

PARTITION TRAUMA, CASTE INTERSECTIONALITY AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S "DRAUPADI"

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ABSTRACT

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak translated Mahasweta Devi's short story "Draupadi" which depicts a plot that examines both female assertion and subaltern resistance. The protagonist of the story is Dopdi Mejhan, who undergoes a metamorphosis from a victim of a colonial and patriarchal brutality to a symbol of resistance against state tyranny that challenge hegemonic power systems. This article challenges the partition trauma, caste intersectionality and reproductive trauma by critically analysing the short story through the lenses of feminist theory and subaltern studies. It also looks at how Dopdi's body and voice become sites of both oppression and assertion. In many countries, women are seen as reservoirs of a community's cultural and moral values, therefore the harm by a rapist inflicts on a woman in such circumstances is an attack on her family and society. Dopdi does not get a saviour, instead she reclaims her agency via violent resistance, in contrast to Draupadi in Mahabharata, who is saved by divine intervention. Dopdi highlights the limitations of the patriarchal control by confronting her captors in her nudity rather than hiding behind shame, demonstrating that sexual abuse cannot obliterate her identity in the face of the unwavering resistance.

Keywords: Dopdi, women, patriarchal, story, assertion, subaltern

INTRODUCTION

"Draupadi Mejhen, the most notorious female, long wanted in many." (16). Mahasweta Devi conveys this exact sentence that her story "Draupadi" (2014), is about a woman who after being violated degraded by the police, becomes rebellious and is going to shatter all the preconceptions associated with the women. One of the most influential writers and politicians in post-colonial Indian literature, Mahasweta Devi uses her writings to highlight the structural oppression of underprivileged groups. Throughout her career, she concentrated on the socio-political struggles of landless workers, Adivasis, Dalits highlighting the gendered violence these groups endure at the hands of upper caste hierarchies and the state. One of the most politically charged and unsettling accounts of state sponsored sexual abuse in contemporary Indian literature is her short story "Draupadi", which was written in Bengali and then translated into English by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

She (Draupadi) is introduced to the reader...between two versions of her name. Dopdi and Draupadi. It is either that as a tribal she cannot pronounce her own Sanskrit name (Draupadi), or the trivialized form, Dopdi, is the proper name of the ancient Dopdi.(Spivak, 387)

Mahasweta Devi creates a radical critique of patriarchy, state power, and the dehumanisation of tribal women in postcolonial India through a horrific story of gendered and caste-based persecution. According to Waghmare, the oppression of the marginalised women is a widespread and deeply embedded problem that exists in all countries and civilisations, "Marginality with all its aspects is indeed, a major problem to be reckoned with in the world." (16). The story reimagines the mythological Draupadi from Mahabharata as Dopdi

Mejhan who is portrayed both as victim and a rebel, against the backdrop of the Naxalite Movement in West Bengal, India. Mahasweta Devi claims that feminism addresses the difficulties faced by women, especially those from oppressed and marginalised groups. In addition to gender issues, she focuses on prejudices related to class and caste. Her paintings and stories challenge the norms of the patriarchal society with their powerful themes of enquiry and resistance. Mahasweta Devi explores the problems of justice, injustice and feminism in her creative works. Devi brought social change by fighting for the rights of tribal and low caste woman. She impacted writers, activists, educators and generations of men and women. The primary focus of this book 'Breast Stories' is a feminist critique of some of Mahasweta Devi's fiction that highlights rejection of patriarchal structures.

PARTITION TRAUMA: STRUCTURAL BACKDROP, NOT EXPLICIT PLOT

The cruel torture of Dopdi, the tribal woman, by the state machinery is depicted in this story. The torture vividly illustrates the extremes to which Dopdi is not only detained but also repeatedly raped and suffers from the double agonies of being raped, both physically and mentally. In this instance, the state uses rape as a weapon to punish Dopdi for her defiance, demonstrating both gender-based and class-based oppression. Dopdi's body exhibits naked authority over subaltern based on gender and class, and she is repeatedly raped. The state even makes an attempt to rob Dopdi of her humanity and individuality. Dopdi's rebellious nature is what makes her so exceptional.

In "Draupadi", the conflict arises when the tribal community murders Surja Sahu and his son, who are of higher caste, due to the cruel denial of water access during the draught. The government rather of addressing the issues faced by the indigenous communities that compelled them to resort to violence, deploys the whole state apparatus against them through confrontations, enforced disappearances and sexual assaults on women. The progress in the village is confined to the elite, while the indigenous population is deprived of essential resources such as water. Displaced from their indigenous surroundings, the tribal communities struggle to integrate into mainstream society due to the absence of government initiatives that cater to their needs.

In "Draupadi", the forest symbolises a labyrinth of support from the patriarchal governmental apparatus. The unyielding pursuit of the female protagonist 'Dopdi' by the oppressive state authorities and her subsequent abduction, culminating in an unofficially endorsed gang rape, underscores the status of woman as subalterns within the contemporary power dynamics of India. The way Santhals are treated may gently allude to the impending danger in Dopdi's destiny. Senanayak, an elderly Bengali expert on extreme-left politics and combat is introduced to us. He is a man who is capable of comprehending and understanding the opposition's actions. He believes that every soldier has an obligation to eliminate combatants using scythes, bows and arrows (Dopdi falls into the category). In theory, he respects his opposition, even if this is how he operates. He feels that he must unite with the adversary in order to get control of them. In order to quickly pursue Dulna and Dopdi, he gives his men the command to hide in the Jharkandi forest.

Draupadi, the wife of the five sons of the impotent Pandu and daughter of King Drupad, was asked to be undressed hundreds of years ago. As stated in the forward by Spivak:

Within a patriarchal and patronymic context, she is exceptional, indeed "singular" in the sense of odd, unpaired, uncoupled. Her husbands...are legitimately pluralized...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, 387)

Her oldest husband loses his belongings in a game of dice, and as Draupadi is the one of those belongings, she also loses herself. According to Spivak, the Mahabharata (65:35-36):

The Scriptures prescribed one husband for a woman, Draupadi is dependent on many husbands; therefore she can be designated a prostitute. There is nothing improper in bringing her, clothed or unclothed, into the assembly. (Spivak, 388)

Devi's 'Draupadi' is an indictment of how the Indian government treats its underprivileged groups, particularly tribal populations, who frequently face violence, exploitation, and displacement. The larger socio-political battle of the tribal groups against a state machinery that seems them as an expendable is symbolised by Dopdi's unadulterated defiance. According to Devi, Dopdi's defiance of the state's power is not just personal; rather it is a symbol of group resiliency. Devi's narrative highlights how marginalised identities must reclaim their own narratives in order to challenge institutionalised inequity because they do not fit into the frameworks created by those in the positions of power. Ranajit Guha believes that, "marginalized groups, or subalterns, must be seen as "the makers of their own destiny, sometimes successfully, sometimes in failure" (Guha, 1988).

Fanon highlights that the fight against the oppression is a group effort rather than just an individual one. He remarks, "The liberation of the individual does not follow national liberation; an authentic national liberation exists only in the precise degree to which the individual has irreversibly begun his own liberation" (Fanon, 1961).

CASTE INTERSECTIONALITY: ADHIVASI/WOMAN/INSURGENT

Caste/Tribe: In order to prevent oppression from being interpreted as "just gender" or "just class" Devi incorporates intersectionality into Dopdi's identity. As an Adhivasi woman, Dopdi Mejhan is marginalised both as a woman and as a tribal rebel, placing her at the bottom of the Indian social structure. Her caste and gender both determine her oppression, putting her in a precarious position where she is both exploited and erased. Tribal women like Dopdi are rendered useless, their bodies used as battlefields upon which state authority is executed, in contrast to upper caste woman, who are frequently shielded inside the frameworks of Brahmanical patriarchy.

Gender: Dopdi is sexually violable due to the patriarchal norms, and the police use rape as a weapon of intimidation and questioning. A critical viewpoint is provided here by Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which holds that gender is created through socially repeated activities (34). Rejecting the "ashamed victim" performance, the patriarchal story of silence and is rejected by Dopdi. Her nudity turns into a calculated political statement that exposes the state's aggression rather than her frailty.

Political Identity: In Draupadi rape is a systematic, state-approved weapon of war, rather than a singular act of sexual assault. The paramilitary group in India don't take just in an intentional display of power, rape Dopdi, mutilate and strip her in order to obtain information or punish her for her political activities. There are several political powers for this act; to destroy Dopdi's revolutionary identity.

1. The state thinks that by raping Dopdi, she will become helpless, degraded woman instead of a political rebel.
2. The brutalisation of Dopdi is intended to strike fear in other tribal rebels, especially women by warning that defiance will result in severe physical punishment. This is intended to send a message of fear to the greater Naxalite movement.

3. To uphold male dominance through sexual conquest. In patriarchal systems, sexual violence is not just an attack on a person but also a confirmation of male power, demonstrating that women's bodies are constantly under male control.

The paramilitary troops anticipate that Dopdi would come out of his ordeal devastated, pleading for forgiveness and assuming the stereotypical character of the “dishonoured woman”. However, Dopdi's last act of disobedience totally undermines their expectations of acquiesce.

HOW THE THREE THREADS CONVERGE:

The legacy of partition normalises the treatment of the bodies of the subaltern women as areas to be subjugated.

Mahasweta Devi's stories show how gender interacts with caste, class, tribal identity and postcolonial political systems to produce particular types of oppression and resistance tactics, as opposed to using general gender analysis categories. Her depiction of tribal woman's lives calls into question feminist theoretical frameworks that were mostly created by examining the realities of the educated, metropolitan women. The confluence of cultural marginalisation, environmental degradation, tribe relocation and gender opposition results in forms of exploitation that surpass traditional feminist categories and produce new forms of resistance.

“Draupadi [Dopdi] comes close [to Senanayak]. Stand with her hand on her hip, laughs and says, The object of your search. Dopdi Majhen, you asked them to make me up, Don't you want to see how they made me?” (33)

Instead being a symbol of weakness, Dopdi's nakedness turns into a scary force that makes the commander, “terribly afraid” (33). The conventional heroine aesthetics are destroyed. Her beauty is not the symmetry and purity but rather in her refusal to submit to the harsh power. In this re-imagination, the contemporary Draupadi does not wait for any Krishna to assist her; instead she confronts the harsh truth on her own.

CONCLUSION

After her capture Mahabharata in which the heavenly intervention saves the legendary Draupadi from the public shame. In contrast, Dopdi Mejhan does not have a masculine or a divine intervention. Dopdi uses sheer disobedience to save herself, using her nakedness as a weapon to undermine her oppressor's psychological dominance.

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