

Projection of Body as Repulsion to Subjugated Female Identity in Mahasweta Devi's *Breast Giver* and Parijat's *The Raped Tears of Salgi*¹

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Abstract

This paper seeks to analyze how the projection of female body stands as a great repulsion to the female identity that is defined by the male chauvinism with particular reference to the two stories of two prominent writers Mahasweta Devi of India and Parijat of Nepal. One story, Breast Giver, of Mahasweta Devi and a story, The Raped Tears of Salgi, of Parijat have got a keen observation dealing with the female body alienation. This study shows how female bodies have been alienated from their selves; how these female characters Jashoda and Salgi do not have the sense of being distanced from their own selves.

The study adopts qualitative methodology and takes Marxist feminism as a theoretical tool to interpret and analyze the primary text. Instead of focusing on the analysis of the theme of the text, the study focuses on analysis of the text in concern with female body portrays in the stories. The female characters are physically assaulted, raped, and coerced time and again. Their bodies become the site where men enact violence. The study argues that these female characters become the victim of violence just because they are women. The study makes an attempt to make people understand how women suffer from gender-based violence in patriarchy.

Keywords: *Projection, alienation, female body, self-identity, objects, possession*

Background Study

Identity is basically understood as a set of behavior or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member. It is a "sense of self with some qualities and distinguished attributes" (Woodward 2002, p.13). Who the person is and where s/he belongs to, name, caste, group etc. are the parts of one's identity. So, an attempt is made to analyze the various aspects of identity crisis in Mahasweta Devi's story *Breast Giver* and Parijat's story *The Raped Tears of Salgi* with special focus on the projection of the body of the leading characters Jasoda and Salgi.

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Mahasweta Devi, the noted writer activist from India, has ever used her pen to raise awareness against the issues like social injustice, discrimination, domination, poverty, untouchability etc. She is a prominent figure to cope the issues “against oppression, injustice and a protest for the liberation of the Indian society with the rebellious mind” (Shekhar, 2006). Similarly, Parijat, a rebellious writer from Nepal, presents herself as a rebel in her writings, and her “opposition to all forms of discrimination, oppression and exploitation particularly of female who are the victims of injustice caused by long rooted male chauvinism” (Gautam, 2011, p. ii). But she has always resented being labeled a feminist. She identified more with being a defender of individual freedom, human rights and had demonstrated a very open attitude to life and humanity. So, the characters in both of these writers – Mahasweta and Parijat - are those people who are exploited and used in various forms. To them, literature means the voice of the voiceless, expression of what is not expressed and representation of what is not represented.

Such defiant writers’ stories *Breast Giver* and *The Raped Tears of Salgi* bear the sense of identity loss in the leading female characters Jasoda and Salgi who are constantly being alienated from their self by the dominant hetero-normative social structure. Even getting an identical body as every individual has, *Jashoda* and *Salgi*’s bodies are alienated from their own self. Their body is of value to other more than themselves in terms of possession. Their body has of no property to them rather a product for other. They are forced to be a patient not as an agent, not a creator but a creature enjoyed by other as commodity. Hence, when one’s body is of value to other more than the self, the question of possession and alienation comes up.

Similarly, in the male dominated society, women bodies are objectified and are used for the pleasure of someone else. They are alienated and are not free to have rights on their bodies or their own sexuality. As alienation is endemic to one’s existence, it exists when a person is unable to identify the individual self either with own self or with the society. One must be able to maintain “a balance between the two levels of identities - individual and societal”. Conflict between these two levels of identities “breeds tension in one who loses the sense of self” (Fromm, 2004, p. 78). This state means, in other words, one is alienated.

Alienation here means the “objectification or appropriation by one subject of another subject’s body, action, or product of action” (Seeman, 1969, p. 7). On such condition she or he does not even assume and recognize that objectification. Feminist writers

use this concept to describe female existence in a male-dominated society and culture. In this society, women's "body images are exposed, exploited and used as commodities, and are taken as subjects for the bawdy advertisements and a course of entertainment" (Jaggar, 1989, p. 308). One may ask, how are women's images exposed, exploited and used as commodities? It is not in shade that certain body parts such as the lips, eyes, butt or breasts are shown to convey unrealistic and degrading messages about women. The similar form of body projection of *Jasoda* and *Salgi* is expected by the male characters in the stories of Mahasweta and Parijat.

If we consider the case of women representation in South Asian context, women's political representation becomes more complex than in everyday life. Mallarika Sinha Roy observes:

South Asian women have been repeatedly stereotyped as victims, epitomised by the child bride, oppressed widow or sati, illiterate woman doomed to ignorance, and more recently as victims of dowry murders, honour killings, public sexual harassment or rape; they have been involved in anti-colonial struggles, and various caste- and class-based political and social movements, registering their voices. (Roy, 2020, p. 112)

Since women in south Asia are resisting to different forms of patriarchal domination, their everyday has attracted the attention of feminists. The everyday resistance like reproductive capacity, autonomy over body, division of labour, and access to resources like education and wage labour, the impact of women's participation in mass-based social and political movements has not always been impressive and the decisive changes are also not common. Familial ties, caste status, social class, and sheer political insight have been crucial factors to pave a tenacious ascendancy within a society.

A concept such as the 'female alienation from their body' has hardly attracted the attention of any intellectual debate or discussion. This paper seeks to analyze the much neglected aspects of alienation of female body with particular reference to two prominent women writers of south Asia. One is the most creative Indian woman writer, Mahasweta Devi and the other is the prominent Nepali writer Parijat, dealing with the female body alienation in their noted stories. Since everyone is supposed to be the master of self, the adverse circumstances of life, sometimes, make an individual fail to grab the real possession on that self. When one's body is of value to other more than the

self, the question of possession and alienation comes up. It is what we find in the female character *Jashoda* in the story *The Breast Giver* and *Salgi* in the story *The Raped Tears of Salgi* have been deliberately used and robbed off their selves. Their existence is valued merely on account of how long they can please males undermining their own desires and sacrificing for others where their body is centralized rather than their identity.

Thus, this paper aims to explore Marxist feminist interpretation of identity in terms of body. It draws the materialist feminists' concepts of alienation and applies them to the gendered body ideas of exploitation to better understand the gender/race oppression where patriarchal mindset appropriates their subjugated roles in society and has been creating a limbo since its social constructions. The study equally shows how female bodies have been alienated from their selves; how these female characters *Jasoda* and *Salgi* do not have the sense of being distanced from their own selves. But we as a reader feel that their body and their identity are two different matters.

Projection of Body as Repulsion to Subjugated Female Identity

The body does not remain merely a body due to the increasing technologization of it. It has changed the way that the body was viewed socially. So, the projection of female body through different media is tried to be taken for granted. But the question is why only female body is made show case, why not male. *Jasoda* suffers a lot by the same plight as *Salgi* is robbed off facing the similar bitter circumstances.

The story *Breast Giver* explores the graphic picture of a woman how her body is used as a means to fulfill others hunger and quench their thrust. *Jashoda*, acts as a wet nurse for the new-born children of the Haldar's family just to feed them every day. Her breast, which is a gift of nature and a source of nourishment, thus becomes a commodity. In 'Breast-Giver', the breast is a survival object transformed into a commodity, making visible the indeterminacy between filial piety and gender violence, between house and temple, between domination and exploitation (Spivak, 2010, p. vii). It is a source of food and a livelihood: *Jashoda* is paid to breastfeed the many children in the extended family of her Master and Mistress. Her abundant milk supports her own crippled husband and family. Here *Jashoda's* breasts are used by many to quench their thirst, to kill their hunger simply because they are milky. She raised too many children probably uncountable feeding her breasts. In this regard, *Jashoda* was taken as *Jashoda* due to her "milky breasts" not as a normal woman (1087).

Unlike Jasoda, Salgi, in the story *The Raped Tears of salgi*, is distorted from herself and is used as the playing tools to males. She has been completely ousted from the happy livings that she could bear at remote village of Nepal. Salgi has become nostalgic and got her parents and the village in her eyes when she has to be a doll of Indian rascals. Her flashback makes her rebellious and she comes out with the rage against those all who made her such plight. Since she is compelled to be a whore in Indian brothel where she has subdued her inner feelings just to satisfy some Indian wantons, and the brothel owner Sardarni has been getting financial outputs making Salgi's body as an opera to Indian male rascals.

It seems that Mahasweta Devi has not casually chosen her character's name. Jashoda is taken as the name of the mother of Lord Krishna. So, the story tries to spotlight the values that the female body embodies the picturesque of a holy goddess. But it parallely is invoking the use value as Gayatri Spivak in her article, "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value," emphasized the "imbricated quality of use value to exchange value in the international division of labor. Jashoda, the main character of the story is possessed by her husband and is praised for the way she looks. Her body is always taken as a way of satisfaction. The villagers like Nabin long to be alleged with Jasoda. He mixes holiness with lust and all around him blows the sweet winds of sympathy-compassion-kindness altogether.

For a few days, whenever Nabin tries to think of the Lion-seated, the heavy-breasted, languid-hipped body of Jashoda floats in his mind's eye. A slow rise spreads in his body at the thought that perhaps she is appearing in his dream as Jashoda just as she appeared in Jashoda's as a midwife. (Devi, 2010, p. 1072)

Here we can learn the height of a vigorous sensation of a male where he approaches the Goddesses and then turns the image to the sensual image of a lady. On one hand Goddesses are worshipped in the name of power and on the other they are dreamt to be possessed and manhandled. Kangali, her husband is proud getting married to a younger body. He supposes that Jasoda is pleased when given food. He does not feel any difference between the pet and his wife. Moreover, he subjects Jasoda as a "fresh young thing" (Devi, 2010, p. 1070).

The similar plight is of Salgi in the stories *The raped Tears of Salgi*. As a piece of a showcase, Salgi has to be seductive and attractive to drag the customers up to that brothel where she had to sacrifice her own womanhood. She just has a use value and is regarded most as per the number of visitors that she satisfied. Here, she hasn't been living and doing anything for her pleasures rather "the coercions upon her are to make and define her an object of male satisfaction" (Katrak, 2006, p. 31). Now Salgi is just a weathered flower petal that has no fragrance and use at all. The story portrays:

The odor of the males hasn't been faded out from her body. Where has gone that natural and organic fragrance that Salgi had brought with her from Sindhupalchowk. When dusk has fallen, she has to be appeared with heavy make up for flirt; with naughty cheap smoke, with seductive scents, uff! Brothel is this; nothing different here than this. (Devi, 2010, p.158)

Such portrayal degrades woman life into a depressing, animal-like, existence where they are working just to survive, while producing wealth and pleasure for someone else. Their "life and existence is crushed into this abstract, congealed human labor". They are a machine whose sole purpose within a society is based on "commodity production they produce" (Katrak, 2006, p. 44). Their individuality, abilities, skills and creative development does not matter. This is why, Salgi realized that women's bodies are never fully in their control; their sexuality is not a choice that they are free to make without interventions by male dominated social construction.

Mahasweta Devi also wants to put emphasis on the alienation of body of Jashoda, since she uses the word "drill" for Jashoda who is a human being; but nowhere do we find her position as a human being (Devi, 2010, p. 1067). Jashoda is Jashoda for her capacity to conceive the babies and for her capacity to serve her husband for his sexual desire. She is just counted for her body that can provide and can satisfy the needs. Jasoda's husband Kangalicharan is found thinking of the imminent pleasure and tasting paradise at the thought of his wife's "large round breasts" (Devi, 2010. p. 40). He also admires his wife for her assets. More than being a wife, her body is adored.

After the accident Kangalicharan is crippled and Jasoda now wants to be the food giver for her family. So, she asks for a job which pays. But the mistress denies to give her any household work instead she proposes to sell her milk to the babies at Haldars house. The Mistress is overwhelmed by the milking capacity of Jashoda. At the same time,

she compares Jashoda with the milking cow. The thought of the Mistress is bound to rip off identity of Jasoda and only seen as a bodily figure. Jasoda remains helpless in front of the entire circumstances.

Such helplessness also haunts Salgi at Indian brothel. She is helpless there and is used as per the visitors' will. She was a jasmine flower which now gives no fragrance at all; she is a beauty in itself but it is withered in such a way that no one admires even if she gets released from that inhumane jail. This is why, the Sardarni and the brokers will always be saying "what difference is to you people either in brothel or outside of it" (Devi, 2010, p. 157). The room where Salgi exposes her body itself "forces to settle the life with syphilis, ignorance and hateful death" (Devi, 2010, p. 157). The present circumstances mock Salgi from the very surface of her captivity:

The dim light enters the closet. On a cot at the corner, there lies a young lady's body as deserted dead. Her shameless deserted body looks as if hungry rascals have raped her ten times at that night. The room smells the local wines, and the torn jasmine scattered all over the bed. (Devi, 2010, p. 154)

Similarly, the story does not only portrait the beautiful life scenario and the handsome earning sources of Indian *Sardarni*, but it reflects and analyzes the mind and heart of distorted Salgi. She bears a sense of turmoil where she finds herself in cuboids of mental trauma. What she excels was just for the benefits of others; where her individual identity is discarded and she is continuously mocked in reference to the so-called remoteness, illiteracy and ignorance due to her upbringing in rural setting. She is understood by this brothel community as an object that can be vulgarized or promoted as a means to exchange something. Neither has she got the physical rest nor her mental pressure at peace that can be healing tonic to her irritation, fatigue and hatred. She shows the mental outrage against her own fellows who became a ladder of her ruin; against all who think female body just the elastic that one can stretch as far as they wish or can throw lying on the floor if they think it is useless. She loathes to all those males who came to quench their sexual thirst spending handsome money even though they have their wives at home. Here at a point Salgi's mindset has been displayed as:

... Salgi's fatigue and compulsion have been exchanging with Indian currency and getting Sardani's purse filled up. While an Indian man was getting sexual orgasm, she developed the sense of revolt. 'They said

devils of yard would be useful than the gods of the country, but that LwageGharti is more dangerous than those hyenas who paid to exploit me. Lwage is the demon of the village. My devil. (Devi, 2010, p. 158)

Such anguish helps her to be bold and makes determined to punish Lwage but the punishment she aspires does not compensate her lost dignity, happiness and self-identity. She knows well that any punishment to that what distorts an individual is not enough and cannot compensate any more. However, she became impatient and is about to burst out. This is a clear indication of how an individual reacts when s/he realizes the loss of self.

Even though *Jashoda* and *Salgi* have a firm body that comprises all the identical facts a person possesses, their bodies are alienated from their own self and they had no sense of distancing too. It is because they are defined merely with the use value of it. If their body remains useful, they have got space on service but not of their own identity. Their body is of value to other more than themselves and remains no property to them rather a product for other. They are just compelled to be a patient not as an agent, not a creator but a creature enjoyed by other as commodity. This is all happened due to patriarchal social construction where women are forced to live away from the sense of distancing.

These stories seem as a complete package of body description in one way or another. Entirely they talk about the female body from the male point of view in regard to be exploited, to be used, to be enjoyed and to be pleased for others (male). The physical existence of those characters is valued merely on account of how long they can please males and how their body is centralized rather than their identity.

Conclusion

Thus, in these stories, Mahasweta Devi and Parijat have presented the woman characters focusing the adverse circumstances of their life because of their female body. Even getting a firm and identical body the leading female characters *Jashoda* and *Salgi's* bodies are alienated from their own self. Their bodies are alienated from their own self and they had no sense of distancing too. It is because they are defined merely with the use value of it. If their body remains useful, they have got space on service but not of their own identity. Their body is of value to other more than themselves and remains no property to them rather a product for other. They are just compelled to be

a patient not as an agent, not a creator but a creature enjoyed by other as commodity. This is all happened due to patriarchal social construction where women are forced to live away from the sense of distancing. They all have been deliberately used and robbed off their own selves by other for oral and physical satisfaction.

The protagonists Jasoda and Salgi have no possession on their own body. Rather they have been distorted and distanced from the value of own body, that counts on how long and what pleasure they can generate to others. Their physicality has been a mere construct of male rascals' seductive eyes on their frequent visit. This is why, what comes out from the study is that neither Jasoda nor Salgi is living the life of their own. In both the stories the women identity is lost. The woman is only present with her body active and of use value. She does not have a life if her body is not proper.

The alienation of women's bodies and subsequent loss of autonomy over their bodies is a part of heteronormative social construction. As radical feminists point out, the family has been a mechanism to support this oppression and regulation of women's bodies and sexuality by regulating the form of unpaid role of housewife. All women are subjected to this role within patriarchal capitalism (Price and Shildrick 1999). The gendered alienation relies on exploitation, including the sexual exploitation of women's bodies. Such thought is weighty enough when we look at the roles of Jasoda and Salgi in the stories. Both the stories have the resemblance in terms of the materialistic uses of the female body where they are deprived of their identity and alienated in terms of their fragmented body.

This study makes an important contribution in analyzing south Asian women writers' representations of female distancing from the body and the treatment that a community does. And, the comparative scope of this study aims to strengthen solidarity among women with common struggles across national lines where women's struggles for autonomy over their bodies often need to contend with long rooted male constructed hetero-normativity.

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