

DROUPADI: THE STORY OF RURAL VERSES INTELLECTUAL STRUGGLE

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Mahaswetha Devi is widely acknowledged as one of India's foremost writers. Her trenchant, powerful, satiric fiction has won her recognition in the form of Sahitya Academi (1979) and Jnanpith (1996) awards, amongst several literary honors. She was also awarded the Padmasree in 1986 for her activist work amongst dispossessed tribal communities. In recent years she has come to be recognized in the Western world as the spokesperson for the under-privileged and for women. Mahaswetha Devi's 'Draupadi' is presentation as a revisionist text where she attempts to re-write one of the greatest character of the 'Mahabharata' from the subaltern's point of view . The 'Mahabharata's' voices of the oppressed remained a somewhat neglected field of critical enquiry. Mahaswetha Devi's obvious intention is to underscore the contrast between the Rajavritta in which one becomes "cunning and treacherous" and Lokavritta in which one honor and celebrates life. Contemporary India has its own subaltern's in the lower castes, the tribals, the landless, the poor and their women .

Mahaswetha Devi gives voice in her writing. She had a commitment to political and ideological fields in her works. She firmly believes that political, cast and class interest have always controlled the social, cultural and moral fabric of our country even in the 'remote' and past and hence, "the interest of the exploiters and the say of the exploited" have always been the central point of interest in her writing. (Women writers in English A Comprehensive Study, Gauri Shankar Jha) 'Draupadi' of Mahaswetha Devi is a story which can be conceived in two different deconstructive lines - one as a law that is fabricated with a view to its own transgression and another, as the undoing of the binary opposition between the intellectual and the rural struggles. 'Draupadi' is the name of the central character of the story. She is introduced to the reader between two uniforms and 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 tribalised form, Dopadi, is the proper name of ancient 'Draupadi'. She is in a list of wanted persons, yet her name is not on the list of appropriate names for the tribal women.

'Draupai' is one of the most celebrated heroine of the Indian epic 'Mahabharata' which is one of the cultural Prudential's of the Aryan civilization of India. The tribe predate the Aryan invasion. They have no right to heroic Sanskrit names. It is the killing of this 'Dopadi's' (Draupadi, the name given by her mistress, to the daughter of a benevolent tribal bond servant) husband that sets the going the events of the story. Dopdi Mejhhen, twenty seven year old is on the list of wanted. Long back, Draupadi's mother threshed rice at Surja Sahu's at Bakuli. It was his wife, who gave her the name 'Draupadi'. Dulna, her husband and Dopadi worked at harvests rotating between Birbhum, Burdwan, Murshidabad and Bankura.

In 1971, in the famous Operation Bakuli, when three villages were cordoned off and machine gunned, they too lay on the ground, faking dead. In fact they were the main culprits of murdering Surja Shau and his son, occupying upper-caste wells and tubewells during the drought etc. In all these they were the chief instigators. Dulna and Dopdi went underground for a long time in a Neanderthal darkness. The special Forces attempted to find the out. The Primitives were very good at Guerilla Warfare with their special weapons. Annihilation at the sight of any and all the tribals is considered as the duty of every soldier now. Dopdi and Dulna too were very good at using hatchets, scythes, bows and arrows. Their fighting power is greater than the gentlemen's. Mr. Senanayak, who is on the mission to catch Dopdi and Dulna, is not a man to be trifled with. As the story says, "Whatever his PRACTICE, in THEORY he represents the opposition" (Draupadi, Mahaswethadevi, page no 22). The Senanayak knew that, as in an old popular son, turn by turn the world will change and in every world he must have the credentials, to survived with honour. The Senanayak as presented by the author is a simple man and he hopes to write on all these encounters in future in which he plans to highlight the message of the harvest, workers and demolish the gentlemen. As the author says, Today he is getting rid of the young men by means of 'apprehension and 'elimination', but he knows people will soon forget the memory and lesson of blood . And at the same time, he, like, Shakespeare, believes in delivering the World's 'legacy' into the youth's hands. He is Prospero as well. (Devi, page no 23). Escaping from Bakuli, Dopdi and Dulna have worked at the house of virtually every land owner, they can efficiently inform the killers about their targets and announce proudly that they too are soldiers.

Finally the impenetrable forest of Jharkhani is surrounded by real soldiers and the forest turned into a real battlefield. Soldiers in hiding guarded the falls and springs which were only the sources of drinking water for the tribal's. On one such search, the soldiers shot a man, as he was drinking water and later he the body was realised as that of Dulna Majhi. Dopdi loved Dulna more than herself. Now the search for Dopadi continues. Dopadi was really a strong woman who knows how to come to terms with torture.

As the story says, if mind and body give way under torture, Dopdi will bite off her tongue. That boy did it. They countered him. When they counter you, your hands are tied behind you. All your bones are crushed, your sex is a terrible wound. KILLED BY POLICE IN AN ENCOUNTERUNKNOWN MALEAGE 22.(Devi , page 28). Dopdi recollected what once Dulna had explained to her as they were wandering here and there and it was their hope, "Dear this is best !we won't get family and children this way. But who knows? Land owner and money lender and policemen might one day be wiped out !" (Draupadi, Mahaswetha Devi, page no 30).

Droupadi felt proud of her forefathers. She adored them because they protected women's honor. She had loved her husband and kept political faith. But now Draupadi got apprehended. She was sent to the 'camp'. She was interrogated for about an hour. She was allowed to sit on a canvas stool. No body touched her. She was caught at 6.53 p.m. and was questioned till 8.57 p.m. At 8.57 p.m., when Senanayak's dinner hour approached, he disappeared ordering, "Make her. Do the needful" (Devi, page no. 34). Then a billion moons pass. It seems a billion lunar years have passed. Opening her eyes Draupadi sees sky and moon. Trying to move, she feels her arms and legs still tied to four posts. She is incredibly thirsty. She senses that her, vagina is bleeding as a result of 'making her'. She don't know how many came to make her. Shaming her, a tear trickles out of the corner of her eyes. In the author's own words, she is made up right. In the muddy moonlight she lowers her lightless eyes , sees her breasts and understands that, indeed, She's made up right.

Her breasts are bitten raw, the nipples torn. How many? Four - five - six - seven- then Draupadi had passed out (Devi, page no 34, 35). Here in the storyline one can recall the 'Draupadi' in 'Mahabharata' where the representative of the King tries to strip her. But it was not successful then because of divine intervention. But here, the men easily succeed in stripping Dopdi. Here this stripping is the culmination of her political punishment by the

representative of the law .The punishment seems unending. Dopdi when turns her eyes, she sees her white cloth. She thought perhaps they have abandoned her for the foxes to devour .But as the author says she need no wait, Again the process of making her begins. Goes on. The moon vomits a bit of light and goes to sleep. Only the dark remains. A compelled spread-eagled still body. Active pistons of flesh rise and fall, rise and fall over it. (Devi, page no. 35). It was Senanayak, who pushed Dopdi in that night. But next day when he ordered her to be present before him, she insists on not to wear clothes and now Senanayak is at trouble. He saw Dopdi, walking towards him in the bright sunlight with her head high, completely naked.

The nervous guards don't know what to do and they followed her. She stands before Senanayak 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 ?" (Draupady, Mahaswetha Devi, page 36). Senanayak roared, "Where are her clothes?" (Devi, page no 36). Draupadi laughs, her ravaged lips bleed as she begins laughing. She says in a voice that is terrifying as sharp as her ululation (a signal for her people)," What's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man?" (Draupadi, Mahaswetha Devi, page no 36). She looks around and chooses the Senenayak's white bush shirt to spit a bloody gob at and says, "There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed. I will not let you put my cloth on me. What more can you do? Come on kounter - come on, kounter me --?" (Devei Page no 36) Draupai pushed Senanayak with her two mangled breasts and for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed 'target'. ' Draupadi', the name take us in long back in the hall, where the enemy chief begins to pull at her sari in ' Mahabharata'. Draupadi prays to the incarnate Krishna.

The idea of sustaining law (dharma) materialises itself as clothing and as Dussasana pulls at her sari , there seems to be more and more of it. She is infinitely clothed and cannot be publicly stripped. But in this story of Mahaswetha Devi, Draupadi gangraped by police, refuses to be clothed by men again. In this, what is represented is an erotic object transformed into an object of torture and revenge. Rather than saving her modesty, Dopadi insists on remaining naked and at this juncture, the male leadership fails. As a tribal, Dopadi is not like the 'Draupadi' of 'Mahabharata', a patriarchal and authoritative sacred text. Dopadi emerges as the most powerful 'subject' who calls herself as "the object of your search" (Devi, page no 36).

The author described her as a terrifying object—"an unarmed target "(Devi, page no37). At this target the voice of the male authority fades. After continuous rape and abuse deprived of food and water, the story ends with a magnificent final scene in which Dopdi faces her abusers , naked and bloody, but fiercely strong. As the foreword by Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak, on the level of the text, the name 'Draupadi' plays a role. To speculate upon this, one might consider the 'Mahabharata' itself in its colonialist function in the interest of the so-called Aryan invaders of India . It is an accretive epic, where the 'sacred' geography of an ancient battle is slowly expanded by succeeding generations of poets so that the secular geography of the expanding Aryan colony can present itself as identical with it and thus justify itself. (Draupadi, Translator's foreword, Gayatri Chakrovorti Spivak, page no.9). In 'Mahabharata' Draupadi provides the only example of polyandry. Within a patriarchal and patronymic context, she is exceptional. But Mahaswetha Devi's story questions the concept of 'singularity' of ancient Draupadi by placing Dopadi first in a comradely, activist monogamous marriage and then in a situation of multiple rape.

In the epic, Draupadi's legitimised pluralization (as a wife among five husbands), in singularity (as possible mother of five children) is used to demonstrate male glory. She there provides the occasion for violent transaction between men, and later on leading to a fierce battle. Mahaswetha Devi's story rewrites the episode of the stripping of Draupadi in "Mahabharata" in which the attempt fails. In her story the men easily succeed in stripping Dopadi - as a culmination of her political punishment by the representatives of the law . But here Dopadi refuses to be clothed again by the male authority and it is this place where the male leadership fails. Dopdi is at once a palimpsest and a contradiction. Dopadi is a fierce and proud tribal woman, a Naxalite partisan. She drinks, smokes and goes around carrying her baby schyte. 'Dopadi' is the tribal name of 'Draupadi', and it in turn gives her a double identity: one as woman called 'Draupadi' and the other as a tribal woman called 'Dopadi'. The name 'Draupadi' is an obvious reference to the heroine of the Indian epic, the 'Mahabharata'. In the epic 'Draupadi' is married to five Pandava brothers and the eldest Pandava at one point loses his kingdom and all his possession along with 'Draupadi'. She was tried to strip by the mean Dussasana but, due to Krishna's miracle works thus saves Draupadi from this attempt.

Conclusion

This attempt itself is a symbol of women's humiliation, harassment and violence. In the story 'Draupadi' by Mahaswetha Devi , Draupadi - Dopadi is hunted down, caught and arrested by the police because of her Naxalite movement. She is then tortured gang-raped and stripped in front of the policemen. Her violated body seems to fall apart dismembered. Her vagina is bleeding while the moon is vomiting; Mother Nature seems to be close to Draupadi during the terrible moments of violence and rape. Draupadi is actually dismembered: her thigh and pubic hair are matted with blood, her nipples and her breasts are wounded, her lips bleed . However her black body - ravaged and tortured becomes a weapon Draupadi uses, against the Burra Sahib, Senanayak, who questions her after gang-rape. Draupadi refuses to cover herself and her humiliated and mangled body hits the conscience of the Senanayak. In this way, the beaten Dopadi, a tribal woman is able to humiliate and terrify Senanayak, a symbol of male force and institutionalised authority.

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