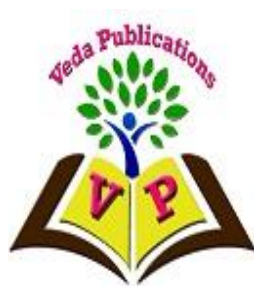


**MODERN ENTHUSIASM: RE-READING “BEHIND THE BODICE”**

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*(Research Scholar, Department of English, Raiganj University, West Bengal, India.)*[doi.org/10.33329.joell.8.1.26](https://doi.org/10.33329.joell.8.1.26)**ABSTRACT**

Mahasweta Devi shows the modern enthusiasm for what is behind the bodice in the modern society. Women being are sexually and physically tortured in every field of our society. They are doubly subalternized. They cannot protest against the social injustice. The people of the mainstream of the society make the women of the lower section of the society conscious about what is behind the bodice. The marginal society of our country loses their social status in all aspects. The ace-photographer makes Gangor famous with the publishing of pictures of her breasts in a magazine. Gangor loses her social status by the people of the mainstream of the society. At last she takes the profession of whore. Her situation becomes just like- *choli ke pichhe kiya hai*.

**Keywords:** *Mainstream, Molested, Ace-Photographer, Climber, Tribal, Enthusiasm.*

**INTRODUCTION**

*Breast Stories* is a well-equipped trilogy of Mahasweta Devi. "Behind the Bodice"(1997) is the last story of the trilogy. It is the exaggeration of the discussion of a Hindi film, *Khalnayak*(1993) in Indian society. Common people become enthusiastic about the film. The main issue is one of the super hit but ominous song of the film. The story pivots with a well-endowed migrant labourer, Gangor. She is sexually exploited by the mainstream people of the society. The theme of this story is centred on a popular song of a Hindi film and the bad effects of the song on the society. At the very beginning of the story there are some ironical statements on the present scenario of rape, murder, earthquake etc of Indian society. Mahasweta Devi questions,

"What is there? - was the national problem that year. When it became a *national issue*, the other fuck-ups of that time- e.g. crop failure- earthquake, everywhere clashes between so-called terrorists and state power and therefore killings, the beheading of a young man and woman in Haryana for the crime of marrying out of caste, the unreasonable demands of Medha Patkar and others around the Narmada dam, hundreds of rape-murder-*lockup* torture, etc non-issues which by natural law approached but failed to reach highlighting in the newspapers- all this remained *non-issues*. Much more important than this was *choli ke pichhe*-behind the bodice." (Devi, Behind the Bodice 119)

Devi narrates how the female being is physically and sexually tortured by the male being in most of her writings. In "Behind the Bodice" she shows how the society intends to abuse the female being on the basis of a contemporary Hindi song of a film. Male being of the society always wants to enjoy in different way. This affects the woman being. The story is also the tale of a sexually molested woman,

"In Behind the Bodice, she bitterly decries the supposed 'normality' of sexuality as

male violence. In the eyes of the caretaker, it is just at Gangor's breasts have been destroyed. If 'the girl does not understand the police are men too, they will craze if you tease them'." (Devi, *ibid.* vii)

Upin, the ace photographer is an educated one. He travels through Bihar and Orissa with his friend, Ujan to take photos. Shital Mallya, a mountain climber by profession is his wife. Ujan does not know how, Upin, an itinerant ace-photographer, and Shital a famous Himalaya-climber- the two don't spend even a month and a half out of the year together- yet how they remain in love with each other...(Devi, *ibid.* 121) Upin tries to save the endangered tribal culture through his photographs. There are so many unique things of tribals to be followed like- customs, dresses, songs, and dances. Upin takes the photograph of the breast of Gangor, a village woman of Purulia, West Bengal. He wants to show the natural beauty of the tribal woman. He compares the breasts of the tribal woman and the breast of his wife, Shital. There is no such intention of sexual fascination of Upin for Gangor's breasts. He finds only aesthetic pleasure in it,

"Learn to praise and respect a beautiful thing. Why Gangor and her natural, most complex sweat glands or bosom had turned Upin's head he didn't know. The breast can be called a complex sweat gland. There is plenty of fat in it. This glandular collective is most charming.

Upin knew all this, he knew. Not a breast blessed by liquid silicone, but natural, hence unique. He felt that Gangor and her chest were endangered." (Devi, *ibid.* 145-150)

It is Gangor who becomes desperate towards her life style. The photographer pays her first time for snapping her breasts. She behaves with everyone as her dear and near ones. The people from the mainstream of the society takes its advantages. She is raped. At once Gangor realizes that police also will not save her. Everyone takes the advantage of her



scandalous news and pictures once came in a newspaper,

“Although the power of Gangor’s resistance and rage is, if anything, worked out more explicitly than Dopdi’s – Gangor’s explicitly accuses the police – the staging of the provenance of her name is interestingly obscure. Ganagouri as the origin of Gangor is a bit of documentation offered by the most problematic character in Behind the Bodice.” (Devi, *ibid.* ix)

Readers will not understand the real friendship between the photographer and the village lady. There is a colonial love-hate relationship between Upin and Gangor. Upin loves the natural beauty of the tribals and their living place. He wants to live with them like Mahasweta Devi. Somehow he highlights the tribal life through his photography. He is attracted towards the natural beauty of Gangor as well as the ugliness of the life of Gangor.

“Under the dirty red cloth the cleavage of her Konark chest, resplendent. A train passing, Gangor’s crowd looking at it. Her breasts like the cave paintings of Ajanta, against the backdrop of the sky. Dirty choli. Dirty red cloth, hair full of lice, filth...filth....”(Devi, *ibid.* 145-150)

Upin achieves the crown of natural beauty. But he is not right fully because modern tribals do not live fully in the lap of Nature. They are well dressed now. The conception of Upin becomes wrong here as he thinks tribals and their open breasts are aesthetic beauty of Nature. Upin sees the beauty of the breast of Gangor aesthetically. He only enjoys the beauty and shares this pleasure to others through printing media. He wants to make Gangor self-conscious about her beauty. Spivak observes very rightly,

“Upin made Gangor self-conscious about the unique beauty of her breasts, without any thought of the social repercussions. His political correctness ended with personally not lasting after Gangor’s breasts: learn to praise and respect a

beautiful thing, he chides.” (Devi, *Breast Stories.* xii)

Upin makes Gangor famous. He grows a false sense of power in Gangor through publishing her photography with a news in an article of a newspaper. Later on she is captured by police under false charges and gangraped her in custody. At that time Upin’s attractive photographs of the breasts of Gangor and the popular Hindi song, *Choli ke pichhe* together brings the sexual violence in the society. So also Gangor becomes a victim of sexual hazards in the police custody. A local Caretaker says to Upin-

“You ruined her with your pictures, Sir, otherwise, how would she dare?” (Devi, *ibid.* 132)

Upin searches for natural beauty. He revisits Jharoa, the native village of Gangor. He desires to do this. They sit together, look at each other. She accuses Upin for her disrupted situation of becoming a whore. She reminds him that his pictures of her breasts is the cause of her ruin. She is disrupted by all-the police, the contractor and all the others. She becomes alcoholic and a low quality whore. Upin realizes his fault,

“Somewhere a feeling of vulnerability, for some time now an *obsession* has been spinning him like a top. Suddenly he feels he is alone in a place like this- he is alone everywhere. To live in such solitude, to have denied the natural demands of life so much was perhaps not right. Gangor’s developed breasts are natural, not manufactured. Why did he first think they were the object of photography? Why did it seem that chest was endangered?” (Devi, *Breast Stories.* 135)

The friendship between the Village lady and the photographer changes. Now Gangor thinks him nothing but a mere customer. She declares desperately, Will Gangor unwind her cloth, or just lift it? Do your staff, 20 rupees. Spend the night, 50, tell me quick.(Devi, *ibid* 137)At the end Gangor removes her bodice like “Draupadi” to show-



"Gangor breaths hard. Says in a voice ragged with anger, Don't you hear? Constantly playing it, singing it, setting the boys on me... behind the bodice...the bodice...*choli ke piche...choli ke...*

No Gangor...You are a bastard too Sir... you took *photoks* of my chest, eh? Okay...I'll show...but I'll take everything from your *pocket*, a-ll ...." (Devi, *Breast Stories*. 137)

The end of this story is pathetic. An amazing incident happens. Upin is motionless and still. He cannot utter a single word. He finds no breasts behind the bodice. It is only- The two raging volcanic craters spew liquid lava. (Devi, *Breast Stories*. 137)

### CONCLUSION

Gangor is raped brutally. It is the torture of the mainstream people against the tribal. Abysmal enthusiasm removes from the mind of the common people by reading the story of Devi. Poverty is the main reason of the tribal people to stay downward in the modern India. Devi herself answers the question which she raises at the beginning of the story. She wants to say that the rape of the tribal woman by the mainstream of the society means the terrible rape of democratic system and human values. She criticizes this. The story starts with the first line of the song: *Choli ke piche kiya hai?*(What is behind the bodice?) At the end the answer is found. It is obviously the 'breasts'.

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