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Dr. S. Karthicka

Assistant Professor

PG & Research Department of English

Vellalar College for Women, Autonomous

Erode, Tamil Nadu, India

karthicka.singaravel@gmail.com

Plight of the Subaltern Woman in Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi*

The status of women in the society, particularly marginalized is engrossed with the sense of docility and negligence. These marginalized women are living in the border line in terms of their gender discrimination, class differences and caste position. These women do not have any voices with regard to their authority on their self and everyday life of living. The position of marginalized women is more, and is living on the edge of domination and suffering. These women do not have any voices with regard to their authority on their self and everyday life of living.

Mahasweta Devi is one of the contemporary writers who deal with the forms of oppression in her works. Her works do exemplify the minor details of these marginalized women and offer an array of the position of female in society as well as their materialistic use of the body for the social and economic purpose. It also apprehends the vivid layers of domination and resistance. She also deals with the women issues like loneliness, separation, women's fight for survival, exploitative situations like rape, marital violence, death and its loss and female slavery. Critics like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak view Mahasweta Devi's works as rich sites of feminist discourse.

Mahasweta Devi is considered as the boldest Bengali female writer whose works are associated with the rural tribal community of West Bengal, women and dalits. Her sharp and powerful fiction has won her the recognition in the form of Sahitya Academy (1979), Jnanpith (1996) and Ramon Magasaysay (1996) awards, amongst several other literary other literary honours. She was also awarded the Padmasree in 1986, for her activist work among the dispossessed tribal communities.

Her writing stands out as a powerful tool that subverts the authority of upper caste in tribal society, particularly marginalized women's subjugation by society. They question the whole discourse of caste prejudice and women's suppression; by suppression it is also meant the objectifying of the female reproductive body for material purposes.

In Mahasweta Devi's short story "Draupadi", the protagonist Draupadi Mejhen (Dopdi), a revolutionary activist. She and her husband Dulna Majhi are the part of Operation Bakuli in 1971. They are wanted by the government and therefore they are hiding in underground. The complete story revolves around the search for Dopdi until she is arrested. The story concludes with a disastrous scene wherein she becomes miserable victim of the most atrocious and brutal male violence on woman. Two members of their group have betrayed and consequently Dopdi was caught by police.

Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" encapsulates the life of Dopdi, on connection with modern progressive state and the survival of the subaltern. It raises the issues of class, caste and colonialism, and their collusion in the formation of hegemonic patriarchal nation state and how this mainstream formation maintains itself through violent 'othering' of the margins. The cultural burdens of her own community, the exigencies of naxalites activism, and the onslaught of army and state – Draupadi (Dopdi) summarizes the gendered nature of the process of othering and how the mainstream-margin antagonism uses the female body as a site of dishonour to vindicate patriarchy, its values and norms. Mahasweta Devi defines her

modus operandi thus: “It is essential to revive existing myths and adapt them to the present times and following the oral tradition, create new ones as well. While I find the existing mythologies epic and ‘puranas’ interesting, I use them with new interpretations” (qtd in. Rohtak 166).

Literature is the amalgamation of imagination and reality. Mahasweta Devi draws Draupadi (Dopdi) character as the representation of epic character Draupadi from *Mahabharata*. In the epic, Draupadi is the wife of five brothers (Pandavas) that gives an idea of only polyandry example in any religious text as Spivak said. However, the manifestation of Draupadi is only limited in religious rites, but not in human life. Her first husband lost the dice-game and stalked what he owns. Draupadi is one of them as the ‘material property’ who is to be sold or exchanged. It is also a matter of fact that her presence in their life is not at all important and thus the enemy chief gets the opportunity to strip her. However, in religion the enemy leader was not able to strip her completely. The enemy chief is not able to strip her as Krishna plays a miracle; “Draupadi is infinitely clothed and cannot be publicly stripped” (Spivak 183). Her story represents the upper-class story where so-called God is present saving her. However, her position among her husband gives the reader a strange idea of her “legitimized pluralization in singularity” (Spivak 183) which is completely limited. Spivak maintains: Mahasweta’s story questions this “singularity” by placing Dopdi first in a comradely, activist, monogamous marriage and then in a situation of multiple rape (Spivak 183).

In Dopdi’s life, no God can save her. She is brutally gang-raped and leaving carelessly on the floor. She steps ahead without any clothes in front of Senanayak which makes him uncomfortable. He asks for her clothes, but she denies wearing and said “What’s the use of clothes? [...] There isn’t a man here that I should be ashamed” (Spivak 196). Her naked body represents the power of marginalized that stops Senanayak to move ahead. In

myth, lord Krishna helps Draupadi to save where in reality Dopdi is not saved by any lord against male domination. She plays the roles of both as marginalized and suppressed woman. Being a woman she becomes an active agent in executing the protest even giving away her 'body'. Similarly, as a marginalized, she becomes an alternative voice to stand out. It is true that her course of action was instructed by Arijit, the leader of a movement; however, it is she who stands against Senanayak. Portrayal of Dopdi is not only as an activist but also as an agent who asserts her own story that challenges the general thought of Indian history.

Senanayak apprehends the degraded Dopdi in order to fulfill the law. He maintains and believes what he is taught and follows his duty without any hesitation. Spivak compares him with Prospero Shakespeare's *Tempest*, who comes to a land and found uncivilized people. And it is his soul's duty to civilize them even by killing them. Dopdi, a Santal woman is considered as marginalized. As Dopdi's activities frighten Senanayak and his government, he executes the hunting mission operation. He willingly wants to participate in so-called civilizing mission because for him it is his duty and only truth to deal with. Spivak remarks, "He follows the necessities and contingencies of what he sees as his historical moment" (Spivak 179) that exemplifies his character clearly. He constructs his own story from his point of view where his counter Dopdi has a different version to express.

Here it is meant that the superior complex of white people who believe that they are the 'only' civilized people in the world and it is their duty to civilize 'others' in rest of the world. Dopdi's position in the story is the position of a marginalized who will never speak or who cannot be spoken. However, she breaks this thought and raises her voice. She stops Senanayak and wants him to know the 'unspoken' voices of a woman. Her struggles to become independent or unshackles her country gets a shape while she stands upright in-front of Senanayak and scared him. Mahasweta Devi says, "Draupadi pushes Senanayak with her

two mangled breasts and for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed *target*, terribly afraid” (Spivak 196).

Dopdi’s ultimate action takes her “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” (Spivak 184). She (Dopdi) rewrites the story that tells the story of marginalized woman who instantly turns herself into ‘subject: I’ from being ‘object: her’. Moreover, her body protrudes the perception of materialization of the marginalized women that signifies as resistance. She breaks the traditional belief of womanhood or womanly behaviour and stand against this believe.

Furthermore, her naked-mutilated physical appearance draws a picture of a bold protest of being ashamed because of gang rape. She does not consider any man as a man because she is cruelly gang raped and when Senanayak asks her to get dressed, she objects and then abjects as she is resisting taking the essential needs of human being of being cover up. She totally refuses to become a part of subservient or docile, but proposes herself on a different level. Her abjection of shame and hesitation as women reveals her strength. She defies the docility of being poor, tribal and or a woman.

In addition, Mahasweta Devi presents her as the repressive female whose body is mutilated and at the same time becomes a dispute against oppressor. She authorizes the female voice by presenting the female body as dispute of domination and suppression. Dopdi’s action is “a visible explosion of unorthodox sexualities [...] that has become apparent, at least after a general review of the facts” (Foucault 49) which becomes a repressive response to the superior power. Michel Foucault entitles it as ‘instrument- effect’ which explains the reverse mode of protest against perversion of [male] power. It also projects that Dopdi’s consumed body becomes an instrumental strike back against the suppression of superior authority.

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