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# Recalcitrance as resistance through differential and de-formed identities in the fiction of Mahasweta Devi

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## ABSTRACT

Mahasweta Devi in her "feminist" fiction about aboriginal Indian women "creates" dissident women characters that embody a healthy scepticism towards the modernising operations of decolonisation and ethnographic differentiation within tribal formations. Mary Oraon in *The Hunt*, Chandidasi Gangaputri in *Bayen*, Sanichari in *Rudali* and the titular heroine of *Dhouli* de-essentialize gendered "subaltern" identity. Their recalcitrant female bodies ideologicaly embody a narrative of resistance as they transgress the constitutive operations of hegemonic tribal norms by deliberately performing prohibited, foreclosed and abjected subject positions.

**Key Words :** Feminist, Postcolonial, Ethnographic, Aboriginal, Subaltern

## INTRODUCTION

Mahasweta Devi in her "feminist" fiction about aboriginal Indian women, tears through the mainstream postcolonial logic of appropriated and expropriated gender roles. She "creates" dissident women characters that embody a healthy scepticism towards the modernising operations of decolonisation and ethnographic differentiation within tribal formations. Mary Oraon in *The Hunt*, Chandidasi Gangaputri in *Bayen*, Sanichari in *Rudali* and the titular heroine of *Dhouli* de-essentialize gendered "subaltern" identity as they transgress the constitutive operations of hegemonic tribal norms by deliberately performing prohibited, foreclosed and abjected subject positions. If the elite postcolonial figuration of the woman as a non-threatening nationalist myth constitutes the referential element of signification, Mahasweta's heroines actively *resignify* the referential gender model by enacting what Kristeva calls the Semiotic or Performative instead of the Symbolic. Thus, this process of resignification and reinscription involves a dialectical opposition to both the conservative gender norms embodied by their own mothers and the mainstream social norms enforced by the nation-state. This, challenge to the dual structures of signification- nationalist and aboriginal, becomes an ethnic as well as ethical dissent. Kristeva's defines abjection in *Powers of Horror* (*From Filth to Defilement*) as that which is

> Asserted to be a non-object of desire, abominated as abject, jettisoned from the symbolic system. It is what escapes the social rationality, the logical order on which a social aggregate is based (Kristeva, 1982, p. 65)

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This allows us to see how certain subjectivities are outlawed and disavowed from the domain of language and culture. But such disavowed subjectivities threaten the security of the stable aboriginal culture; they signify the Unconscious Semiotic excess that spills into the Symbolic (male) ethnographic discourse. Butler and Spivak in *Who sings the Nation-State? Languages, Politics, Belonging* (2007) identify the systematic production of *Un-belongingness*; the nation-state produces a cohesive national identity which is homogeneous; in such a political formation the excluded as opposed to embedded communities become *Abjected*. Butler says:

> The state does not presuppose modes of juridical belonging because it expels and suspends modes of legal protection. It can signify the source of non-belonging. The state can make us out of sorts if not destitute (Butler, 2007, p.3-5).

In *Dhouli*, a Dusadin becomes widowed soon after marriage and returns to her maternal home only to discover that her father died repaying the mortgage to the feudal lords. She inherits the debt from her father and works as an unpaid bonded agricultural labour (*khetmajdoor*) on the Misra's fields. Hanuman Misra's youngest son, the ineffectual Misrilal falls in love with the unfortunate Dusadin. But the Misras marry him off to an elderly woman for dowry; he leaves for Ranchi but not before making the unsuspecting and naïve Dhouli pregnant.

> This was not the first time a brahman's son had ruined a *dusad's* daughter. The village held Dhouli solely responsible. Her kinsfolk rejected her as she had fallen in *love*. If Misrilal had used force, they would not have spurned her. There were several illegitimate Misra children growing up in the *dusad-ganju-dhobi* quarters. But Dhouli had been willing. An unforgivable offence. The *Dusad-Ganju* lad and the contractor's coolies were watching closely. They would see to it that Dhouli, the widow, the *randi* was forced into prostitution (Devi, 2002, p.14-15).

As Kundan and Hanuman Misra try to starve Dhouli, her illegitimate son and her mother by denying them agricultural work; Dhouli becomes a professional *randi* instead of becoming a private whore of the Misras. Towards the end of the story, she leaves for Ranchi to become a professional whore "When you are a kept woman, you are all alone. But now she would be part of a community" (Devi, 2002, p.33).

In *The Hunt*, Mary Oraon a half-caste tribal girl, being the illegitimate daughter of a white colonial planter and an Oraon mother, is never completely accepted as part of the Oraon community. "Mary's skin is a resistant barrier to Oraon men", but she lets Jalim, a Muslim lad "approach her on the promise of marriage". Unlike her mother, Bhikni who was duped by the white colonial planter, Mary negotiates strict terms and conditions about sexual intimacy. She is the best dancer at the feasts, gets smokes from the tribal marketeers and drinks and chews betel leaf at their expense but does not lead them on. Tohri along Gomo-Daltonganj railway line is a coal halt exploited by the state owned neo-colonial mining lobby; soon after a timber felling lobby encroaches upon the virgin Sal plantations in Kuruda, Murhai, Seeho, Thapari, Dhuma and Chinadoha. Mary has a hybrid genealogy with multiple points of cultural origin; Butler in her 1990 Preface to *Gender Trouble*: *Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (1990) using Foucault offers a valiant defence of genealogical critiques:

> A genealogical critique refuses the search for the *origin* of gender, rather it investigates the political stakes in designating as origin and cause those identity categories that are the effect of discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origins (Butler, 1990, p.xxxi).

With the promise of "a tiffin of cornmeal in the afternoon", the contractors lure the unassuming Oraon and Munda men and women to work as cheap agricultural labour (*khetmajdoor*) and

mining labour (*khadanmajdoor*). The rural contractor, Tehsildar tries to sexually assault the unacquiescing Mary once she refuses his overtures. On the day of the aboriginal spring festival, Jani Parab which involves tribal women with their inviolate constitution running in the forests to hunt hedgehogs, rabbits and birds; Mary seduces the Tehsildar only to kill him. Mary's "hunt" ends with the dismembered and bloodied body of the Tehsildar tossed into the ravine.

In *The Hunt*, Mahasweta shows a differential unrest between Mary and the Oraon community; Mary chooses to define herself neither as completely Australian nor completely tribal. Her differential subjectivity both preserves and transcends the cultural difference that she lives through. The institutionalised domain of ethnographic communities like bourgeois nationalist spheres thrives on the logic of exclusion:

> This exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed requires the simultaneous production of a domain of *abject beings*, who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the *subject*. The abject designates here precisely those *unlivable* and *uninhabitable* zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated (Butler, 1993, p.3)

In her half-breed heroine, Mahasweta shows an implicit questioning of colonial inheritance (in Mary's case biological inheritance) and an explicit rejection of the deceptive narrative of postcolonial progressivism and decolonised development in Tohri and Kuruda districts of Palamau. The logical purchase of this self-generated difference from the Oraon community inheres in Mary's cultural ambiguity and its perspectival engendering. "Because she is the illegitimate daughter of a white father, Oraons don't think of her as their own blood". This cultural negation imposed by the tribe upon her becomes a generative trope from whence her differential subjectivity ensues; her culturally deformed and internecine non-identity is transmogrified into a transcendental identity.

In the tribe's rejection, Mary like Dhouli finds the possibility of regeneration and cultural freedom. The Dusad community and the Oraon community hesitate in imposing their associational script of restriction, prohibition and conformity upon the "randi" Dhouli and the "savage" Mary. Both Mary and Dhouli rather than passively accept their "othering" within discursive tribal formations; use their "othered" position to interrogate the normative regulations of the tribe's totalising logic. Mahasweta shows an oppositional matrix, a dual structure of opposition in which the ethnographic minority in its counter-hegemonic and decolonising impulse constitutes a colonising gesture since its totalising impulse is an appropriation of all differences and otherness within. By uncritically repeating and reinstating the logic of dialectical cultural oppositions, it tries to steamroll variegated differences and amplifications within the aboriginal community. Mahasweta reads this counter-colonising impulse as a phallocentric substitutive act in which the outcasted widow falling in love with a *deota* and the half-caste girl falling in love with a Muslim are unrepresentable. But it is precisely this logic which becomes an inaugurative counter-signification since Mary's and Dhouli's*excluded* subjectivities *exceed* their negative assignation as the tribe's outlawed outside.

Both the women use sexuality as a site of subversion; Dhouli uses her sexuality as an instrument of unsettling the caste privilege of Misras and Mary uses her body's diverse and erotic attributes for a functional revolt against the neo-colonial operations of modernity which serves as an alibi for the hegemonic discourse of masculinism and phallogocentrism covertly operating through the nexus of the government contractors and the local brokers. Both the widow-professional prostitute and the illegitimate half-caste embody a panoply of different and unacceptable sexualities; but this transgressive perversity of female sexuality transforms politically into a transgressive positivity of deviance, otherness and negation as both Dhouli and Mary emerge as survivors in the end.

The Oraon culture and the cultural sematics of the Jani Parab are essentially androgynous, heterogeneous and polymorphous in terms of sexual designation. This differentiation of the polymorphous, pluralistic and subversive aboriginal culture from the androcentric, monolithic, masculinist and repressive colonial/postcolonial bourgeois culture is something that Mary exploits. The Oraon community permits a more fluid and permissible model of gender that does not designate the gender/sex binary as Masculine/Feminine or culture/nature; the morphology of anatomical specificity does not deny differential manifestations or performative utterances of subaltern "womanness". Mary's labour seen from the sex-determinate perspective of metropolitan postcolonial culture is Masculine but the Oraon logic does not conflate sex and gender and thus unleashes the multiple possibilities and expressions of sex. Judith Butler's proposition that "sex" is in itself a cultural construction seems instructive; culture makes sex signify a pre-cultural, passive, biological and immutable anatomy that precludes gender. This structuralist dimorphism between sex/substance/ nature and gender/spirit/culture is however a culturally inflected differentiation.

Ashis Nandy in *The Intimate Enemy*(1983) tries to recover the more disruptive models of gender in pre-colonial tribal societies as opposed to the androcentric model of the collaborationist feudal class and colonisers:

> Many nineteenth century Indian movements tried to make *Kshatriyahood* the new interface between the ruler and the ruled as a new, nearly exclusive indicator of *authentic* Indianness. The change in consciousness that took place can be briefly stated in terms of three concepts: *purusatva* (essence of masculinity), *naritva* (essence of femininity) and *klibatva* (essence of hermaphroditism). The polarity defined by the autonomous *purusatva* and *naritva* was gradually supplanted in the colonial culture of politics by the antonyms of *purusatva* and *klibatva*: femininity-in-masculinity was now perceived as the final negation of a man's political identity, a pathology more dangerous than femininity itself (Nandy, 1983, p.7-8).

One can say that precolonial aboriginal culture produces an epistemological quandary which is premised on the irreducibility of sex/gender causalities. Mahasweta's story tries to exhume alternative significations of sex/gender beneath the sexualising regime of meaning generated by colonialism. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler uncovers the ways in which structural differentiation and binary regulations try to streamline behavioural attributes into culturally acceptable patterns of intelligibility. Moreover, this binary structuration is in itself inflected by phallocentric logic as it's valuation is dependent on a (Masculine) sexualising economy which defines women/native/aboriginal as deviant and primordial against which the colonial/postcolonial man is defined as (hetero) normative. Both Irigaray and Butler have associated this signification practice with amasculinist economy of privilege; one can however take it a step further and associate it with the bourgeois privilege of the metropolitan postcolonial consumer class. It is significant that no man in the Oraon community is endowed with the cultural privilege that accrues from the discursive configuration of phallic presence; rather it's the postcolonial bourgeoisie be it Prasadji, Banwari or Tehsildar who embody this univocal and hegemonic discourse. The Oraons become associated with primordial coarseness, the pre-linguisticsign which has not yet emerged into the colonial symbolic, the pre-capitalist corporeal economy of labour and the Feminine. So, in a way sexual abnormality becomes a condition of aboriginal existence under the functioning phallocentrism of colonial/postcolonial capitalism.

In *The Hunt* and *Dhouli*, Mahasweta goes beyond the abstract materiality of cultural formations in order to diagnose the underlying economic system of (sexual) labour production. The Dusad village in *Dhouli* and the Oraon territory in Kuruda and Murhai are both decolonised territories

under development. The coal mining and timber felling lobby are seen jostling for market consolidation with a pre-colonial/pre-capitalist feudal economy and its attendant modes of production. The neo-colonial agents of monopoly capitalism such as the Tehsildar are working in nexus with an emergent bourgeois class as the last remnants of late colonialism face economic extinction. An old crumbling feudal class of exploitative landlords, the Misras in *Dhouli* while facing economic competition from the modern contractors and *jotedars* nevertheless derive their enduring social privilege from a complex system of hereditary debt-repayment. The material processes of social formations are embedded in the over determined structures of debt, labour- domestic, agricultural and sexual, and exchange as against the reified logic of capital. The social production of class privilege and the stratification of labour are not rooted in caste alone since the Misras allow Sanichari, a Dusad woman to serve as midwife and healer; similarly Prasadji, the owner of the Dixon bungalow allows Bhikni and Mary to work in the plantation as well as the house. These social ideologies of segregating the widow (Dusadin) or the half-caste subaltern woman have a material basis of production. There is an informal mode of production characterised by domestic commodity exchange within Prasadji's household, in which the "picker" of the Mahua fruit, Mary Oraon claims ownership of it. The multipurpose Mahua fruit used for making country liquor, cooking oil and washing soap serves as a currency crop yielding Mary a surplus income when she trades it in the market. Furthermore through her cunning she steals salt, spices, peanut oil, flour, and molasses from the kitchen leading to a surplus accumulation; Mary has vowed to marry Jalim, the Muslim lad only when each has saved hundred rupees. Thus in a curious economic arrangement, Kuruda and Tohri continue to be imbricated in pre-capitalist modes of exchange and bartering while the state owned coal mining lobby on the outskirts of the town is trying to reconstitute new relations of capitalist exploitation. Mahasweta shows female sexualities being inscribed upon and restructured within complex interdetermination of material production and organisational matrix of changing economic arrangements.

Dhouli, the hereditary agricultural labour/bond-slave towards the end of the story self-generates a new identity as a professional prostitute whose body is no longer embedded in feudal systems of debt-bondage and debt-repayment. Rather the body is now revalued as part of a liberal free market economy; it no longer has a *Use-Value* and *Exchange Value* but also a *Surplus Value* which cannot be appropriated by the owners of her labouring/labour inducing body. Dhouli emerges out of a privative, informal and feudal economy into a more organised, modern and public economy when she leaves for Ranchi to become a professional whore. The social production of exploitative gender roles is predicated on the sexualised construction of the labouring body as either bonded/unfree or as transgressive and what Foucault calls *bodies in revolt*. The sexuality of the subaltern woman has always remained occluded and invisible even within appropriative narratives of Third world Feminism; thus Mahasweta's fiction can be seen as providing an alternative History of (Subaltern) Sexuality as it shows the complex interactive causal processes both material and cultural that underlie the historical production of subaltern womanhood. The commercialisation of the body ironically liberates it from outmoded and retrograde systems of sexual appropriation and expropriation. Commodity capitalism by shifting the discourse of power differential from feudal ownership to postcolonial model of self-ownership and consumption restructures labour organisation. Under the debt-bondage system, the value of Dusad women had a historical rather than material basis of production since its use value metonymically enacted the debt amassed. Dhouli inherits the debt from her father who dies trying to repay it; thus value is lodged not in the labouring body but overdetermined structures of feudal-patriarchal kinship which preclude and pre-exist the body.

In *Douloti,* the Kamiya whore Douloti Nagesia is exchanged between moneylenders to repay the debt of her crooked father; similarly Joshmina, the migrant agricultural labour ensnared in the web of sex trafficking in *The Fairytale of Rajabasha* is subjected to multiple rapes by the landowners. This model of sexual appropriation precludes commodity fetishism as "things" derive their value from definite social relations and are not valuable in themselves.

So, the question arises how does the phallocentric feudal regime generate production surplus and alienate the labouring body from value production? It does so through an exploitative regime of rape and insemination thus restructuring the relation between lord and bond-slave and reinventing a new master/owner and sex-slave/private whore relationship. Historically available ways of cultural exploitation allows the Misras to impregnate the working Dusad women thus begetting a horde of bastard children who serve as easily available labour to work their fields. Old barren Oraon women such as Budhni, Somri and Mungri in *The Hunt* are thus defunct as they no longer produce a surplus workforce of labouring bastards. Mary in *The Hunt* is also an illegitimate progeny but of a white colonial planter; thus means of labour production are passed from mother to daughter in a perverse parody of the female genealogy of labour identity. It is interesting to note that both Mary and Dhouli reject the "legitimised" option of affective mothering. The pregnant/lactating body mythologises the body in labour thus alienating it from the social rigours of feudal bondage. The enforced pregnancy of Dusadins and Oraon women relocates them within an incestuous and heavily circumscribed regime of feudal kinship as the violator assumes the new found hallowed identity of husband/protector.

Maternity plunges tribal women in a self-perpetuating cycle of passivity. Images of divinised mother in mythology or mainstream cinema are part of a patriarchal-nationalist narrative of sexual mastery. The maternal subjectivity buries the woman in the role of the mother allowing the husband/ feudal lord to exploit this pre-social, invisible and unacknowledged labour. Nancy Chodorow amongst others has established that such a heterosexual kinship arrangement invariably implicates the daughter in the *Reproduction of Mothering*:

> The care and socialisation of girls by women ensure the production of Feminine personalities founded on relation and connection, with flexible rather than rigid ego boundaries. This is one explanation for how women's relative embeddedness is reproduced from generation to generation. Mothers and daughters experience boundary confusion, for example guilt and blame for the other's unhappiness; shame and embarrassment at the other's actions; daughters' "discovery" that they are "really" living out mother's lives (Chodorow, 1989, p.57-58).

In opposition to this rule, Mahasweta's heroines see maternity as a political instrument of de-subjectivisation, which recruits women in a circuit of sexual and social exchange between feudal moneylenders and indebted fathers/husbands. Mary, Chandi and Dhouli see maternity as a masculinist recuperative fantasy which re-territorialises female desire by disciplining it. Maternity suffocates the subversive potentialities of aboriginal womanhood. Unlike their mothers, Mary and Dhouli refuse to be re-entrenched in the master narrative of Feminine vulnerability and inadequacy that maternity signifies. Thus, there is a cultural disruption in the female genealogical model as the daughters refuse to replicate the subject positions they inherit from their mothers. Dhouli's decision to leave her in-law's home after widowhood, her refusal to be abused by her brother-in-law, her disavowal of the function of mothering as a psychologically/emotionally fulfilling affective role and finally her refusal to become a private Randi of the Misras is a demythologising of available models of motherhood and subaltern womanhood. She asks Misrilal for money as a compensatory price for

raising his bastard son and eventually renounces her maternal function when she leaves behind her son to become a professional whore. Dhouli's rejection of maternity is a rejection of the genealogically transmitted cultural script of tribal womanhood invested with the male logic of paternal exploitation. From the perspectival lens of Dusad womanhood, Dhouli is a social aberration as she wanted social legitimacy of wifehood as the price for offering sex to Misrilal. Thus, self-inscription of her "self" as abnormal/anomalous is a counter-intuitive gesture of re-subjectivisation as she reclaims her material subjectivity subsumed beneath "legitimising" narratives of widowhood and motherhood. She erases her genealogical (pre)history of being *born* a Dusad Randi and through her exile from the maternal function establishes her primordial relation to the "natural" mother, the forest. Misrilal and Dhouli carry out their unlawful courtship in the forest; the primitive, pre-social dark world of the forest is not in traffic with feudal structures of caste and prefigures a world of pure libidinal excesses abstracted from social usefulness. Dhouli's eventual entry into a Feminine world of whores is a re-establishment of her relation with her own body and the bodies of other sex workers and thus re-enacts her earlier entry into the primal, pre-symbolic, pre-social, libidinal and orgiastic world of the forest.

In *The Hunt*, Mahasweta shows the production of new sexual identities under colonialism embodied by the white settler and neo-colonialism embodied by the Tehsildar, which reduplicates and re-produces the colonial sexual economy. Just as colonisation created a female workforce, which continued to generate invisible labour within the heteronormative patriarchal family and a surplus value in the imperial market place; the new normative power mechanism of Neo-colonialism also legitimises a gendered division of labour outside family alliance through the reifying cultural logic of an emergent bourgeois capitalism. However one must never forget that the new sexual identities of Mary and Dhouli are different and differentiated from that of their mothers since they are generated in centres of decolonised development and are thus impacted by transnational operations of global capitalism as Chandra Talpade Mohanty in "Cartographies of struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism" in *Feminism without Borders* (2003) has acutely pointed out. The centres of labour/gender production have shifted from the household to the market, the feudal collective to the subjectivised individual, from intergenerational organic/pre-modern modes of production to a political economy of consumption. An undefined discursive ensemble of female sexualities is socially re-produced which in turn *produces* the material body, as Butler in a different context has pointed out.

If bond-slavery and commodity capitalism constitute an alienating regime that abstracts the labouring body from discursive processes of production and the surplus value generated then recuperative power can be seen to lie in female solidarity. Mahasweta refuses to see this solidarity as an abstract model of female utopianism, rather she devises a new substantive grammar of sisterhood embedded in familiar and shared organisation of material labour be it the ethnographic model of community belongingness in *The Hunt* or the commercial model of professional prostitution in *Dhouli*.

The question arises, whether this disruptive and recalcitrant subjectivity is self-generated by Mary or recovered by her from long established tribal discourses? Mary's self-willed remaking and re-construction of identity is a product of her engagement with long-established discourses of paternal illegitimacy, tribal laws and rituals. Rather than endlessly rehearse and play out an outmoded cultural semantics of tribal celebration, Mary recovers and rehabilitates its savage/primordial subtextual meaning. The subversive Dionysian nature of the Jani Parab gets written over by the cultural symbolic of decolonisation which over-defines it as a spring festivity. Like Barthes's reader,

Mary self-generates the "signs" of the signification process as she uncovers the underlying textual unconscious of the spring rites. The subversive, orgiastic and primitive nature of the Jani Parab can be identified as the Lacanian Imaginary or Pre-Symbolic; it is a pleomorphic semantic space invested with the pre-oedipal, the bodily and the maternal as opposed to the phallic logic. Mary's reading of the Jani Parab shows a figurative unveiling and historical recovery of subversive modes of Feminine being lodged in the tribal semantics; in Kristeva's terms it is a Semiotic performance. She transforms the spring rite into a blood orgy affected through the yielding of the phallic spear. She recreates as she rediscovers a lost past which Bhikni and her mother's generation had forgotten; Mary functions as an alternative ethnographer who uncovers an invisible model of tribal insurrection. Through the mother-daughter relationships of her stories, Mahasweta traces a feminist genealogy of descent rather than a feudal genealogy of bond-slavery. Abdicating their mothers' roles, Mary and Dhouli reorganise subaltern female subjectivities around new relations of economic exchange and survival which capitalism makes possible. *The Hunt, Dhouli, Bayen* and *Bedanabala* can all be seen as a genealogical exploration of the silenced histories of women, a historical retrieval of tribal identities beneath the prefiguring identities of whores, widows and agricultural labours.

Butler using Derrida's *Signature Event Context* in *Bodies That Matter* (1993) has shown that the performative can become transgressive and transformative through repetition; citation and iteration of authority carry within them remnants of a parodic subversion and thus political insurrection.

> If a performativity provisionally succeeds then it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that then it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that action echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices.* What this means, then, is that a performative "works" to the extent that *it draws on and covers over* the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized. In this sense, no term or statement can function performatively without the accumulating and dissimulating historicity of force (Butler, 1993, p. 226-227).

The performance of Jani Parab like the performance of Oran womanhood is a culturally enforced iteration of tribal norms, whose ethnographic and historical purchase are indissociably bound up with relations of power, regulation and prohibition. But in Mary's repetition and reiteration of ethnographic and gender norms, all that are socially disavowed is also repeated in the iterative performance of the tribal norms. Thus, the disavowed, the prohibited and the repressed returns *in* and *through* the performative repetition of its disavowal.

The transgressive perversity of Mary's and Dhouli's rebellion can be located in their construction of an alternative female economy of *desire* outside of the phallocentric logic of feudal and postcolonial bourgeois economy which reduces female sexuality to discourses of domestic labour production and genital lack. Thus, we not only see their rebellion against discursive economic structures but also representational superstructures as they reorganise sexual, representational and symbolic models leading to a metonymic staging of female desire. Dhouli's abjection is precisely rooted in her desire to love and marry Misrilal, similarly Mary's cultural alienation is rooted in her desire to go against the injunctions of Oraon society in marrying a Muslim. Both these gestures militate against exclusively masculine social organisations of economic exchange between moneylender and debtor as well as between father and husband. Both Mary and Dhouli reconceive the female body as pleasurable and pleasure giving; Dhouli puts a selling power on her ability to "sell" pleasure while Mary seduces

the Tehsildar with the promise of sexual pleasure. This reconception of female sexuality disavows feudal-patriarchal processes of socialisation in which female corporeality is de-formed to stand for singular genitality and sexuality is socialised/colonised through practices of child-rearing. Mary and Dhouli's self-willed denial of a maternal and non-threatening model of femininity points to a uniquely disruptive moment of recalcitrance in which we see female eroticism's eruption.

In *Bayen,* Mahasweta shows Chandidasi Gangaputri as embodying the female archetype. Her name, Chandi carries forward her identification with the destructive and forbidding aspect of female energy which threatens the Dom community and its exclusively male profession. As a terrifying spectral presence relegated to the womb like darkness of the forest and feared as hostile, vengeful and emasculating she almost becomes a corporeal figuration of the id, the archetypal female principle. In the social transformation of Chandi into a witch, Mahasweta makes this "monstrosity" of the female subject a concretely embodied material reality. If one deconstructs the process of discursive formation of the female subject, one realises that the female body in itself stands for an anatomical monstrosity. In opposition to the male body which remains stable, the female body is what Kristeva calls the "Abject body". Like Mary, Chandi's crime is also her decision to marry out of her own volition. The droplets of milk curdled around Chandi's breats, Dhouli's self-advertisement to attract customers and Mary's seduction of the Tehsildarare culturally disavowed signs of female *jouissance* (sexual autonomy). This female pleasure is an *excess* since it flows above and beyond the phallocentric circuit of marital copulation. Since, Masculine semiotics denotes female pleasure as lack; it cannot represent this polymorphous, ambiguous, fluid and excessive desire which counters the dominant phallocentrism embedded in vaginal genitality. Hence, it denotes such female sexualities as unnatural, abjected and deformed.

In the contested space of shifting power relations, such a castrating female agency has to be contained and thus Chandi is ostracised for being a witch. Her alienation gives her a limited power as her gaze can be mortifying but this is accomplished only at the cost of her demonization and desubjectivisation. Ironically in the end, her martyrdom deifies her; Mahasweta parodies hegemonic nationalist narratives which reappropriated the figure of woman for divinisation of the motherland. The irony here is that the deified woman lacks the "purity" of the Hindu woman in the nationalist iconography as caste contaminates and pollutes the female subaltern subject. Similarly, Mary's slaying the Tehsildar with a machete serves as a parodic enactment of the Hindu religious myth of the wrathful Goddess Durga. However, this trope of political aggression is not an appropriation of mainstream postcolonial myths but a resignification of those myths through a parodic performance.

Just as Mary Oraon's hybrid and thus "contaminated" subject position in *The Hunt* makes her the ostracised "Other" in the decolonised nation state which is in the ideological grips of a Neo-colonial state machinery; Chandi in *Bayen* becomes a spectral presence with whom there can be no communication. Thematically one can see how the alienation of Chandi mimics the political estrangement of the ethnographic minorities or aboriginals in both pre-colonial and post-colonial India. In Chandi's social alienation from the community of Doms, Mahasweta turns the metaphor of political estrangement literal by making Chandi the ostracised and simultaneously feared "Other" of an already politically "othered" community. All the three women, Mary, Chandi and Dhouli become enigmatic fixtures of tribal society; they are dualistically positioned as the "other" so that postcolonial society can define itself as the standard bearing norm.

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