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Subaltern Female Identity in Mahasweta Devi's "Standayani" and "The Five Women"

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ABSTRACT

Here my mode of feminist study will be re-reading female identity with reference to subaltern female position. Subalternity could be analyzed as marginalized or 'other' figure as their essence is under shadow. They are not visible in the space of center or main stream. In this context they grow with their own stories and narratives which collaborately build their values. I have tried to explore the power of resistance and bodily acts of those shadowed females. It is reflected in their manner of acceptance and the collective consciousness in regard to their social position. Mahasweta Devi's 'Standayani' and "The Five Women" are the text to refer and justify the mode of subaltern female identity.

KEYWORDS: Subaltern, Female Identity, Resistance, Performative Bodily Acts, Collective Consciousness

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INTRODUCTION

When we talk about position and identity we differentiate as privileged and marginalized, oppressor and oppressed, or ruler and subject. But, we could find those people who are not recognized in any part of human world with their level of consciousness and unheard voices. It is the issue of those “the silent and silenced center”, as Spivak remarked the identity of subaltern group¹. The debate over subalternity may proceed with a question whether to locate a person in subaltern position or not. The person who shares feeling amidst own circle could be a way of living but representing the group of people if one comes up the he or she cannot remain subaltern. Taib, Mohamed Imran Mohamed discusses the changing condition of subaltern identity as “If the subaltern makes herself heard- as has happened when particular subalterns have emerged, in Antonio Gramsci’s terms, as organic intellectuals and be spokesperson for their communities- her status as a subaltern would be changed utterly; she would ceased to be subaltern”². In this context subalterns’ voices remain within their circle representing each other. Their romour and collective consciousness are the features that we could notice in their narratives. Such narratives are discursive within themselves as they ignore higher class people who could listen them. We find various ways to look at subaltern identities such as: either marginalized group or general oppressed class. Here it is focused on the basis of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s use of subaltern as Gopal, Dr. Arun remarks that she uses “in a more specific sense. She argues that 'subaltern' is not just a classy word for oppressed, for others, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie... [They are the] groups outside the hegemonic power structure”³. These groups of people have their own consciousness.

I have tried to explore the subaltern collective consciousness as a strong mode of female bonding. The females’ strength gets empowered when they share collectively the story of one another. I have based on the story of Mahasweta Devi’s Standayini (Breast giver) where the main character, Jasodha, plays the role of those common females who maintains their position with their own effort. Spivak claims that such stories are the modes of history which creates their essence as great as “the effect of the real”⁴. Spivak has focused upon such subaltern historians as an individual like Mahasweta Devi who has made us to look as historical grounding “within shadowy named characters”⁴. Such subalternity grows with collective effort and narratives by sharing personal stories. They could establish their identity as Jasodha could become “profession mother” Devi, Mahasweta remarks this growth as “the world belongs to the professional”⁵. In this way, my claim is that the collective consciousness encircles the subaltern females with their values of sharing and collectively accepting one another.

Subaltern has got wider modes of discussion. It has been tried to make justification over their oppressed identity. The modes of subaltern have given subalternities as they change in power politics. Ludden, David explains the changing modes of subaltern study as: “Subaltern Studies does not mean today what it meant in 1982, 1985, 1989, or 1993. Intellectual environments have changed too much to allow us to measure cause-and-effect in particular acts of writing and reading”⁶. This study provides the clear vision about the reality of subaltern who could change the position when their voices are heard. In such context we need to look at the people’s identity whether it has got positional value or not. Furthermore, subaltern could be a true source to identify the people’s position. In the case of identifying their position it is said that subaltern is rooted in postcolonial location. It has been taken for the subordinated group. Mallon, Florencia reflects upon the Guha’s use of subaltern as “Ranjit Guha defined the subaltern very broadly as anyone who is subordinated ‘in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way’”⁷. In this study Guha has concentrated upon the contributing factors of the subaltern group in the economy and social system. It is the process identifying subaltern group not only for their recognition but also for their identity process. Subaltern study can define identity and procedural location in the presence of elite group. It is not identity formation in terms with cultural, ethnical or another social marker but their own silent way of gestures, rumours and collective efforts. It could be seen as resisting and reconstructing modes in the process of identifying the existence either as a communal mode or as simplemindedness attitude.

In this subaltern location, females are having their position within the boundary of their family needs and survival forces. The female modes differ for locating the female identity. They grow with their power of resistance as they use their bodily performative acts as means of devaluing the power existence. Spivak uses the ‘Breast Stories’ of Mahasweta Devi to explain the position and real existence of female in the context of the unheard situation of the group. Jashoda in Mahasweta Devi’s story, ‘Standayini (Breast Giver),’ makes her presence and existence as breast feeder and a source of survival for her paralyzed husband. They grow with the strength of resisting the power politics without revolt.

In this mode female struggle and resistance, feminism gets different outlook as for localized female version of identifying themselves. We need to refer the feminisms which raise the issue of gender as the basis for the organization of society; there were various debates and struggle in female movements. The basic component in every modes of female identity formation is heading forth for equality with male or for establishing the differences with men. These trends have brought female right debates rather than exploration of true identity. In a continuum of female movements we get liberal

females who searched for equal rights and radical females who insisted the differences as their identity marker. In every steps of female discourse we find the attempt to get political visibility in the world. Such process has not addressed female sufficiently. There the group of female gets lost whom no one had identified in their social location. Even though, Woolf attempted to redefine feminism with the concept of androgynous figure where, neither existing masculinity nor tradition femininity played role to figure out female. But, in this progress of perceiving female as such, feminism to new dimension of female on her own room.

Such variations in feminism got postmodern values. Postmodern feminism has brought a progressive line in terms female discourse. Ebert, Teresa L has claimed that post modern feminist thoughts have brought different justification about female position even though many feminists are afraid of it. "I believe that postmodern feminist theory is necessary for social change and that, rather than abandon it as too abstract, we need to reunderstand it in more social and political terms"⁸ She views post modern feminism with 'ludic post modernism' and 'resistance post modernism'. She focuses upon resistance post modernism which has brought the difference in the part of identifying position as she explains it as: "I would like to articulate a resistance postmodernism that views the relation between word and world, language and social reality or, in short, 'difference,' not as the result of textuality but as the effect of social struggles"⁹. She finds possibility of liberation with the mode of resistance post modernism. In this value, feminism takes a different mode where female can look for their different existential value to identifying themselves. But, the question remains to talk about the third world females, the females who are been identified in social reality and who are not been acknowledged with value. We can't deny the fact that they are growing with different situational forms of resistance and acceptance. Nagy-Zekmi discusses postcolonial mode of female identity and finds it as being embodied with female subject. She explains as:

Female experience is embodied in the female subject. As said before, women in (post) colonial cultures have been termed 'the twice colonised', both by the imperial and the male social order. As such, women and the colonised are seen as sharing an experience of oppression and subjugation that has constructed their very beings.¹⁰

This mode of female essence makes the way for discussing about the subaltern group. It is not identity formation in terms with cultural, ethnical or any other social marker but their own silent way of gestures, rumours and collective efforts. It could be seen as resisting and reconstructing modes where they either live with a communal mode or as simplemindedness attitude just bothering their own

periphery. This paper will justify that subaltern female existence is built with more reverent stature which makes the people in power worthless.

In this way this paper will float over feminisms to come across the female resistance and the different mode of female struggle to identifying the female position in their location and situation. It is the part of subaltern context where female identity is rarely counted. The main focus will be to justify subaltern female identity with the referential text of Mahasweta Devi's story, 'Standayani (Breast Giver)' as a representational art. It will locate the localized values of female essences rather than the modes of feminisms for political and social equality. It will try to examine whether the power bodily performance and professional mode of bodily act could define difference of female resistance or not. I will be trying to explore the various frame works of female struggle and modes identity formation with Mahasweta Devi's 'Breast Giver' which I will be interchangeably using for 'Standayani.' It is localized version of female study with subaltern references and female study.

Subaltern Female study could lead a different mode for study where rather than looking at binary positions of male/female, we study them with their own narratives. In this paper, it will be attempted that the growth of those people who are conscious on their ways of living without being compared to higher class of people. I will be looking at the position of other marginalized females and their attempt to hold the position to compare and contrast subaltern females and their collectiveness. I will be referring the subaltern female of Mahasweta Devi's 'Standayani' as my primary source. Whereas theoretical modes will be taken from Spivak, Gramsci and critics on them along with post colonial female critics to deal the growth of subaltern female 'Jasodha' in Mahasweta Devi's story.

Subaltern Female Essence and Existence

We can observe various feminisms, from Enlightenment and liberal feminism to cultural and radical feminism. Ebert, Teresa L claims in terms of their motifs and struggle that they "have attempted to define women's positions in society-and thus the basis of women's oppression as well as an agenda for change-in terms of either a basic equality with men or a fundamental difference between men and women"¹¹. She differentiates between liberal and radical feminists and claims that both of them tend to struggle for identity.

The Enlightenment and liberal feminist argument for a "natural" equality between men and women depends on the belief in an inherent human nature based on a rational consciousness immanent in men and women alike. Cultural and radical feminists, on the other hand, argue for and celebrate the

fundamental differences between men and women, commonly treating these differences as deterministic and largely inherent traits. The “female difference” celebrated by cultural and radical feminists is seen by poststructuralists as constituting an “identity.”¹¹

In this line of female study moving differently with different values of identity formation, we can easily grasp the subaltern mode of female discussion. When we move towards subaltern study and female identity within the group then we can figure out their own localized version. Spivak is highlighting the voicelessness of the oppressed group as a subaltern. Subaltern could not be privileged with voices; they remain voiceless as their speech-act remains incomplete. Spivak has argued the position of subaltern as: “The subaltern is not privileged, and does not speak in a vocabulary that will get a hearing in institutional locations of power”¹². So, they are different from the marginalized or oppressed group who could be heard and brought into privileged position. Here it is focused on the basis of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s use of subaltern as Gopal, Dr. Arun remarks that she uses “in a more specific sense. She argues that 'subaltern' is not just a classy word for oppressed, for others, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie... [They are the] groups outside the hegemonic power structure”¹³. These groups of people have their own consciousness. The females’ strength gets empowered when they share collectively the story of one another.

Spivak tries to bring forth the necessity of mentioning the third world female’s essence and justifies her position on talking about the different reality of female in third world as: “The point that I am trying to make is that, in order to learn enough about Third World women and to develop a different readership, the immense heterogeneity of the field must be appreciated, and the First World feminist must learn to stop feeling privileged as a woman”¹⁴. There is the point of departure about the issue to address and cover the hidden group of female whose existence has not been counted. Spivak quotes Kristiva:

An enormous crowd is sitting in the sun: they wait for us wordlessly, perfectly still. Calm eyes, not even curious, but slightly amused or anxious: in any case, piercing, and certain of belonging to a community with which we will never have anything to do.¹⁴

In this line of study Spivak focuses the subaltern female study. She insists their position as more out casted. “If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern female is even more deeply in shadow”¹⁵. Feminists have been alert about the difference to identify females with their modes of struggle and way to posit identity. Sa’ar, Amila has discussed the issue of patriarchal bargain and the variation of female roles that they adopt themselves. Sa’ar, Amila

explains the modes the female takes under the different norms of patriarchal system with the term. She refers Deniz Kandiyoti, who introduced the term "the patriarchal bargain" in 1988. She is pointing out the main focus of patriarchal bargain as it is used:

To explain how women living under patriarchy strategize to maximize security and optimize their life options. She showed that women's responses to male dominance vary widely, according to the objective opportunities available under each particular variant of patriarchy. Such responses range from eager collaboration, whereby women act as devout guardians of patriarchal mores and values, to skillful maneuvering to make gains while avoiding overt conflict, to different levels of passive and active resistance.¹⁶

Such variation of responses becomes subaltern mode of female existence. They need not to revolt against patriarchal system but they present themselves as valued figure. Mallon, Florencia has focused upon the subaltern groups concern as, "if subaltern traditions and practices are better understood, they can still serve as the basis for building alternative political communities that will truly liberated the people"¹⁷. There is complexity in defining the subaltern identity along with its changing prospects. But, the historical narratives could omit the real existential mode of subaltern essence. Spivak claims that the subaltern study had changed the perspective to redefine the theory. Her position is that it is subaltern's contribution to for-lead the change with their local efforts. Representation of subaltern female is a major issue in feminist mode in these days. It is a localized analysis of female identity. Mahasweta Devi's breast stories bring forth the issue of female existence with their local modes.

Representation of Mahasweta Devi in Feminist Mode

Mahasweta Devi is one of India's foremost writers. Mahasweta Devi has her unique pattern to represent stories from the side of those ignored group of people. Her powerful fiction has won her recognition in the form of the different national awards. Mahasweta Devi believes in writing for the tribal, downtrodden, and underprivileged. In Devi's writing is the condition of India's indigenous people and of other economically marginalized people were envisaged. She puts female within them with their strength and modes of existence. These influences can be seen in her short stories, including 'Standayani' as well as in her novel 'Hajar Churashir Ma' (Mother of 1084). She could easily envision the life and feeling of those females. Devy Ganesh N. remarks Mahasweta Devi as "she has a strange ability to communicate with the silenced, her best speech reserved for those to whom no one has

spoken”¹⁸. She is taken as a rare creative writer in bringing the challenging stories from the unheard groups. Mahasweta’s story represents a feminist literary appropriation.

With her book, “Breast Stories,” Mahasweta Devi, as an Indian intellectual, is known for her feminist position. The stories, written by Mahasweta Devi, represent the real context of female existence. The voiceless figure of female has her own consciousness that grows along with her stories. So, subaltern narratives are the representation of the female identity which consist collective consciousness. Mahasweta Devi’s female characters forbears the strength of their bodily performances and local needs. She has been mostly talked and used for references by Spivak to justify her subaltern discourse. Spivak, as a post-modern critic remains suspicious with Mahasweta Devi’s way of presentation of female characters in submissive mode. Alter, Stephen mentions the conflicting interpretations and claims that “Mahawesta Devi’s, ‘The Breast Giver,’ and her other stories succeed in giving voice to a discontented and marginalized segment of the population.”¹⁹ Her stories have not only been the representation part but also the agent for bringing the change. Alter explains, “Her characters are generally drawn from the impoverished or exploited classes and their struggle for justice takes on mythological overtones.”¹⁹ Her stories are the basics for justifying localized figures where female becomes the means of social and familial savior. Basically, she tells the stories of the women of India who are caught endlessly in the cycles of holiness and self-abnegation.

MAHASWETA DEVI’S ‘STANDAYINI’ (BREAST GIVER) WITH SUBALTERN FEMALE FIGURE

In her story, “The Breast Giver,” from her collection of short stories called, “Breast Stories,” Mahasweta Devi outlines women’s identity as body, worker and object. Breast-Giver is the story of Jashoda, a Brahmin woman character, whose husband loses his legs in an accident and she has to take up the job of a nurse in a rich family. Devi shows female protagonist, Jashoda, living in a 1960’s India as she is compelled to take up ‘professional motherhood’ when her Brahman husband loses both his feet. Her role as a wife and as a mother of the owner’s family is the key female possessiveness in the context. The concept of motherhood is far more complex than mere female reproductively. It takes on much larger dimensions where it translates into the determining factor of a woman’s position in society. The concepts, motherhood and mothering, are also discussed widely into the emerging feminist rubric of the third world nations. The mother enjoys a privileged social position particularly if she is the mother of sons. Though discriminated against both as a daughter and a wife, as a mother she gains a certain

privileging and therefore motherhood becomes aspirational. Devy, Ganesh N. mentions Mahasweta Devi's own response towards the story as: "Breast-Giver is a parable of India after decolonization."²⁰ He takes the story as a representation of India and the valued mother India. It is very much concerned issue in regard to mother India as well as the character Jashoda who lives the life of sacrifice for husband and owner's family. Devy, Ganesh N. includes Mahasweta Devi's concern as:

Like the protagonist Jashoda, India is a mother-by-hire. All classes of people, the post-war rich, the ideologues, the indigenous bureaucracy, the diasporas, and the people who are sworn to protect the new state, abuse and exploit her. If nothing is done to sustain her, nothing given back to her, and if scientific help comes too late, she will die of a consuming cancer. I suppose if one extended this parable the end of the story might come to "mean" something like this: the ideological construct "India" is too deeply informed by the goddess-infested reverse sexism of the Hindu majority. As long as there is this hegemonic cultural self-representation of India as a goddess-mother (dissimulating the possibility that this mother is a slave), she will collapse under the burden of the immense expectations that such a self-representation permits.²⁰

Devi shows female protagonist, Jashoda, living in a 1960's India as she is compelled to take up 'professional motherhood' when her Brahman husband loses both his feet. With her only ability held in her 'always full' breasts and her desperate economic destitution she is compelled to give her breast ^{upon} the condition of owner's provision, which she does for 25 years, before losing her usefulness and consequentially dying from breast cancer. Morton, Stephen critically examines the role of Jashoda and her female position, quoting Spivak's comment as "The gradual decay and disease of Jashoda's exploited maternal body challenges the bourgeois nationalist myth of Mother India from the standpoint of a subaltern woman"²¹.

In the story of Mahasweta Devi's Standayini (Breast giver), the main character, Jasodha, plays the role of those common females who maintains their position with their own effort. Spivak claims that such stories are the modes of history which creates their essence as great as "the effect of the real"²². Spivak has focused upon such subaltern historians as an individual like Mahasweta Devi who has made us to look as historical grounding "within shadowy named characters"²².

Mahasweta Devi has also presented Jashoda's maternal body as "professional mother." She presents Jashoda's motherhood as "her way of living and keeping alive her world of countless beings. Jashoda was a mother by profession, professional mother"²³. She searched a job for the survival of her family after her husband's lamed body. But, Mr. Haldar's wife assigned her for breastfeeding her son-in-

law's children. Morton, Stephen presents Spivak's argument about the experiences of Devi's subaltern female protagonist, Jashoda, "challenge the assumption prevalent in western feminism that childbirth is unwaged domestic labour. In 'Breast Giver', Jashoda is employed as a professional mother in an upper-class Brahmin household to support her crippled husband, Kangali"²⁴. The argument is about existence with her own body which takes care husband and gets a professionalized identity. Mahasweta Devi wants to value Jashoda with her strength of self that "she wants to become the earth and feed her crippled husband and helpless children with a fulsome harvest"²⁵. In this way Jashoda is also presented as the figure of mother India, "such is the power of soil"²⁶. Jashoda is localized in terms of her needs and existence.

It is the fact that Jashoda's reproductive body which turns out to be the source of earning livelihood not for her but for her husband and her children. The breast milk is valuable part of existence which nourish the upper-class Haldar household. Her bodily performances becomes the major source of income for Jashoda's crippled husband. Morton, Stephen quotes Spivak, "Jashoda's experiences as a professional mother and wet nurse thus challenge the universal claims of western feminism to speak for all women"²⁶. 'Breast Giver' dramatizes the exploitation and gruesome death of Jashoda, a subaltern woman character in Devi's historical fiction, who is employed as a professional mother, She became a wet nurse in the upper-class household of the Haldar family in part of land where everything was dependent to male. Morton, Stephen explains Spivak's careful observation of Devi's descriptions about "Jashoda's cancerous body in the closing sequence of the story, especially the phrase, 'The sores on her breast kept mocking her with a hundred mouths, a hundred eyes'"²⁶. It is the stage of forbearance and the power of motherhood in professional context. Morton, Stephen. argues it as, "what is more, Jashoda's revolting and cancerous maternal body offers a powerful and situated counterpoint to the universal valorization of women's embodied resistance and political struggle"²⁶. It could be calculated as the performative mode of female existence in her own context that no male and social phenomena could defy.

Jashoda becomes more and more revered for her body's otherworldly tolerance, as the story that plays out on Jashoda's body. Jashoda suffers a painful and sickened death. Her plentiful breasts now become a gaping wound. She did not get the food and survival sources from Haldar's house as they parted here and there. Neither her husband followed her. She remained alone and she searched to passed out the life. She got cancer in her breast. Kangalicharan, her husband and her son came to support her. But, it was already late that they could not do anything. She is destined to die with breast cancer. It is

the extreme phase of female resistance without defying male dominance. She showed it to her husband who came after listening her disease. Devi, Mahasweta justifies the Jashoda's existential struggle with such a condition where, "[she] showed him her bare left breast, thick with running sores and said, 'See these sores? Do you know how these sores smell? What will you do with me now? Why did you come to take me?'"²⁷. It is the biggest question over the patriarchal system, and vain existence of master and male characters. She became mother to all, and left them all helpless to help her. Breast experience for female is the experience of own existence. Young, Marion Iris agrees the phenomenological claim "The chest, the house of the heart, is an important center of a person's being. I may locate my consciousness in my head, but myself, my existence as a solid person in the world, starts from my chest, from which I feel myself rise and radiate"²⁸. Jashoda did not lack being female. She remained able to challenge the social structure that it could not defy her as she became spiritual figure, 'Mother.' Mahasweta Devi exposes Jashoda's wound in her breast that did not challenge only the Hadar's family, her husband and the sons whom she breast fed but also the science and doctor. "One patient's cancer means the patient's death and the defeat of science"²⁹.

Female Bonding within counter discourses in Mahasweta Devi's "The five women"

Mahasweta Devi has retold the part of Kurukshetra in her story, "the five women." Her concentration is upon listening to the voices of unheard women who live their lives with their own sentiments. This story is published in her story collection "after Kurukshetra." It is her attempt to revision the tales of Mahabharata with different narratives. She has brought together the marginalized women and 'raj put' (royal) family's daughter-in-law so as to review female bonding with rumours and collective consciousness of those subaltern females. Her focus is to locate subaltern female within a female bond by contextualizing both marginalized and royal females' fate in Kurukshetra-war. I intend to look at her story to explore female subaltern with their way of female bonding: as they live with collective consciousness and they live sharing their stories in rumour, as they follow their rural conventions. They are unheard; Mahasweta Devi wants them to put forth with their essence.

The story, 'the five women' is basically located with the narratives of those five women who neither are from royal background nor are of servants, but the wives of foot soldiers who fought and died in Kurukshetra-war. These five women represent the ignored class of people who live together with same voice "hai, hai" as they keep on wailing for the loss of their husbands. They are in search of their dead husbands' bodies so as to fulfill their rituals. They don't believe in 'dharma yuddha' as they know

the war is spoiling the sons and husbands of many mothers and wives. They don't believe that the dead sons and husbands will transgress to heaven as they have killed their brothers, sons, gurus and disciples. This sense of interpreting the war, not as "a righteous war" but as "a war of greed"²⁹, shows their consciousness which puts them together sharing same fate and sentiments. They did not get ready to serve the widowed Uttara, the royal daughter-in-law, as dasais (servants). It is their self-respect. The senior servant, Madraja, has to convince them to be companions to Uttara who is pregnant too. Their consciousness for living in their reality is important as they accept their situational needs. They could not return back to home as the earth is hot and hard as rock due to the burning pyres. They want to wait till the earth cools down. They get ready to be companions of Uttara who is silenced with grief. Uttara shares their companions and feels light hearted since they become good friends to Uttara who do not let her feel grief stricken. This is the part of their collective voices, that being widowed they could serve the royal widow not as servants but as friends. They live life with their own nature. Besides, such collective effort to live in their way, they tried to make Uttara feel their essence too. Their own voices and lives get exposed out from the royal palace as they sit in grass land.

Uttara enjoys them who have a better sense of life. But, she gets confused when she hears their voices of mourning when they were sitting on grassland together. She couldn't get it as she thinks it as they are singing. They live and do everything together. This collective effort makes their lives meaningful. They could sleep well, as they mourn for their lost husbands. Mahasweta Devi explores the fact of meaningful survival of this outskirts group of women with their simplest collective consciousness. She has portrayed the figure of female bonding not only with their widowed characteristics but also with their collaborative way of living. Their collective position is envisioned with references that Uttara could not understand being in royal palace. They differ in naming culture, women's struggle along with men, and women's role in the absence of men. These differences make them unique that they could not share with rajput families. Mahasweta Devi is attempting to figure out these women as a real source of female lives. Their narratives flow with their common values of life. Uttara feels secured in their collective, common and natural living pattern. She was unaware about this fact of living. Uttara questions over their returning back as she is experiencing the five women's natural pattern of living who believe that birth, marriage, death and other part of sorrows as nature. They are sure that they will be married with brothers-in-law as they return back to village. This is the true representation of subaltern females who accepts lives as nature. They remain aware of their patterns of lives and works to accomplish. It differs with royal group of family as Uttara's mothers-in-law knowing these facts, want to

avoid in her life. More-over, they do not express their values openly, but they keep on making rumours amidst themselves. Such rumours make their lives more expressive.

The story begins with rumours as it starts with the collective voices, “hai, hai” (the wailing voices) for the lost husbands. It binds the outskirt females. The sound could not be worthwhile for royal people. They sympathize the foot soldiers’ wives and count them as being worthwhile taking part in their war. But, these women live with songs and sharing amidst their own people. When Gomati, who makes Uttara laugh and enjoy their companions, shares that “the foot soldiers’ only weapon is spear,” she gazes down as her thoughts are submerged that Uttara and other royal females could not fathom. But Uttara realizes the true values of life in her silence. It is the essence of subaltern female that they live life with truths. Gomati scolds the chief of dasis, Madraja, who says that the dead Abhimanyu goes to heaven as he died in dharma yuddha. Gomati believes that such faiths are fake one and shame, “Shame on you, Madraja! A woman from Kurujungle! Yet talk like the rajavritta?”²⁹. This sense is binding source amidst females. They make rumours as a source of expressing their sorrows and readjusting their values. They do not want to be transformed as ‘rajvritta’ as their essence is of farming families. They sing song together, they share common values and they could make everyone feel alive. When Uttara’s mother-in-law comes and reminds her to follow the way of rajvritta, Uttara “cries out, No, Arya! With them around... I feel as if I’m alive!”²⁹. The silencing royal family is not the part of life for these five women, who makes rumours by their lamentations. Uttara feels it as songs. So, rumours become their life-force that keeps them away from grief and reminds them to live their customs. They understand each other even in the silenced world. They even move the heart of Subhadra and Kunti (the royal females) with their narratives. They justify their staying in rajput’s house as “so many pyres burned for so many days, that the ground is baked rock hard, searing hot. Our feet get burnt. How can we walk so far over that scorched earth?”²⁹. These words move Subhadra too. It is the source of female bonding as the make rumours with “their glances, heads, sigh” that they understand each other. In this way, subaltern females live life sharing their essence with rumours and collective consciousness.

Mahsweta Devi explores the subaltern females with the figure of five women. The title of the story is deliberately written in small letters “five women” so as to represent their equal and common position that they enjoy without discrimination. Godhumi explains their way of sharing as she “speaks in deep compassion, So many hundreds of widow! So many homes in which mothers have lost their sons!”²⁹. It is their level of compassion and understanding each other that keep them together. Subaltern female bonding is attained with collective voices and rumours which consists compassionate energies of

life. As the five women promise to come back to meet Uttara after she bears child to sing a song for the child, it is their wish to make them join in the natural process of their life.

CONCLUSION

Subaltern Female study could lead a different mode for study where rather than looking at binary positions of male/female, we study them with their own narratives. Subaltern female study puts the female in their own locale where we could notice their real growth with their collective effort. Their identities grow with their narratives and struggle in a unique mode. This study has brought a part of the vision to suggest the females' position should be analyzed with those basic identities of common females that we forget most often. Females have grown with their performative role in various contexts where male figures remain in their professional assistance. Besides, it has located the analysis on the story written by Mahasweta Devi to present the real context of female existence. The voiceless figure of female has her own consciousness that grows along with her stories. So, subaltern narratives are the representation of the female identity which consist collective consciousness. It has been justified the claim of Subaltern Female identity as their narratives with their positional values.

Mahasweta Devi does not seem to write her stories for international issue and audience. But, her parable of countryside makes the remarkable presentation over female existence as the story 'Breast Giver' and 'The Five Women' has done. In this way female modes of discussion has been differed and localized with female study with their situational progress.

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