



Breast Stories

Mahasweta Devi , Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Translator)

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Translated and introduced by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak points out in her introduction, the breast is far more than a symbol in these stories - it is the means of harshly indicting an exploitative social system.

In "Draupadi", the protagonist, Dopdi Mejhen, is a tribal revolutionary, who, arrested and gang-raped in custody, turns the terrible wounds of her breast into a counter-offensive,

In "Breast-giver", a woman who becomes a professional wet nurse to support her family, dies of painful breast cancer, betrayed alike by the breasts that had for years been her chief identity and the dozens of 'sons' she had suckled.

In "Behind the Bodice", migrant labourer Gangor's 'statuesque' breasts excite the attention of ace photographer Upin Puri, triggering off a train of violence that ends in tragedy.

Spivak introduces this cycle of 'breast stories' with thought-provoking essays which probe the texts of the stories, opening them up to a complex of interpretation and meaning.

Breast Stories Details

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From Reader Review Breast Stories for online ebook

Jessica Russell says

Mahasweta Devi's Breast Stories is a translation from either bengali or hindi... The reading can be a bit rough in some places with the loose translations, however the message and stories that are revealed are unforgettable. It is important to note that all three of the stories in this collection are about 3 different women and their breasts. If you can get over the translation the stories are very straight forward and extremely graphic.

Saurabh says

Moving, Sad and Powerful

Sita says

Mahasweta Devi passed away just a few weeks ago, and I am simply devastated. Her stories are stunning and full of off-kilter yet sharp observations on the lives of Indian women. They are funny, in that wicked way of hers and yet full of pain and a feral sort of horror. This woman should be read by all of us, and her warnings must be heeded. I hope to live to see her stories become part of the collective conscience of my country.

Jess says

This is well worth a read for Spivak's extended commentary alone, much of which builds on her famous 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' essay. At first, I thought the translation was a little clunky, especially as Spivak has been criticised for an unnecessarily complicated writing style. However, her helpful notes made clear the reasoning behind translation choices, in particular the difficulties of replicating Bengali dialect and changes in meaning as a result of linguistic changes. Much of it is quite dense, but is interesting as an exploration of the possibility of subaltern agency and the limits of postcolonial criticism.

Advait says

Skip Spivak's pedantic 'introductory' essays and read the stories thrice over instead.

Mollie ~Ravenclaw Romance Reader~ says

I read Draupadi but it is not listed on GR, so Breast Stories was the next closest thing. Powerful, yes, but Spivak's babbling in my translation made it nearly unbearable. However, my main criticism is that every part of the story leading up to the bottom half of the last page was irrelevant. It just wasn't as powerful as it should have been, but only for me. I wouldn't disagree with people who applaud Devi, like I would consider

doing when concerning other authors.

Nikhil says

'Draupadi' and 'Behind the Bodice' are amazing stories. The contrast between Devi and Indian Women authors who write primarily for Western audiences cannot be more stark. Devi lays bare the bleak realities of poor women, with particular interest paid to tribal and migrant women -- peoples as marginal within the idea of india as you can get. Her stories condemn all of us as morally complicit in the horrifying gender-violence these women's social existence inevitably leads to.

Spivak's essays for the first and third story are illuminating and facilitated my understanding of the texts. Her essay for the second story was, in true Spivak style, 50 pages of egregiously pedantic and crushingly literary analysis that, sadly, went way over my head.

Ramachandran Venkataraman says

good set of stories

Vidhi Bansal says

Mahaweta Devi's stories truly sensitize you to real issues with the help of her candid and powerful stories. The book also has essays on the translators take on the the authors work, which gives a deeper understanding on the constant rift of traditions and modernity in India.

Chitra Divakaruni says

A powerful and courageous writer, Mahasweta Devi writes it like it is. These stories lodged inside me like gold thorns, reminding me of the plights of my sisters trapped in patriarchal structures that they themselves sometimes have strengthened, and my responsibility toward them. I recognized the deep human truth of these stories. I think you will, too. Kafka says, A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us. This is such a book.

Ritambhara Dixit says

Great cluster of stories with an unusual theme.

Gunjan says

I read a translation by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as Mahasweta Devi writes in Bengali. Although Gayatri

has tried her best, I understand that the nuances of the language and emotions get lost in translation. The book also includes cultural essays written by Gayatri as introduction to the three short tales. There are unsaid metaphors and how 'the woman's breast' is the connecting thread in each of the unrelated tales. There are social mores of the Indian middle class or the rural illiterate fugitive, jungian and freudian concepts at play and the characters very strongly etched out.

An impressive and powerful body of work and I lament the fact that I cannot read Bangla to be able to enjoy these pieces in their originality.
