This paper discusses briefly the structures of power exercised by the heroic woman character, Draupadi in the epic *Mahabharata* and in Mahasweta Devi’s story “Draupadi” translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. ‘Disrobing of Draupadi’ in both the cases is taken as the point of discussion. Draupadi of Vyasa’s masterpiece, the *Mahabharata*, obviously, has influenced the present day writer. By weaving different situations around her, she portrays woman-power through her. The paper well-explicates the meaning of ‘disrobing’ – while the Draupadi of the epic gets her robe miraculously, the modern day defiant Dopti Mehjen refuses to be clothed thus making all those assembled there puerile and naked. Both the Draupadis are symbols of retaliation and stand as monumental role-models.

The term “Power” is multidimensional since it masks itself with many faces according to the context and interest. In general power, a personal process, empowers the individual to hasten or halt or facilitate the course. To support this, the writer, Lisa Veneklasen y Valerie Miller (3) quotes Srilatha Battiwala’s definition of power in her work *A New Weave of Power, People & Politics: The Action Guide For Advocacy And Citizen Participation*.

Power can be defined as the degree of control over material, human, intellectual and financial resources exercised by different sections of society. The control of these resources becomes a source of individual and social power. Power is dynamic and relational rather than absolute –It is exercised in the social, economic and political relations between individuals and groups. It is also unequally distributed-some individuals and groups having greater control. The extent of power of an individual or group is correlated to how many different kinds of resources they can access and control. (41.http://www.justassociates.org/sites/justassociates.org/files/new-weave-eng-ch3-power -empowerment.pdf).

The author indicates that an individual / group has access to different modes of resources, that certainly includes inner sources. She further discusses the different structures of power in her work. The human being who has “Power over” — a commonly recognized power — dominates others. On the other hand, the person having “Power with” co-operates with others. “Power to” provides the individual...
with abilities to succeed in her / his endeavor. “Power within” makes the woman / man recognize her / his self–worth.

Power Over: . . . [This type of] power involves [the person] taking it from someone else and then using it to dominate. . . .

Power With: Based on mutual support, solidarity and collaboration power with multiplies individual talents and knowledge. . . .

Power To: Power to refers to the unique potential of every person to shape his or her life. . . .

Power within. . . Power within is the capacity to imagine and have hope. (Miller, 45)

Vyasa and Mahasweta Devi view their protagonists in an unusual circumstance and show how they surface their ‘Power within’ in the most crucial moment, and establish their feminine identities. In the epic, the stubborn Draupadi is a bonus to King Drupad, when the issueless King performs a yajna to have an heir to take revenge on his childhood friend, Drona. Along with his son, Dhritishtadyumna, the full grown Draupadi springs from the fire. The granite-willed Draupadi rejects Karna during svayamvara and becomes the wife of Pandavas. In spirit she is in no way less than Bhima and Arjuna. Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas and the Pandavas’ cousin considers them as rivals to the throne and schemes to win the wealth as well as Pandavas’ kingdom. By an unfair dice game, Duryodhana wins everything including the Pandavas and their wife, Draupadi.

The head strong Duryodhana sends a door-keeper to bring Draupadi to the Sabha, since she is a slave to them. Unmindful of the consequences, the door-keeper orders the Queen Draupadi to come to the court hall, as she is won by the King Duryodhana. Now, Draupadi directs her “Power to” authority and interrogates the man whether his master is mad and further she demands to know who the Prince loses first, either her or him.

“Who are you, door-keeper,” said Draupadi,
“to speak to me like this?
Which prince is there
who stakes his own wife?
Was the raja out of his senses?
Was there nothing else to stake?” (II:67:5)

“Go back to the sabha, . . .
and ask that gambler who he lost first—
himself or me.” (II:67:- 7)

She is not answered but she is dragged to the court by the inhuman Duhsasana. In the hall she never hesitates to question the elders the legality of the right of Yudhistira. The power structure “Power over” is exhibited on the part of Draupadi. Now she comprehends the position of her spouses and her wretched condition. She hardly waits for others to stretch a helping hand to her. As a queen she dominates the scene usurping the power of her husbands. Her brilliant mind boldly enquires the Kuru elders about dharma: “Tell me, members of this sabha, answer me: / what do you think – / have I been won or not won – / tell me, O lords of the earth?” (II:67:42).

Karna, instructs Duhsasana to strip Draupadi naked, because a slave should not have the upper garment. When the wicked Duhsasana starts pulling her single dress, the forlorn Draupadi prays to Lord Krishna to protect her: “Govinda! / I am losing my senses in the clutches of the Kauravas! / O save me!” (II:68:47). The mutual understanding between Krishna, the nephew of Kunti, and Draupadi supports her, that is “Power with” saves her from the disgrace. During exile the stubborn Panjali follows her husbands to the forest, leaving her sons in the custody of Subhadra. When Yudhistira opts for peace, it is she who persuades him to take arms against the perpetrators and thus takes revenge for her humiliation in the open sabha. Draupadi employs “Power over”, “Power to” and “Power with” to save herself from the dishonor.

Vyasa’s Draupadi is saved by the Lord whereas in Mahasweta Devi’s story the main character Dopdi is stripped naked by the officials. No god comes to save her honor. The power composition “Power over” makes her question Senanayak, who alone directs his police to humiliate the tribal woman. It is not an ordinary humiliation; it is a gang-rape ordered and performed by the leader himself. This heinous act of disrobing and making her naked, empowers the lady. Miller’s quotes from Srilatha Batiwala, defines the features of empowerment. When a woman /man experience the oppression, she/he swings into action to free herself / himself from the oppression. The change is possible because of her / his power that is empowerment.
The term empowerment refers to a range of activities from individual self-assertion to collective 
resistance, protest and mobilization that challenge basic power relation. For individuals and 
groups where class, caste, ethnicity and gender determine their access to resource and power, 
their empowerment begins when they recognize the systematic forces that oppress them, but 
act to change existing power relationships. Empowerment, therefore, is a process aimed at 
changing the nature and direction of systematic forces that marginalize women and other 
disadvantaged sectors in a given context. (Miller, 53)

Dopdi, a twenty-seven year old tribal woman, is named by her mistress and she is in the list of wanted 
persons who had killed the mistress’ husband, Surja Sahu a land-owning money lender, because he 
refuses to share water with untouchables. A reward of two hundred rupees is announced for her head. 
Dopdi herself seen that notice at the Panchayat office. Mr. Senanayak, an official, moves with the 
tribal as their friend and successfully corners Dopdi in the evening. She is kept at the canvas-camp till 
the dinner time. Senanayak permits the officials to do whatever they like. Her hands and legs are tied 
to four posts. She becomes unconscious. In the morning she is brought to the tent. On seeing the 
General the dishonored Dopdi walks towards him to exhibit what has happened to her.

Draupadi stands up. . . . Tears her piece of cloth with her teeth. . . . Senanayak . . . sees 
Draupadi, naked, walking toward him in the bright sunlight with her head high What is this? He 
is about to cry, but stops. Draupadi stands before him, naked. Thigh and public hair matted with 
dry blood. Two breasts, two wounds. What is this? He is about to bark. Draupadi comes closer. Stands with her hand on her hip, laughs and says the object of your search, Dopdi Mejhen. You 
asked them to make me up; don’t you want to see how they made me? (402).

Her empowerment freezes the General. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (6), the translator and critic writes 
that the illiterate and low-born woman teaches the male officials a shocking lesson. They are unable 
to face the “Unarmed target”.

It is when she crosses the sexual differential into the field of what could only happen to a 
woman that she emerges as the most powerful “subject,” who, still using the language of 
sexual “honor,” can derisively call herself “the object of your search,” whom the author can 
describe as a terrifying super object—“an unarmed target.” (Gayatri Spivak, 388).

The strong-willed lady indirectly questions their power. Her “Power over” structure makes her 
dominate the scene. They can rape her, but they cannot stop her from remaining naked after the rape. Further the critic voices:

The men easily succeed in stripping Dopdi-in the narrative it is the culmination of her 
political punishment by the representatives of the law. She remains publicly naked at her 
own insistence. Rather than save her modesty through the implicit intervention of a benign 
and divine (in this case it would have been godlike) comrade, the story insists that this is the 
place where male leadership stops (388).

Empowerment makes the two ladies, Draupadi and Dopdi, question the members of the society of 
their roles that pulls up the unmitigated hidden power in them that simply jolts the patriarchal authority. 
The questioning certainly causes discomfort to the family or to the community but it is a definite 
therapy to effect healing operations to the long-drawn infections of the society.

Indrani Singh Rai (4) in her article, “Mahasweta Devi’s Draupadi: A Discourse of Dispossessed” 
(www.ssmrae.com/admin/.../043757d8e99a09c8b534039890ceda03.pdf) forwards an apt concluding 
critique:

Once Dopdi enters, in the final section of the story, the postscript area of lunar flux and sexual 
difference, she is in a place where she will finally act for herself in not ‘acting,’ in challenging 
the man to (en)counter her as unrecorded or misrecorded objective historical monument. The 
army officer is shown as unable to ask the authoritative ontological question, “What is this?” 
(Breast Stories 36) (6) In fact, in the sentence describing Dopdi’s final summons to the sahib’s 
tent, the agent is missing. An allegory of the woman’s struggle within the revolution in a 
shifting historical moment can be seen.

Earlier in the same article Indrani Singh Rai presents the political setting that had provoked the writer 
to script her story about the colonial arrogance displayed in dealing with the cracking down the rebellion 
in the Naxalbari area in the northern part of the West Bengal. She observes:
The story is a moment caught between two deconstructive formulas: on the one hand, a law that is fabricated with a view to its own transgression, on the other, the undoing of the binary opposition between the intellectual and the rural struggles. In order to grasp the minutiae of their relationship and involvement, one must enter a historical micrology that no foreword can provide. ‘Draupadi’ the name takes us in long back in a hall, where the enemy chief begins to pull at her sari. Draupadi silently prays to the incarnate Krishna. The idea of sustaining law (dharma) materializes itself as clothing and as the king pulls at her sari, there seems to be more and more of it. She is infinitely clothed and can not be publicly stripped. It is one of Krishna’s miracles. But Mahasweta Devi’s Draupadi, gang-raped by police, refuses to be clothed by men again. In Draupadi, what is represented is an erotic object transformed into an object of torture and revenge where the line between (hetero) sexuality and gender violence begins to blur.

The critic well-explicates the meaning of ‘disrobing’ – while the Draupadi of the epic gets her robe miraculously, the modern day defiant Dopti Mehjen refuses to be clothed thus making all those assembled there puerile and naked. Both the Draupadis are symbols of retaliation and stand as monumental role-models.

References