentle in nature and graceful in form, select from among many, their own loved ones as their husbands.” Marriages were performed for money and love both, in the house of the bride’s parents.” (Ahmed, P-4)

The history of India far off from the mythological stories shows how women possessed respect and equality in the society. Women were taken to be as that child and individual of the society and family who were worshipped. It was believed that women were the individual members of the society who should be adored, like children since their birth. And the irony is women in the same country are tied up by the societal authorities by creating boundaries, borders, discrimination, domination, subalternity, patriarchy etc. who effect barriers against them and treat them like second-class citizens among other things. Everywhere in the world, even the land itself is identified to be as female whole around. A woman’s characterization would be questioned the moment she somehow manages to raise voice against all the societal created norms.

In the stories she compares the generation with respect to changes where the wrong thoughts of the society still remain same as that of the bygone old generations. She talks about the cheap mentality of the society where a woman who pays off her whole life for the sake of her children and family is later being left to suffer alone in her disabilities in the story of the *Breast Giver*. The children who grew up with the milk of Jashoda among whom some were not even her biological children and her husband who fails to take over the financial responsibilities of his family and hands over to his wife also leaves her alone, discriminates her for her weak body which was once the source of living for them. Devi shows how a woman was treated as a commodity until her active ability. The source of motherhood that keeps alive the relationship between mother and child through nourishment gets transformed to commodity. Jashoda was treated as a machine that produces milk. The most pure relationship in the whole Universe was served as business. And then she gets unwanted treatment after passing her middle age and

breast milk. This shows the objectification of woman on the basis of her physic and beauty or appearance as how a mother was left valueless once her breast milk started getting empty to feed further.

The society gives unwanted treatment to women once her value of service comes to end. Women are subjected to unwelcome treatment in society in a variety of ways, including uneven pay, limited professional possibilities, expectations about roles and beauty, and even physical or emotional assault. These injustices might come from deeply ingrained biases and cultural practices that promote gender inequity.

Also the third story of the book shows how a woman herself discriminates another woman for being a belonging of lower caste in compared to her. She comments on Gangor as to be an employee of prostitution for having an attractive body and belonging of a poor family with no ways of earning and choosing prostitution for the sake of survival. The story exposes the exploitation and oppression that women experience in the workplace and in society as a whole. It exposes the brutal realities of gender discrimination, economic inequity, and the fight for dignity and empowerment. Devi's art frequently targets societal issues and marginalized groups.

Devi, through her short stories describes various aspects of women's body which plays the role of satisfaction and pleasure for men. She also focuses on the differences in upper class and lower class through which women also has to be the prey of discrimination as shown in the story of Gangor. We come across such stories of women being humiliated with respect to her caste, colour and community in many novels and stories from subaltern point of view. We often witness situations in a family where woman discriminating another woman can be seen. Usually a mother sets up restrictions to her daughters aiming her to make a deserving woman so as to get her a good groom. She would throw all the societal norms on her daughter to follow

which she has been following from her childhood. Also the mother-in-law would be the one to set up all the possible restrictions and rules for the daughter in law where she herself is also a woman who is better aware about the problems and situations that women faces in their lives. But the son of the house are never put under any kind of rules and norms, his every evil behaviours, habit and intentions are forgiven just because he is a man who is considered to be the superior of the house. Women are kept as option or choice for men, which is why only women suffer from marital issues. A woman would be judged by another women if she remains unmarried for long time and also if she gets married in a young age without being concerned about the difficulties and situations that the other woman is going through. Women themselves doesn't own and accept the equality within their own community which would never result in the end of marginalization against women. It is directed as men would lead a privileged life, believed to be as standard for experiences of human and the women's life will be identified by the relation to males, living a subservient life.

Chapter 3: Females as Heroic Figures (in Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi, Breast Giver and Behind the Bodice: Choli ke Pichhe")

Devi draws her characters with the representation of the heroic figures of ancient Indian mythological stories. Her stories raise voice against the muted and silent women in the society. It forms a discourse of marginality with the assurance of space to struggle and mark a spot of bravery. Draupadi relates the story of a female rebel Dopdi with the ancient female warrior of Indian History from the epic *Mahabharata* as both the characters manages to take strong revenge against their humiliation despite of their weak physic. Both the characters didn't let those men achieve in their evil intentions but instead fought back even with their so-called weak body after their dehumanization and marks a spot of bravery in the patriarchal society. As in Draupadi, Devi defines the strength and sense of voice against subalternity as so the

woman who becomes victim of gang rape by group of men who takes advantage of a helpless lonely woman being caught in their camp. A man loses his masculinity once he happens to take advantage over a woman sexually despite of her refusal or wish. How can a man consider himself to be characterized with masculine characters and powers when he uses his strength over a woman just to weaken her physic sexually, emotionally and mentally.

“Draupadi stands up. She pours the water down on the ground. Tears her piece of cloth with her teeth. Seeing such strange behaviour, the guard says, She’s gone crazy, and runs for orders. He can lead the prisoner out but doesn’t know what to do if the prisoner behaves incomprehensibly. So he goes to ask his superior.” (Devi, P32)

“She looks around and chooses the front of Senanayak’s white bush shirt to spit a bloody gob and says, There isn’t a man here that I should be ashamed. I will not let you put my cloth on me. What more can you do? Come on, *counter* me-come on, *kounter* me-? Draupadi pushes Senanayak with her two mangled breasts, and for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed *target*, terribly afraid.” (Devi, P33)

Devi’s Dopdi in the story was justified not only as a victim but also an Avenger who fought back which implies to a heroic nature of the character. Unlike the story in *Mahabharata*, Indraprastha’s Draupadi being unclothed by the Kauravas in the Kuru Court in front of her husbands and other followed men. Draupadi keeps a promise of leaving her hair untied until the day her husband Bhima take revenge of her humiliation and bring the blood of Dushasana so as she bathed her hair in his blood. In the above paragraph, Devi shows the bravery of her character Dopdi. Dopdi suffers gang rape by Senanayak’s army all alone being caught in the camp. She was raped brutally the whole night by the group army of Senanayak. The next day they take her to the Burra Sahib’s tent as she was known to be the rebel who was being caught.

Dopdi goes out with naked body refusing to put on clothes they offered to her saying there's no men left in the crowd whom she shall be ashamed of to face naked as they all have already raped her throughout the night. If they being a man didn't feel ashamed of harassing a woman, then what is left for a woman to be ashamed of to face them naked? Her naked body frightens the crowd of men which was a way to weaken her the night before. She uses her own body as a weapon. They are no more man whom she shall pay respect or feel shy to face naked.

In our society, the ideals, definitions, norms of a men are to be respected and honoured all the time. Our traditional rules are characterized in such a way that men are always given the first power to keep their opinion. Men are seen as the superior and saviour. But what about those cases and situations where those saviours make negative use of their power over women? Why do men's opinion and choices always hold the first priority? India is a democratic country. It is characterized by the principles of equality and freedom. But the democracy of a country goes in vain when the citizens continue to follow the tradition of discrimination against each other with respect to sex. Even rituals and history of the country India recalls as women to be worshiped.

There are certain stories and fictionalized novels of women as being heroic who comes over and fights back and proves themselves to be brave. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* also portrays the story of discrimination and amusement against the black women who had to be the victim of slavery and live their lives for the sake of service to the white family during the time of American Civil War. She expresses the trauma that went through the lives of black women in those days in their struggle of survival casting the story of Sethe and her family. It seemed the family's profession was a service to the whites where they were enslaved in a house named Sweet Home owned by the schoolteacher. Discrimination against women plays another level of ironic role in the novel. The white women were victimized with gender discrimination. But on the other side black women were victim of both gender discrimination and racial

discrimination at the same time. Black women were living valueless life like those of animals. Morrison shows how Sethe, a mother comes at a point where she had to kill one of her children aiming not to not let them live the life she lived as being victim of sexual disorder in the hands of whites. She chose death over living a life of such harsh slavery. The tragedy shown in this novel is how a mother who takes over her child for nine long months in her womb could think of taking the life of that child in the dark fear of throwing her in the well of slavery and rescue through the way of ending her life forever. A mother is one who fights against all the disabilities that comes towards her children without letting her children to suffer or hurt. Morrison shows the bravery of Sethe in the story by mentioning a mother who is a saviour to the children herself decides to take their life for the sake of their freedom. How far can a mother go just to rescue her children from the evil world. Sethe's journey from enslavement to freedom after the American Civil War and end of the slavery system against the blacks is marked by immense struggles and trauma, yet she manages to fight back with unwavering determination to protect her children and save them from the evil hands of whites. Her actions, including the decision to kill her own child rather than to see her return to slavery, are controversial but it sheds light on her brave deeds and her refusal to let her children suffer the same disorders she endured. Despite facing all the societal issues and internal turmoil, Sethe's actions can be seen as a evidence to her agency and autonomy in the society that sought to strip her of both. Morrison presents Sethe as a complex and multifaced character, whose experiences reflect wide situations and narrative of African American women throughout history of America. Sethe's resilience in the face of adversity serves as a powerful demonstration to the strength and endurance of African American women proving her a heroic figure and tribute of their indomitable spirit. In the society the body of women doesn't own value of survival in the eyes of society which is why society urges to put women in the back or as second option all the time and always keep women as the target to dehumanize and dominate or even abuse through

sexual disorder forcibly. Society never accepts the totality of rights, freedom and independence for women.

The same issue follows in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, where the clashes of marginality of a woman within her own family surrounding before and after marriage is depicted. The play can be seen from a feminism perspective including its exploration of the gender roles and oppression of women in the 19th century. The play explores the themes of gender, marriage and identity roles. The play follows story of Nora Helmer, the main protagonist who is being deprived of her opinion and rights throughout her life before marriage and after marriage. Nora's voyage throughout the play, from an obedient wife who would never complain to any of her husband's opinion to an independent woman, reflects feminist themes of female empowerment and liberation from patriarchal restrictions proving her as a heroic figure in the play. She spends her entire life living under the rules and restrictions her family did set for her. The play shows how a woman fails to own her identity and rights within her own family background as where Nora was being dominated in her own surrounding. She was deprived in such a way that she didn't even have the right to support her own husband during his weak financial period in fear of not letting her husband lose his masculine ego and standard in front of his friends and followed society. But the play takes a turn by its end showing Nora's decision to leave her husband, Torvald Helmer which symbolizes her rejection of societal expectations and her assertion of her own autonomy and agency as women. Additionally, the play also critiques the issues of marriage and the unequal power dynamics between a couple, further underscoring its feminist themes. The play portrays the conditions of women, highlighting their lack of agency and autonomy within the society showing how the main protagonist receives childlike treatment by her husband and how she is always expected to fulfill the traditional roles of being wife and mother without any complain against. The play draws the image of suffocating societal expectations placed on women, their lack of economic

and legal independence, and the consequences of challenging gender norms. Nora's journey towards self-discovery and empowerment reflects the broader struggle for women's rights during the era. The title of the play *A Doll's House* itself represents the confinement and societal expectations placed upon women during that time period presenting Nora as a doll in the house who is controlled and manipulated by societal norms and her husband. The slamming of the door at the end of the play symbolizes her liberation from these constraints and her assertion of independence proving women as strong figure in the society to fight against all the dehumane deeds and behaviour of the patriarchal society.

“NORA

Maybe. But you neither think nor talk like the man I could bind myself to. As soon as your fear was over-and it was not fear for what threatened me, but for what might happen to you-when the whole thing was past, as far as you were concerned it was exactly as if nothing at all had happened. Exactly as before, I was your little skylark, your doll, which you would in future treat with doubly gentle care, because it was so brittle and fragile. [*Getting up.*] Torvald-it was then it dawned upon me that for eight years I had been living here with a strange man, and had borne him three children-. Oh, I can't bear to think of it! I could tear myself into little bits!” (Ibsen, 125)

The words said by Nora in the above line proves her act of bravery against her husband's domination over her. She mentions that for her husband Torvald, she was just a lifeless creature (doll) which is why he treated her according to his wish and desire. Her own opinion, wish and desire didn't have any value in front of her husband as he would always deny to agree to her words. The society views women to be as valueless and man to be not characterized with male

characters within him the moment he happens to obey or even listen to the viewpoint of women. So till the end of the play, Ibsen shows Nora's rebirth and definition as a strong character as portraying Nora's strong step against her husband and decision to no longer live the suppressed life she has been living with her husband suffocated and trapped under the walls of her own house. Nora expresses her frustration and sense of betrayal feeling against her husband after her realization as how she had been living with a partner who denies to understand her emotions and feelings, also the respect and love she carries for him despite of their years of togetherness and being parent of three children.

Showing Mahasweta Devi's works as Heroic (Exploring Heroic Female Characters in other works of Mahasweta Devi)

Mahasweta Devi often symbolizes heroism in her works. She showcases the bravery of marginalized community against exploitation and oppression. Being a feminist writer, through her works she lights a lamp of courage in the room filled with trauma and voiceless people. She writes about the real incidents that often happened to occur in the lives of tribal people. The characters in her works battled against dehumanization with remarkable strength and proved themselves to be heroic in their own right.

Devi's famous notable works follows:

1. *Breast Stories*: This book is a collection of short stories of Mahasweta Devi first published in Bengali language in 1978, later translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in 1997. It is one among the most famous works of Devi as the stories explores the themes like gender, sexuality, oppression, suppression, marginality and subalternity. Each story delves into the struggles of women by focusing on their physic as the point of resilience. The book is a complete portrayal of

strength of women in the patriarchal Indian society. She draws connection of the present generation with the Indian myths representing her characters to be as brave as those female warriors of Indian mythological stories in the stories of the book. She argues that bravery of women still exists within us in the present generation also. The stories of this book talks about the marginalization, discrimination, domination, avoidance of equality and most importantly questioning on women's body, judging and valuing women with respect to her appearance and beauty. However she adds women raising voice and fighting back against the societal norms and saving herself all of her own despite of tolerance of all the sexual disorders that she gets tied up with. The first and second story relates present generation with the past as so how women being brave and heroic is being witnessed by us since generations before generations. There are certain stories of female freedom fighters of India who became martyrs for the sake of country's freedom. Even there were male during that period, but still females were seen to be more enthusiastic and patriots. If males are believed to be as superiors then how come men of those time didn't manage to take over the position of the female freedom fighters. Male powers are not to humiliate women.

The third story also follows the same issue but with a twist. Discrimination of women against men is a common issue. But the story here shows a discrimination of woman against woman. Women themselves denies the equality between each other with respect to caste, class, colour, status etc. Devi in these book talks about all the possible clashes and disorders of women in the Indian society and shows how women have the guts to protect themselves of their own when the limit of tolerance gets extreme.

2. *The Hunt: The Hunt* is another famous work of Mahasweta Devi originally written in Bengali and translated into English by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The story was published in 1995 in an anthology named *Imaginary Maps*. This story often celebrates a moment of bravery and ability of a woman. The story follows the bravery of an 18th year old Anglo-Indian girl named Mary Oraon who takes over the life of Collector Singh who accomplishes to show evil behaviour to her and take advantage of her attractive physic believing her to be helpless and weak. The story is about interconnectedness of gender and caste marking in the complex realities of marginalized society where women are bordered. The title itself depicts bravery in the story as the main protagonist of the story hunts the life of a malevolent. Devi proves that no matter about the women being weaker than men in the sense of power and strength, as being believed by the society. Women too can fight against the dehumanization and save themselves from being victimized through such sexual disorders. Men doesn't have the right to take over on a women's body without her awareness or refusal. Assuming women to be weak and helpless can be said as the biggest mistake of those man who manages to take advantage of women being alone as it happened in the story that Collector Singh who didn't leave a chance to tease and manipulate Mary through his bad intentions got killed brutally by her and had to sacrifice his life.

3. *Hajar Churashir Maa (Mother of 1084)*: This Bengali novel was published in the year 1974, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The novel highlights the Naxalite movement and trauma of Sujata, who is being portrayed as a strong

mother. Hypocrisy plays another important role in the novel focusing on the representation of a mother and son where Sujata seeks to be aware of her son, Brati's life and death despite of the gender dynamics and all the challenges in the patriarchal society. Devi also portrays the social injustice against the so called underprivileged and marginalized class of the society showing Brati's involvement in the Naxalite movement where he gets encountered by the police ironically gets killed. The story of the novel follows Sujata's thirst for knowledge regarding her son's life and motive of being a member of Naxals. Naxal refers to member, participant or supporter of the Naxalite Movement. The movement's main origin is the village of Naxalbari in West Bengal in the late 1960s, followed by the name of the movement. The main aim of Naxals were to overthrow the evil restrictions and politics of Indian government through armed struggle and establishment of a communist state which is why the movement was often declared to be as terrorist organization. They often did operate in the rural areas habituated by the tribals for their rights in the marginalized society. Along the way of her investigation, Sujata discovers certain characters who shares about Brati's experiences and also social and political context of the time. Throughout the novel, Devi draws the attention of the readers towards the theme of motherhood, social and political injustice, identity and loss by referring the love of a mother towards her children as Sujata's quest for truth and justice for her son. The novel shows the passion and bravery of a mother for the sake of love and affection.

Chapter4: Conclusion

Mahasweta Devi in *Breast Stories* presents the struggle of women portraying the relation with past and present. Through the book she tries to highlight mainly on the issues that women are being tied in the norms of patriarchal authorities run by the male community and taking over the rights of women's freedom and independence in the society. In the present generation the world has been heading towards progress and development. Both males and females are seen as breaking the records of success and high achievements one after another. Women are no longer less than men in the field of liberation and education, but yet there seems a long more way to go for women to enjoy the actual freedom until and unless the society attempts to change its mentality of considering women always a step backward in compared to men. Devi in her works questions conventional ideas of heroism and emphasizes the autonomy, bravery, and resiliency of women in the face of marginalization, exploitation, and persecution through her compelling stories. Devi honors the courage and tenacity of women to establish their individuality and reclaim their voices by presenting female characters who face and subvert patriarchal structures, societal standards, and institutional injustices. These women become heroic figures by means of their hardships and victories, which inspires the readers to reevaluate and redefine heroism outside of traditional male-centric ideologies. In addition to illuminating the complex realities of Indian women, "Breast Stories" is a potent monument to their resilience and ability to stand up for what they believe in.

The real sense of freedom and independence is still left unexperienced by the women despite of India's independence since 1947. The joy of independence still seems to be not to the fullest sense for women, as they are still left marginalized and kept in the state of subaltern no matter how educated or how strong her mentality and emotions are. She would

be taught the norms and restrictions since her birth itself and would grow up in the limitations of rights, dependency towards men. The dark spot of discrimination in a society somehow seems impossible to get erased of from the mindset of the peoples. Its being seen a woman herself discriminating or dehumanizing another woman with respect to her caste, colour and status. Even women themselves teach their daughters to get dependent on their fathers and brothers. And even would deny to let their daughters raise voice against this inequality. How would the mentality in a society be changed when there seems to be no equalities in the thoughts between women themselves. A change from within is only a way to bring change from a crowd, group and society.

Mahasweta Devi's works not only depict the oppression of women, but also appeal for societal change and fairness. She promotes unity, empowerment, and opposition to the systems that subjugate women. Her works cover not only the abjection of women but also acts like a voice for change and a step towards equality. Overall, Mahasweta Devi's representation of women's oppression in her works is distinguished by a deep empathy for the oppressed, a commitment to social justice, and a forceful critique of repressive structures. She encourages readers to confront hard truths and work to create a more egalitarian and inclusive society. Her stories challenges the traditional ideals of heroism, bringing disadvantaged voices and experiences to the forefront. Devi honors female protagonists that navigate challenging social, political, and economic settings with fortitude and perseverance while simultaneously emphasizing women's collective capacity to create change. Her works are a monument to the determined spirit of women, prompting readers to reconsider traditional notions of heroism and realize the diverse character of female agency. Mahasweta Devi's literary legacy shines as a beacon of hope and empowerment, inspiring every readers to work for a more equitable and inclusive society.

Devi's portrayal of the female characters as heroic in her literary works reflects her phenomenal voice and knowledge of the challenges that women in India experience, most importantly those from tribal and lower-caste backgrounds who experience caste discrimination against their own society. By narrating the stories, she lights up light of brightness on the many dark traumas of their experiences, deconstructing their ability, power, strength, courage, and perseverance in the face of an evil-behaved society. Devi's strong concept of characterizations and strong story composing not only encourages these women's bravery, but also emphasizes the need of acknowledging their contributions to society via readers of her works. Her works often serve as a compelling reminder of the importance of increased bravery around and representation in heroism narratives, challenging dominant narratives that frequently ignore the peoples who undergo hardships and triumphs but ironically they remain unrepresented in nature.

Devi's works often offer a powerful critique of society norms that suppress women through gender-related issues, paying more attention to those from lower castes or indigenous communities in her stories. Her writing highlights the spirit, courage, and agency that women manage to give birth in them, portraying them as change agents in their own lives and communities. Devi's stories of bravery are relevant to modern concerns about feminism, social justice, and representation. Her presentation of female characters as heroic people provides a counter-narrative to conventional preconceptions and broadens the scope of how women's experiences can be shared and appreciated through writings and narrating in the literary field. Overall, Devi's pays certain contributions to literature and feminist debate, also encouraging the readers and the female victims more investigation and knowledge into the complexity of gender, power, and heroism that has been taking place in the society through her literary works that focus mostly on victimization of women..

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