



Rape of Human Rights in Mahasweta Devi's works *The Hunt and Draupadi*

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Abstract: Mahasweta Devi was a prolific writer who diligently and courageously unmasked the plight of the downtrodden. She was a passionate social activist and a journalist. Thus, her fictions always had an element of truth in them. She worked amidst the tribals and was aware of the deprivation that they faced on a regular basis. The infringement of human rights of these tribals and the utter ignorance of the government on this matter has been portrayed in many of her works. *The Hunt* and *Draupadi* are two such stories that document the poignant predicament of tribal girls and their struggle through it.

Key Words: human rights, tribal, ignorance

Introduction: Though the movement to protect, preserve and propagate 'human rights' is a modern one, but the concept and the actual urge for it in some form or other appear to be as old as human civilization itself. In fact, the recognition of man's dignity as a human being, who is the most powerful agent in cultivating and exploiting human resources for the advancement of civilization was ever active in the formation and progress of human society. But ironically enough, while men in general are extremely anxious to secure and safeguard their rights and privileges, some among them being highly covetous and ambitious have been seeking throughout the course of history not only to rob the less privileged people of their natural right to live with dignity in consonance with their creative urge and capacity, but also to make devious designs to violate and desecrate their basic rights to manifest their human potentiality. This is precisely the reason why calculated attempts are adopted by some person or persons, or social and religious institutions and even the state machinery who, on various pretexts, seize or misappropriate the rights of the weaker sections of the society at the mercy of the mighty ones. The assault on the rights of the individuals may come from the conservative, dogmatic or fanatic persons or power-mongers who would like to stifle the voice of reason and conscience. In fact, the rape of human rights has been so regular and rampant that it affects most sections of the society, in particular the women, the children, the old men and the weak and the unprotected. However, such a sad situation slowly awakened the conscience of some intellectuals and statesmen whose united will and effort ultimately led to the adoption of the charter to human rights by the United Nations in 1948.

Literature being a reflection of the conditions of the society and the world provides pervasive and penetrating evidences of sheer violence to human rights which is

perhaps more rabid in the so-called enlightened society than in the distant past. Looking back at the past, one may find various evidences of devious designs and determined attempts to rob men of their natural right or their own choice even from the ancient epics of both the Western and Eastern Worlds. So, it is seen that just as Durjyodhan in the *Mahabharat* by misappropriating the rights of the Pandavas to the throne of Indraprastha invites his own destruction and the misfortunes of others, so does the wrath of Achilles and the arrogance of Agamemnon in Homer's *Iliad* become responsible for the wreck of both the Trojans and the Grecians. Indeed, the Homeric epic is replete with characters who, in spite of their valour and heroism, do not hesitate to violate the rights of men and women and even speak in the rudest language to offend them. And their attitude towards women were utterly disrespectful, they often proved themselves inhuman and in the satisfaction of their carnal desire and inflated ego.

Mahasweta Devi could be regarded as a valiant rebel who has fearlessly exposed the intensity and extremity of hate and inhumanity of one section of men against the helpless suffering of another section of men and women who were made to undergo unrelieved misery and suffering inflicted by a richer and more socially and politically powerful class of people. She feels the tragedy of these men with the sense and sensibility of both an artist and activist. And makes her readers realize the utter barbarity of their behavior towards their fellow beings. It is because of this wholesale humiliation and deprivation of a weaker section of the society, Mahasweta felt, that the country's progress as a civilized society has been retarded beyond measure. No wonder, Mahasweta has been astounded by the appalling apathy of the successive governments in the State and at the Centre who have callously allowed a system of social and economic injustice to be perpetrated by some perverted people who are fiscally and politically powerful to practise the principle that might, physical or political or financial, is the only right which they are pleased to exercise on the lower classes of society at their sweet will. Mahasweta is rightly outraged at the utter anarchy of this attitude of the affluent who have the audacity to take the governmental authority for a ride in order to indulge in acts of anarchy at their pleasure.

'I think a creative writer should have a social conscience. I have a duty towards society'. (*Imaginary Maps*,ix) This is what she says in one of her conversations with Gayatri Chakroborty Spivak. She was, according to Spivak, instrumental in wiping out the lines of divisions among the tribes as she wants to see them as 'a united community in India'. She formed the Adim Jati Aikya Parishad (Tribal Unity Forum) in order to achieve her mission. In deed Mahasweta was possessed with an extremely sensitive 'social conscience' which urged and inspired her to probe deep into the malady of the tribals in many parts of the country, though her role as an activist was largely restricted to West Bengal. Mahasweta saw for herself the abysmal poverty and pain, torture and persecution of the tribal men and women. So, the artist in her not only felt and realized their gravity and intensity but also effectively expressed the extent of their inconsolable agony and anguish in the forms of excruciating artistic etchings. It is indeed difficult, almost impossible, to plumb the depth of their almost

perennial pain by an outsider, even if he/she has the feelings to realize such rude reality of the savagery of so called civilized beings who stoop to utter animality to satiated their greed for money or lust for sex which is actually almost unquenchable. No wonder all her stories and novels are realistic reflections of the unrelieved and total tragedy to which these unfortunate men and women of the so called low class were victims.

Mary Oraon's 'Machete': Mahasweta Devi's *The Hunt* introduces her collection of short stories entitled *Imaginary Maps*. The story revolves around the central character of Mary Oraon, a tribal girl. Mary is the protagonist of the story and all other characters are etched on in a manner that helps to bring out the many different facets of her character. It is through her interaction with the other characters that we get to understand the personality of Mary. The character of Mary is not entirely fictional as Mahasweta had the opportunity to observe a tribal girl like her when she went to Lapra. She describes her thus: 'When I went to Lapra I would see this light-skinned girl in a yellow sari worn in the village way, on the back of a big old buffalo, sitting in the most relaxed manner, chewing sugar- cane. Maybe chewing popcorn. I see her in Tohri market, bargaining for fruit and other produce, chewing pan [spiced betel leaf], smoking biri [tobacco- leaf cigarettes], arguing and always getting the upper hand. Such a personality. Then I learned what she had done on Janiparab day in order to marry the Muslim boy'. (*Imaginary Maps*, xi) Mahasweta Devi was so mesmerized by her personality that she decided to pen her story. But *The Hunt* is not only a story about a girl but it is the story that encompasses the entire tribal community in its central element of oppression and exploitation. Mahasweta Devi is not an ivory-tower writer. In spite of her work being labelled as stereotype in term of theme, one has to understand that she writes for a purpose and her writings are not merely to amuse people but to awaken their conscience and bring about a change in the attitude of people. She says in the 'Foreword' to *Rakasi Kora* : 'I am often asked how long am I to bore my readers with same themes. My answer is, as long as hunger, poverty, naked exploitation by the rich and the landed, oppression by the government machineries continue, I will continue to write the same thing'. (Devi, ii)

Mahasweta's *The Hunt* is one such story of oppression of the *adivasis* or the ancient people and thus by corollary an exploitation of nature. But *The Hunt* is also noteworthy because of its portrayal of the courage and determination of the protagonist Mary Oraon. She, much like Dopodi in her story, *Draupadi*, is a woman who fights for her honour and establishes herself in the pre dominantly male society. Dopodi is a rape victim but she could stand stark naked in the face of the Senanayak who in spite of his supposed valour, becomes afraid of her physical body. In case of Mary, Tehsildar Singh attempts to rape her but is ultimately killed by the superior courage and cunning of Mary. So the motif of 'body' is extremely important in both these stories. Val Plumwood, a renowned socialist ecofeminist, has suggested that 'the body is feminine associated' but it is even more clearly associated with other oppressed groups, such as "primitives", animals, slaves and those who labour with their bodies'. (*Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 116) However it is the strength

of mind, determination and courage behind the body that actually achieves the apparently impossible task for a woman of heroic mettle. But such expression of fearlessness and courage may not be available in every man and woman. Hence it is necessary that the principle of human right is properly enforced and protected for those who are engaged in their struggle for minimum human dignity and honour.

Evidently *The Hunt* is a story about a woman attempting to liberate herself from the capitalist clasp of the dominant section of people in the society. The story begins with a description of the landscape of Kuruda focusing mainly on the train line and the station there. 'The bill board says 'Kuruda Outstation, Abandoned'' (*Imaginary Maps*, 1)- The word that is to be noted here is 'abandoned' because it is suggestive of the abandonment of the poor tribals from the care and conscience of the government. In fact, whatever wrong or evil goes around in the area seems not be under the surveillance of the government but is only controlled and dominated by the rich landlords and unscrupulous contractors. *The Hunt* being the first story in the book *Imaginary Maps*, it can well be said that this word also sets the mood of all the following stories which give us a pathetic picture of the hunter and the hunted. Again, the word 'abandonment' is the key element which connect all the stories and all the characters in an unfortunate state of desertion and neglect. This 'abandonment' of the government permeates through the humans and touches upon the jungle which becomes the breeding ground and also the victim of all kinds of oppression. Kurada thus remain abandoned probably because it is not profitable for the contractors and money-makers. Mahasweta, therefore, comments 'now the station is Tohri... Tohri is also a coal halt. The train picks up coal. There are surface collieries all around... But Tohri's real benefactors are the timber brokers' (*Imaginary Maps*,1) The intrusion of the 'outsiders' in Tohri is mainly based on profit. It becomes profitable if Tohri has a station as it is surrounded by collieries and is also a rich hub for sal trees while Kurada can remain abandoned. Tohri- Kuruda belt ' is a Sal-growing area. Sal- logs arrive night and day by truck. They are split in sawmills and sent in every direction. Tohri's bustle is an experience after the silence of Kuruda'. (*Imaginary Maps*,1) It may be noted in this context that the title of the story has already started to make sense as we see the hunt of the sal- growing forest by the timber brokers. The image of the sal-logs arriving and being sent to the saw-mill to be split, springs an image of dead bodies arriving and being sent to the crematorium and Kurada's silence therefore suggests the silence maintained for the departed souls. Thus the 'hunt' of the sal tree is a reflection of the exploitation of nature and oppression and total deprivation of the forest and human rights of the poor and their pathetic end.

The Hunt or *Shikar* is an intriguing documentation of exploitation and violation of human rights. Woven in the threads of fact and fiction, the story is intensely touching and Mary is a most courageous and captivating protagonist. Mary is a tribal girl belonging to the Oraon group but her uniqueness is hidden in the secret of her birth. She is no doubt a tribal but she also has the blood of her Australian father running in her veins. Thus at a glance she might not appear to be an Oraon, 'yet she is a tribal'. (*Imaginary Maps*,2) Therefore, she looks a bit unusual for an Oraon girl- 'tall, flat-

featured, light copper skin'. (*Imaginary Maps*,2) Her physical attributes draw much attention as she has 'countless admirers at Tohri market' and she is exceptionally confident of herself as 'she gets down at the station like a queen' (*Imaginary Maps*,2) and 'sits in her rightful place at the market'. (*Imaginary Maps*,2) She is regarded with respect and a kind of reverence by the other villagers, but in spite of that they do not consider her as their own as she was not able to find a boy amongst the Oraons. When Mrs. Prasad, the lady of the house where Mary and her mother Bhikni works, finds a prospective match for her with the gardener's son, Mary immediately rejects the proposal saying- 'No. Living in a shack, eating mush, the man drinking, no soap or oil, no clean clothes. I don't want such a life'. (*Imaginary Maps*,3) She has chosen her own mate, Jalim, a Muslim boy as he has already promised marriage to her. Therefore, Mary is no ordinary tribal girl, neither by appearance nor by personality or ability. She is strong-willed and determined and extremely hard-working as she does the work of twelve ayahs single-handedly in the Prasad's bungalow. Though there is a certain degree of dichotomy in the manner in which the other villagers perceive Mary for on the one hand, she is respected and at the same time she herself is aware that she does not belong to the 'inner circle' of the Oraon community. She is aware that '...had she resembled any Oraon girl-if her father had been Somra or Budhna or Mangla Oraon-the Oraons would not have let this marriage happen. Because she is the illegitimate daughter of a white father that the Oraons don't think of her as their blood and do not place the harsh injunctions of their own society upon her'.(*Imaginary Maps*,5) But that does not stop them from admiring her great qualities and her perseverance for a better life amidst the poverty around her. Mahasweta Devi rightly comments that 'women have a place of honour in the tribal society'. (*Imaginary Maps*, xi) and this does not change even for an illegitimate child. It is thus Mahasweta Devi seeks to protect and honour the human dignity and right of woman of self-respect and rectitude.

It appears clear that Mary is blessed with many qualities of character which made her dear to many people. She is a hard working woman- 'She is a most capable cowherd. She also sells custard apple and guava from the Prasad's orchards, driving terrifically hard bargains with the Kunjaras, the wholesale fruit buyers. She takes the train to Tohri with vegetables from the field. Everyone says Prasadji is most fortunate.' (*Imaginary Maps*,2) She is indeed, intelligent, resourceful and forward-looking. With Jalim also she has an arrangement that they will only marry when he saves a hundred rupees. Though she is empathetic about the pain that Jalim is taking to save the money, she does not inform him that she herself has saved ninety-two rupees.

She is a deft business woman and she has profitably negotiated with Mr. Prasad also. Whereas Bhikni gets a wage as the employee of the house, Mary works independently. She does the household work at the Prasad Bungalow for which she gets a free 'board and lodging, clothing and sundries' (*Imaginary Maps*,2) and she makes a huge profit for them by selling the fruits and vegetables from their field and in exchange of which Mary gets the permission to pick the fruits from their mahua tree (*basila latifolia*). She is aware that 'by government regulation, if there are mahua

trees on anyone's land in the forest areas, the right to the fruit goes to the picker'. (*Imaginary Maps*,3) Thus it is by dint of her hard work that she has earned the right to pick the fruits of the 'four mahua trees on the Prasad property'. (*Imaginary Maps*,3) Thus Mary can be safely regarded as a kind of a feminist capable of earning a decent living by safeguarding her rights as respectable woman. There remains no doubt that a character as dynamic as Mary can bring about a change not only for herself but for the entire tribal community as well as for any human society where a women's just rights are relentlessly violated.

In this context one is naturally reminded of Annette Kolonody who in her book *The Lay of the Land* describes the landscape as a virgin who is repetitively ravished and tormented by the insensitive male world. Tehsildar Singh lured the tribal workforce in the Tohri district with 'twelve annas daily for men, eight annas for women for trimming branches and carrying the pieced timbers to the truck' and 'a tiffin of cornmeal in the afternoon...Salt and cayenne with the meal.' (*Imaginary Maps*,7) Even though the village elders knew that the wage is extremely low but they knew that the hungry lot of tribal men will go insane if this offer was rejected. Poverty and hunger is their constant acquaintances thus the offer to stay and work in Kuruda itself seemed very lucrative to them. Apart from that 'after the final agreement the contractor gave six bottles of first quality country liquor to the six elders.' (*Imaginary Maps*,7). In this context, one is reminded of the legendary figure of Birsa Munda who as a rule prohibited the consumption of alcohol amongst the Mundas as he realized that liquor was the cause of many of their sufferings and subjugation and loss of the strength to protest and fight against injustice. In *Mother Earth*, commenting on deforestation and land acquisition policy C.K. Janu describes the plight of the tribals who are displaced from their natural habitat by the local landlords by offering the tribesmen intoxication and meagre supply of food.

Tehsildar Singh's interest in the sal plantation is with the intention of 'bhog' or utility of enjoyment and he wanted to use Mary too as a 'bhog samogree' or an object of lust. 'He thought, the business of felling trees in this forest is most profitable. Mary can make his stay profitable in the other sense as well'. (8) His immoral and evil intentions were not merely restricted to the illegal felling of the tree but was extended to harbouring feeling of possessive lust for Mary and so he wanted to ensnare her as well by any means, fair or foul. Naturally he wanted to exert his monetary and male dominance not only on nature but also on the poor girl's human body. But though Mary time and again sought to shun Tehsildar's amorous advances, but most unfortunately the more she rejected him, the more he became desperate to have her and in one occasion even showed the audacity and intemperance to grab her by the hand while she was coming back from the Tohri market. Even the driver of the timber truck Ratan Singh previously also assaulted Mary in a similar fashion. It seems ironical and a cruel commentary on the cowardice of male chauvinism that the contractor and the truck driver of the same sal trade showed the temerity to violate the honour of Mary. It is indeed clear and remarkably revealing of the reminiscence of the repetitive violations on the nature, both physical and human, by the same agent.

The story is purposely placed by Mahasweta Devi against the backdrop of Jani parab or the Festival of Justice to clearly suggest how sheer injustice is perpetually perpetrated on the poor who do not have the power and courage to rise in protest. 'For twelve years men run the hunt. Then comes the women's turn.' (*Imaginary Maps*, 11) So once in twelve years the women get a chance to mete out justice. As Mahasweta Devi points out in an interview with Gayatri C. Spivak- '...it was Jani Parab, the women's hunting festival day. She resurrected the real meaning of the annual hunting festival day by dealing out justice to a crime committed against the entire tribal society'. (*Imaginary Maps*, xi)

'At first Mary was scared. Struggling she lost her machete...Mary was able to spring out of his grasp...Tehsildar did not have his dark glasses on. Long sideburns, long hair, polyester trousers, pointed shoes, a dark red shirt on his back. Against the background of the spring songs Mary thought he was an animal'. (*Imaginary Maps*, 12) Mary's identification of Tehsildar Singh with an animal gives a nascent and hidden meaning to the Jani Parab for Mary. Mary has identified the animal she will 'hunt' on the occasion of the Parab. In *The Hunt*, Mary, the victim of an attempted rape thus becomes the agent through whom nature exacts its revenge from the oppression of men.

This fact has been dramatically demonstrated by Mahasweta Devi in this significant short story which has been appropriately entitled, 'The Hunt'. On the day of the Jani Parab 'Mary is wearing a new sari...Jalim's gift' (*Imaginary Maps*, 14) Jalim the betrothed of Mary, has, on one occasion, saved her from the clasp of Ranjit Singh, the driver of a timber truck and has vowed to marry her and protect her. Jalim, in contrast to the character of Tehsildar Singh and Ranjit Singh stands as the protector of Mary. She thus wears a sari gifted by him like an armour. 'In her coloured sari and red blouse', says the author, 'Mary is now like the flamboyant tree in motion. As if a bunch of flowers from that flamboyant tree is running in the wind. Red flowers on all sides. Everything is red'. (*Imaginary Maps*, 15) She is directly compared to nature in this line. Thus when Mary lures and kills Tehsildar it appears as if mother nature only has killed him. In *Women: The Last Colony* Maria Mies in her attempt to define the myth of man-the-hunter points out that 'the hunters main tools are not with which to produce life but to destroy it' (85). But Mary is a hunter who hunts the original hunter and thus her machete is not simply an instrument of destruction but rather the catalyst through which she will deal out justice on the pious occasion of the Jani Parab. Like the way an animal is tempted before it is hunted Mary also tempts Tehsildar and waits for him to shed the garb of human and become the animal that essentially he is. 'Mary laughed and held him, laid him on the ground...Mary lifts the machete, lowers it, lifts, lowers'. (*Imaginary Mapd*, 16) She takes her revenge but it is not only her individual revenge but it is an act of justice that was long pending. She has killed an agent of destruction. Tehsildar Singh is a symbol of destruction and appropriation not only of the forest but also of their culture by forcing the tribals to fell the sal trees. His lust for the female body and greed for the sal are intermingled in the entire fabric of the story. Mary's killing of Tehsildar is the ultimate victory of the subaltern over the

mainstream and an assertion of their very existence and independence. Mary's choice of the Jani Parab is equally significant as it is an event that comes only once in twelve years where women 'like the men they too go out with bow and arrow. They run in the forest and hill.' In olden days 'there were animals in the forest...Now the forest is empty, life wasted and drained, the hunt game meaningless. Only the day's joy is real'. (*Imaginary Maps*,12) But Mary made the Parab alive when she succeeded in making the biggest hunt by killing Tehsildar Singh and thus brought to the fore the real meaning and success of the hunting festival.

Dopdi Mejhen's 'ravished body': Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* is a phenomenal work in the sense that being a short story it was able to capture the unimaginable horrors of the Naxal revolution or as some critics say 'reign of terror' in a style almost graphic. The protagonist of the story Dopdi is a 27 year old tribal woman who worked as 'harvest' around the belt of Jharkhani. Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak in the Translator's Preface to *The Breast Stories* writes, 'Draupadi is the name of the central character. She is introduced to the reader between two uniforms and between two versions of her name. Dopdi and Draupadi. It is either that as a tribal she cannot pronounce her own Sanskrit name Draupadi, or the tribalized form, Dopdi, is the proper name of the ancient Draupadi.'(8) Mahasweta Devi has used both version of her name interchangeably in the story. The story of Dopdi is placed in the background of the Naxal rebellion in which she actively participated and considered herself as a comrade up and against the injustice under which they remained subjugated for centuries together. It is to be noted that the Naxal revolution was also the outcome of the years of violation of human rights by the landowners and other governmental machineries. Interestingly, *Draupadi* was first published in Bengali in a collection called *Agnigarbha* or 'the womb of fire' and indeed the story of Draupadi is of that fire that was present in the bowel of not only Draupadi but of all the oppressed tribal people. In fact after the ulgulan of Birsa Munda the Naxal revolution was one of those rare show of protest in which the tribals engaged themselves actively. Spivak points out, 'In the spring of 1967, there was a successful peasant rebellion in the Naxalbari area of the northern part of West Bengal. According to Marcus Franda, unlike most other areas of "West Bengal, where peasant movements are led almost solely by middle-class leadership from Calcutta, Naxalbari has spawned an indigenous agrarian reform leadership led by the lower classes including tribal cultivators. This peculiar coalition of peasant and intellectual sparked off number of Naxalbaris all over India.'"(*Breast Stories*,6) Mahasweta Devi thus by placing Draupadi as the central character of this story has achieved the dual purpose of revealing not only the severe violation of human rights during that period but have also exposed the violence that a woman in prison had to go through. Thus in a way it was not surprising that Mahasweta Devi chose the title as 'Draupadi'. *Draupadi* is not the story of the legendary wife of the Pandavas in the Mahabharata. Dopdi Mejhen is a tribal girl who was forced to face abysmal atrocity in a police lock-up which is ironically an instrument of justice. Draupadi in the *Mahabharat* too faced utter humiliation when Dushshashan tried to disrobe her publicly in the open court before all the Kaurav

stalwarts who were themselves the image of justice. Therefore in a way *Mahabharat's* Draupadi transcends the centuries gap and becomes the soul sister of Dopdi, the tribal girl.

Dopdi Mejhen the widow of Dulna Majhi is thus introduced to the readers as a notorious antisocial who has been working as informer for the rebellious Naxals. We have to remember here that though the Naxal movement was ignited by the tribals was later on joined by many young intellectuals who firmly believed that free India cannot progress with one section of the society continuously oppressing the weaker section. They wanted to help the tribals and launch an organized rebellion against the government. Mahasweta Devi has not romanticized the character of Dopdi. She is the most important character in the story and indeed a most worthy comrade but 'the decision-makers among the revolutionaries are, again 'realistically', bourgeois young men and women.' (*Breast Stories*, 11) Thus when Dopdi is apprehended she could hear Arijit's (an young intellectual who was working with Dopdi in the Jharkhani belt) voice inside her head instructing her- 'you must know when you have won, you must also acknowledge defeat and start the activities of the next stage'. (*Breast Stories*,30) So Dopdi 'ululates with the force of her entire being' (*Breast Stories*,31) to warn her comrades about the imminent danger. Dopdi Mejhen and his husband Dulna Majhi both were working with the naxals in conjugation to battle the age old subjugation of them. They were not only robbed of their right to land but their entire tribal identity was degraded by the upper class people. There has been incidents of utter inhumanity against them as in the case of Ganori Nagesia and Douloti Nagesia in Mahasweta Devi's story, *Douloti the Bountiful*. Ganori Nagesia was deformed when his master forced him to pull a bullock cart and Douloti Nagesia, a mere girl of fourteen was sold off to live the rest of her life as a kamiya-whore. Bond labour is in tribal language known as Kamiya. So while Ganori Nagesia was a born bond labour, Douloti Nagesia, his daughter is a kamiya whore. Numerous such incidents took place over centuries and some of them remain unwritten and unknown. It is only for writers and social activists like Mahasweta Devi that an average Indian who takes his fundamental rights bestowed by the government as granted could realize and sympathize with the millions who had to fight for their basic right to be considered as fellow human beings. Dopdi and Dulna are the offshoot of the unthinkable and unspeakable atrocities meted out to these people who have been almost forgotten by the government. Both husband and wife being aware that their life will be at danger were not shy from joining the band of Naxalites. They knew that people like Arijit, Malini, Shamu, Mantu, Jugal Mandal, Satish Mandal, 'Rana alias Prabir alias Dipak', (*Breast Stories*,27) are fighting for their cause and thus they were happy and contented being able to help them. Dulna even told Dopdi that perhaps in this war stricken land they will never have children and no family to call their own but 'landowners and moneylenders and policemen might one day be wiped out!'. (*Breast Stories*,27) Dopdi who loved and respected his husband was also proud of the fact that 'Dulna died, but...he didn't lose anyone else's life'. (*Breast Stories*,29) Thus Dulna's

death was not a cause of remorse for her but she became more resolute to help people like Arijit to continue with their mission.

It was Operation Bakuli in which both husband and wife participated to take revenge on the landowner Surja Sahu who had been exploiting them for a very long time. In fact with the assistance of a government official Surja Sahu 'dug two tube wells and three wells within the compound of his own house' when the entire district of Birbhum was going through severe drought. It appears that being the upper -caste only Surja Sahu can have any authority over water but the people belonging to the Austro-Asiatic tribes were not human enough to feel the pangs of hunger and thirst. Dulna requests others that he will have the first blow on Surja as it is he who contrived and manipulated to make Dulna's family a bond-labour for three generations. Dulna's statement only highlights the deprivation of his lot of people for ages together. It has been a saga of the violation of human rights which is one of the most important feature of a democratic, socialist, secular republic. Since the event at Bakuli, Dulna and Dopdi were marked as criminals who were to be shot at sight. No one questioned the disparity between Surja Sahu's abominable act of keeping all the water for himself but branded the Majhi couple as antisocials who are to be apprehended. In fact, as Mahasweta Devi sarcastically writes, that the Special forces in an attempt to find the couple succeeded only in killing many an innocent Santhals and she gives two reasons for this act-

'1. Underground couple' skill in self concealment.

2. not merely the Santhals but all tribals of the Austro- Asiatic Munda tribes appear the same to the Special Forces'(Breast Stories,17)

The tribes, therefore, have no 'singularity' of their own but they only seem to be black bodies sprawling around and at times trying to voice their opinions and thus they are to be killed even without thinking.

The same sentiment is apparent in the character of Senanayak, who was later on called to replace Captain Arjan Singh of the Special Forces. He points out that in the Army Handbook it is mentioned 'that the most despicable and repulsive style of fighting is guerrilla warfare with primitive weapons. Annihilation at sight of any and all practitioners of such warfare is the sacred duty of every soldier'. Thus Dulna was killed while he was having water at a stream and later on, his body is used as a bait to pull out Dopdi of her hiding. His body was neither cremated or buried but was made an instrument to capture Dopdi and other fugitives. Mahasweta Devi aptly describes this as 'the hunter's way, not the soldier's'.(Breast Stories,21) Again, when Dopdi realised that she is been followed and will soon be captured she prepares herself mentally against all kinds of torture and remembers how the young boy of twenty-two bit off his tongue when he was violently tortured by the agents of law keepers. She decides on the same. Dopdi knows how an encounter is carried out-' When they *kounter* you, your hands are tied behind you. All your bones are crushed, your sex is a terrible wound'.(Breast Stories,25) As Mahasweta Devi explains 'counter' is the abbreviation of encounter. Encounter killing is defined as 'killings by the police or the armed forces, allegedly in self-defence, when they encounter suspected gangsters or

terrorists' (Wikipedia.org) but Mahasweta Devi has deliberately used the word counter with a 'k' and has placed it in the mouth of Dopdi. Apparently it might seem that an illiterate tribal might pronounce the word incorrectly but the incorrect spelling of the word 'counter' actually points towards the malpractice in the name of encounter. In an authorial intervention, Mahasweta Devi asks a series of questions- 'why after confrontations are the skeleton discovered with arms broken or severed? Could armless men have fought? Why do the collar bones shake, why are legs and ribs crushed?' (*Breast Stories*,22) But she provides with no answer. The answer is silence. Silence from the government. 'The Neanderthal darkness' (*Breast Stories*,17) in which Dopdi and Dulna took refuge after the Operation Bakuli is the only reality of their life. The government's lack of interest in them could not bring them any light but they remained engulfed in the primitive darkness of degradation and deprivation. The Special Forces attempt to pierce that darkness is only through an armed search to find the instigators of the Bakuli incident. There is no attempt on the part of the government to extend a hand to pull them away from the darkness of deprivation. Finally, when Dopdi Majhen was 'apprehended' she remains calm and true to her husband and comrades as she did not reveal the location of their hideouts, but ululated with all the force of her being to signal at them. She was taken in for questioning and later on she was repeatedly raped by almost eight people before she collapsed. Her body was injured in places and 'her breasts are bitten raw, the nipples torn'. (*Breast Stories*,31) But even in that distraught state she stops herself from asking for water. She hopes that she has been left in the jungle with her hands and legs tied. She prefers to be eaten up by wild animals rather than been violated by these beasts. But her ordeal has not finished as another guard violates her dignity yet again. Interestingly, in the third section of the story the spelling of her name has been changed from Dopdi to Draupadi. Spivak points out that 'within a patriarchal and patronymic context, she (Draupadi, wife of the Pandavas) is exceptional, indeed *singular* in the sense of odd, unpaired, uncoupled' (*Breast Stories*,9). In a similar way, Dopdi is also unparalleled and singular when she refuses to be clothed and shouts out at the Senanayak, 'What's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man?' (*Breast Stories*,33) Dopdi's rape has strengthened her and her defiance to put on her clothes thus not only reiterates the fire in her womb but also gives an identity to the Austro-Asiatic tribes who cannot be distinguished by the Senanayak or his guards. Draupadi of the *Mahabharat* was disrobed right before her five valiant husbands who remained quiet and was only saved by the intervention of Lord Krishna, but Dopdi could not avoid her fate. There was no divine intervention that could save her yet both of them are victims of utter violation of human rights. It is impossible to measure the intensity of humiliation of both the Draupadis because in a way Draupadi of *Mahabharat* faced the same horror in spite of being the queen to five husbands, whereas Dopdi was a widow and she had only herself to protect her dignity. Thus in Draupadi and Dopdi become intermingled and their difference is completely obliterated.

Conclusion:

It may be noted that in the stories of Mary Oraon and Dopdi Mejhen, human rights have been tattered in the manner Dopdi tatters her clothes at the end of the story. But none of them are weak individuals who give in to their predators. Mary uses her machete to protect herself and Dopdi uses her naked, injured body to shake the foundation of the law when she moves towards the Senanayak ‘with her two mangle breasts’ (*Breast Stories*, 33) and ‘for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target, terribly afraid’. (*Breast Stories*, 33)

Mahasweta Devi, like most of her works in *The Hunt* and *Draupadi* too felt obliged to adopt two roles to combat these long standing curse of the society, that too in a country which boasts of a human heritage which has always upheld the dignity of men for the real uplift of the nation. In such a situation she thinks that she should and could do something substantial for the society if only she was able to play the roles of both an artist and a social activist. She is confident that both the roles are necessary in order to bring out some measure of fundamental reform in the existing order of the society which is steeped in a malady that needs serious care and concern from both the socially active and the artists and other intellectual and enlightened people of the country. Being herself a very conscientious and conscious artist, she has fully fathomed the power to portray and expose these deep seated malaise of the modern society which, in some form or other, may be found in various parts of the country. She has the conviction that with her capacity as a creative artist, she would be able to awaken the minds of men not only in this country but throughout the world to the stark reality of the utter exploitation, persecution and humiliation of the weaker sections of men so that people throughout the globe are not only made aware of these awesome malady but are encouraged to launch a mighty movement against this menace to the society.

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