

SILENT SCREAMING OF A MARGIN'S SOUL: A STUDY OF MAHASWETA DEVI'S DRAUPADI

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Abstract: In the stream of marginalization, women are in worse situation. They are marginalized on the basis of unspoken and unwritten laws of the man constructed society. Women's positions in society, particularly those of marginalized /peripheral one's are very preoccupied with the sense of docility and negligence. Marginalized woman, the tribe or the poor women, do not have any 'decent' or 'proper' position and identity in society. In the present paper, an attempt has been made to show how Draupadi, a Santhal tribe woman brutally raped resists, erases the typical silence adopted by many in our country. She prefers the way of resisting instead of remain silent. Draupadi depicts how a marginalized tribal woman derives strength from her body and her inner feminine core to fight against her marginality. In an attempt to subjugate her mind, body and soul, Dopdi (tribal name) is raped repeatedly by a number of men as she loses consciousness time and time again during her ordeal. She displays an unusual form of resistance by subverting the gaze in such a way that it is her oppressors who are made to feel the shame.

Key words: Marginalization, tribal, women, subjugate, position.

Introduction: Mahasweta Devi is one of the foremost literary personalities, a prolific and bestselling authors in Bengali. She is one of those writers in India who have an unflinching commitment and passion for the underdog. Born in 1926-2016 in Dhaka, Mahasweta Devi procures an international recognition as an activist writer. Her satiric fiction has won her recognition in the form of 'SahityaAcademy' and 'Jnanpith Award' the highest literary prize in India, in 1996. A social activist, she has spent many years crusading for the rights of the tribal and was also awarded the Padmashree and the Magsaysay, the Asian equivalent of the Nobel Prize, in 1997, for her activist work amongst dispossessed tribal communities.

Mahaswetaas being a writer with a social cause, her stories and novels are a causaticcomment on India as a nation and the socio-political trajectory of the country which has happened since Independence. Mahasweta Devi has been actively working for years for tribals and marginalized communities. Her activism effortlessly translates into her writings, endorsing this view Radha Chakravorty writes in her book *Feminism And Contemporary*

Women Writers: "Mahasweta's current reputation as a writer rests largely on her own self-projection as a champion of the tribal cause and decrier of class prejudice" (Chakravorty 2008: 94). Championing the cause of tribals in India she is particularly devoted to ensure their economic, political and social security. Her stories bring to the surface not only the misery of the completely ignored tribal people, but also articulate the oppression of women in the society.

A society in which a woman has been reduced to commodity in the wake of consumerist culture. As keen observers of history, if we analyze writings of Devi we have a feeling whether it may be Bengal or any other part of the country, the situation of the oppressed and violence of contemporary meted out to women throughout India remains the same: 'The continuation of sexual assault of feudal- patriarchal society in the form of state violence is the experience of contemporary feudal society.' (Jyoti and Katayani 1998: 127)

Mahasweta Devi is one of those rare writers who always aspire to find and explore something challenging and new and never

accept the existing ideals. Her short fiction 'Draupadi' is primarily, the story of a Santhal tribal woman raped by men in power that is her sexual torture in police custody. Rape is considered as a bolt on the forehead of an innocent woman. As it is given:

Rape is worse than death

Rape is always spoken through the lips of dead women

For a live woman rape means dishonor

Silence is the only choice for a victim

Rarely do families give victims the space to speak about their condition

(Qtd. In Hameed 2005: 312)

Draupadi, on the surface, seems to tell a familiar tale from the most revered Indian epic, Mahabharata. Draupadi in the epic, the most celebrated heroine married to the five sons of Pandu, provides an example of polyandry, not a common system of marriage in India. (Spiyak 1990: xiii)

Draupadi, which was published in her work Agnigarba in 1978 is one of them. Later it was translated in English by Gayatri Chakravorty Spiyak's collection of short stories entitles Breast Stories. The story has its backdrop, the Naxalbari movement of Bengal, which started as a rural revolt of landless workers and tribal people against landlords and money lenders. The misery of a tribal woman as compared to aristocratic woman is far more dreadful. Rape is the worst recognition of sexual violence against women. Giving all the vital information about the famous criminal Draupadi right at the beginning of the story, Mahasweta Devistates:

NAME DOPDI MEJHEN, age 27, husband DulnaMajhi [deceased], domicile Cherakhan, Bankrajarh, information whether dead or alive and/or assistance in arrest, one hundred rupees ... (Devi 2010: 19)

Mahasweta Devi's tribal Dopdi is fighting for her survival, for food and for water. The writer etches out the plight of the tribals in words. She depicts how utter helplessness can finally lead to resistance or even rebellion.

Dulna and Dopdi worked at harvests, rotating between Birbhum, Murshidabad and Bankura. In 1971, in the famous Operation Bankura, when three villages were cordoned off and machine gunned, they too lay on the ground, faking dead. In fact, they were the main culprits. Murdering SurjaSahu and hisson, occupying upper caste wells and tubewells during the drought, not surrendering those three young men to the police. (Devi 2010: 19-20)

They went underground for a long time and they are on the list of wanted. They used the technique of guerilla warfare to compete with their enemy. Guerilla warfare is supposed to be the most despicable and repulsive style of fighting with primitive weapons. Dopdi and Dulna belong to the category of such fighters, for they too killed with hatchets and scythes, brows and arrows.

Dopdi is called by Senanayak and she is flooded by confused memories of drought in Birbhum. There was hardly any drop of water for her and for her people but there was 'Unlimited water, at SurjaSahu's house, as clear as a crow's eye' (Devi 2010: 29). The only way out of this situation was to kill SurjaSahu. The killing was carried out by Dulna, Dopdi and other comrades. Their fight was for survival and when that is at stake than any action and every action is justified. The feudal and imperialist mindset fails to give a human character to a tribal who is perceived only as a dark bodied and wild untouchable who can't even have the right to draw water from the wells. He is the proverbial 'other' who has been given a marginalized identity by the dominant hegemonic Hindu society.

Surja Sahu's house was surrounded at night. Surja was tied up with cow rope. His whitish eyeballs turned and turned, he was incontinent again and again. Dulna had said, I will have the first blow, brothers. My great-grandfather took a bit of paddy from him, and I still give him free labour to repay that debt.

Dopdi had said, His mouth watered when he looked at me. I will pull out his eyes.

(Devi 2010: 30).

Operation Jharkhani gains momentum under the leadership of Senanayak, 'a specialist in combat and extreme left politics'. He is a seasoned military strategist with mastery over 'theories' on how to defeat the enemy by learning their language, using tribal informants and 'kountering' techniques;

In order to destroy the enemy, become one. Thus he understood them by (theoretically) becoming one of them. He hopes to write on all this in the future. He has also decided that in his written work he will demolish the gentlemen and highlight the message of the harvest workers. (Devi 2010: 22)

Very soon DopdiMejhen is apprehended and understanding her defeat she readies herself for the next action of warning her comrades:

Now Dopdi spreads her arms, raises her face to the sky, turns towards the forest, ululates with the force of her entire being. Once, twice, three times. At the third burst the birds in the trees at the outskirts of the forest awake and flap their wings. The echo of the call travels far. (Devi 2010: 34)

With her capture, the process of co modification of her body starts. She is no more treated as an activist with a cause but a mere body, a possession or war booty. But before going for his dinner, Senanayak, issues orders to his men- of course after her 'official interrogation - to make her and do the needful'. In an attempt to subjugate her mind, body and soul, Dopdi is raped repeatedly by a no. of men as she loses consciousness time and time again during her ordeal.

The most important question that this text poses is not only why Dopdi was raped, but it also analyses why women fall as an easy prey to be raped? Through this story, the author challenged the 'Co modification' and 'Subsequent victimization' of a woman's body.

Shaming her, a tear trickles out of the corner of her eye. In the muddy moonlight she lowers her lightless eye, sees her breasts and understands that, indeed, she is made up right. Her breasts are bitten raw, the nipples torn. How many? Four-five-six-seven-then Draupadi had passed out. (Devi 2010: 35)

Dopdi's denial of shame imposed to her by the oppressor through the act of rape reveals her courage and strength in spite of being a rape victim.

Draupadi's shakes with an indomitable laughter that Senanayak simply cannot understand. Her ravaged lips bleed as she begins laughing. Draupadi wipes the blood on her palm and says in a voice that is terrifying, sky splitting and sharp her ululation, What is the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you cloth me again? Are you a man?

What more can you do? Come on, Kounter me -come on, Kounter me-? (Devi 2010: 37)

Unlike other passive rape victims, Devi does not let her heroine 'Droupadi' suffer in silence. With unconquerable spirit, the naked and bleeding Draupadi faces all her rapists defiantly, out resisting the sexual flouting of her body. Mahasweta Devi gives voice to the voiceless unfortunate of the earth, her literary output is an attempt to shake the conscience of the citizens, to make them notice, identify and analyze what goes unnoticed, unheard by the naked eye.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that this story is a hard hitting comment on the grim situation of the tribal and marginalized in the face of democracy. The condition of women in the present patriarchal society remains the same irrespective of time and place. The tribal woman is marginalized in more than one way as she lives in a constant fear of victimization. When in literature one comes across a character like Dopdi who decides to take her revenge in her

own way. She is an example about to what extent a woman can be pushed that it comes to her mind to raise her voice after being brutally gang raped. Conquering her pain and humiliation, she emerges as the most powerful 'subject.' Her tale presents the bitter realities of the revolutionary movements of the tribals in an unabated manner and highlights the irony that in 21st century tribal women still have to fight the unjust world order for bare survival.

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