

Draupadi: A Victim of Gender Oppression

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Abstract

From the times of Mahabharata to Postcolonialism till now, women have always been disproportionated on various grounds. The proposed paper will shed light on this inequality, taking the references of the character Draupadi from great Hindu epic the Mahabharata and Draupadi, also known as Dopdi in the works of Mahasweta Devi. Undoubtedly, the condition of women has been ameliorated since ancient times, but they still are subalternised by the other part of society. The paper will also focus on the massive difference between the lifestyle of both characters and similarities in the treatment they get from their opposite sex.

Keywords: oppression, Dopdi, Subaltern, women, Mahasweta Devi

Literature has always been a mirror of the society, it depicts the condition of different sections of the society from various point of views in different times and provides its reader a range of theories to understand various practices exercised within the society. Feminism is one amongst these theories. As a theory, it has been developing gradually since ages, but the condition of the marginalized section of the society, the women, is not upgrading, they are continuously struggling with the age old tussle of oppression of being born a woman. Woman went through numerous issues, impediments and hindrances to end up an imperative part in the society. Previously, woman did not have any sorts of rights, she was segregated, dismissed and abused by man. By the happening to Feminism, the profile and the picture of woman have changed totally and from being a poppet in the hands of man she turns into a ruler, president, craftsman, and educator. However, whenever she is compared to or treated by man, she is always oppressed even in modern times.

It happens because the problem of gender inequality persists in the society. Gender inequality is incorporated with the association of marriage and families, work and the

economy, governmental issues, religions, human expressions and other social preparations, and the simple language in which the society converse. The proposed paper discusses the setting of gender oppression faced by the heroic character: Draupadi in Vyasa's *Mahabharata* and Draupadi in Mahasweta Devi's story *Draupadi* translated in English by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. 'Stripping of Draupadi' in both the scenarios is considered the central point of discussion. The Feminist theory of subversion will be utilized in the article to facilitate the discourse. Subversion is the demonstration of undermining man centric organizations. To subvert something is to take severe powers and transform them into something that difficulties the oppressor. The uncovering occurrence, as a representation of the manners by which such a talk has developed and executed the possibility of the woman's body being the site on which male authoritative structures work. Since a woman's respect is attempted to dwell in her disregarded body, its infringement through open stripping implies that she loses the respect both of herself as a person, and in addition a gathering family or even the country which she has a place. Subversion ends up clear since as a matter of first importance polyandry possibly observed as a subversion of man centric standard of a man centric culture; in spite of the fact that she is extremely awkward she gives her assent thinking about an awesome decent.

"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" (*Mahabharata* 65:35-36) 1. Draupadi, in the great epic *Mahabharata*, is depicted as a royal beautiful lady having five husbands as her strength; she is portrayed throughout the epic as a "power within" two character. But, when the character is analyzed thoroughly, she comes out to be merely a commodity that is being used by the male counterpart. The birth of Draupadi itself is pictured in such a way that the dominance of patriarchy is clearly visible there. Her father King Drupada had been tested by Arjuna and lost half of his kingdom to Drona, to take revenge on Drona he performed a special yajna *Putrakameshti* to have a male child, who will take revenge from Drona. But, as a result of the yajna, Draupadi emanated the sacrificial fire. Here, Draupadi is sketched a dark skinned beautiful young woman, whose beauty, being a woman would be used to defeat the opposition. The cause of birth of the lady, who would be used by and for the opposite sex in the scripture, is male dominated.

Regardless her "power within" character, she has been the victim of repression and suppression wherever she could be subdued. As described in her article 'Interpolations in the *Mahabharata*', M. A. Mehendale understandably mentioned that Draupadi can be seen merely as a "virya-sulka" or a piece of reward to be presented to the winner of the *savayamvara*; a

‘self-choice ceremony’. She was not able to lay down even a single condition at the time of her marriage, no restriction of caste, religion and region was mentioned in the terms and conditions of the *savayamvara* of Draupadi. She had to present herself to anybody who will fulfill the one and only condition set by her father, there was little scope of freedom of choice. Even, the scene of rejection of Karna as a suitable participant in the *savayamvara* by Draupadi is available only in later editions of The Mahabharat, it was in absentia in earlier editions, due to the effect of patriarchal dominance.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in Translator’s Foreword of “Draupadi” says, “In the epic, Draupadi’s legitimized pluralization (as a wife among husbands) in singularity (as a possible mother or harlot) is used to demonstrate male glory.” Again, one more time, Draupadi has to pay for being a woman when Arjuna wins her in the contest and takes her to his home along with his four brothers known as Pandavas, their mother Kunti instructs her sons, "Share the alms equally"³. Kunti was not an ordinary woman, she was the lady with supernatural power, she knew that the alms his sons has won was not a thing, but a princess, even then she ordered his sons to share the reward. Draupadi is suppressed here. The character Draupadi is being materialized every then and now, she is considered as an object which will be divided equally amongst her sons.

The peak of oppression is unfolded when her eldest husband loses her in a game of dice against Kauravas, here she is portrayed as the effective cause of the critical battle. She is treated as an object and indicates male glory and male power. Her husband, while playing, staked all he owns, including his kingdom. At last, when he loses everything, he stakes their wife Draupadi as well, because, "Draupadi belongs within that all" (*Mahabharata* 65:32). Eventually, he loses one more thing: Draupadi. That is not the end of winning male glory: after being lost in the game, she is called to be present in the assembly as a slave of Duryodhana. When she refuses to come to the court she is dragged by hair to the court and forced to sit on the thighs of Duryodhana. She is humiliated in the assembly of men. To make the suppression worse, Karna orders Dushasana to take away the luxurious garments of Draupadi and her husbands. Dushasana starts unwrapping her sari layers by layers within the assembly and her husbands could be able to do anything to stop the humiliation faced by their wife.

Later, when Pandavas and Draupadi go to the palace of King Matsya, Keechaka, the brother of Queen Sudeshna tries to harass Draupadi and forced her to marry him, knowing that she is the wife of five Gandharvas. Keechaka only wants to satisfy his lust, he starts torturing her and there is no one to protect her despite of being a wife of five husbands. One more time, she is ill-treated just because she is a woman.

Draupadi has been displayed as a gallant sovereign in the epic of Mahabharata. Draupadi shows up from the flares with a celestial declaration from the heaven that she would be the reason for the demolition of underhandedness warriors. Draupadi is constantly presented to fervency: her Swayamvara closes in conflict; a fivefold marriage is forced upon her; she is insulted in the regal court twice. She was tolerant and has been blamed for being the reason behind the whole war of Kurukhsetra.

Mahasweta Devi's short story rescripted many of the episodes of The Mahabharata. As written in one of the scriptures (Puranas):

“In the Kritar Yuga Renuka was Kritiya,
In the Satya Yuga Sita was Kritiya,
In the Dwaparyuga Draupadi was Kritiya
And in Kalyugas there are Kritiyas in every house.”

, woman has always been subdued. But Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi is a palimpsest as well as a conflict at the same time. Although Devi's Dopdi is a recreation of Draupadi of the great epic, she is a 'kritiya' in a different modus operandi. Unlike Draupadi of the great epic, Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi was not royal and rich, she belongs to a tribe. She is a tribal woman. Whereas gender oppression was the point of discussion in the first half of the paper, the later part will focus on “doubly subaltern” Draupadi and her resistances to oppression. Mahasweta Devi in her works majorly focuses on gender oppression amongst underprivileged, those who are made subaltern on the basis of gender and class as well. Dr. Renganathan and Gupta in their paper RESISTANCE TO OPPRESSION: A STUDY OF MAHASWETA DEVI'S SELECT WORKS say, “Mahasweta Devi's approach to oppression is unique, because, while most women writers deal with gender oppression of middle class or upper class women, Devi deals with the issue of gender oppression enmeshed within its class and caste dichotomies.” Devi's representation of caste, class and gender oppression unfolds a unique chronicle of the subdued, their suppression and repression and their resistance to the same.

Devi's Dopdi gets far superior treatment than Draupadi of the Mahabharata, as Dopdi in the first two third part of the story, fights abreast her husband against extreme torture and abominations imposed on the tribals. In the story, Dopdi is not portrayed as an ordinary woman, she is more like an agile strong wild animal. Tribal Dopdi was neither a queen nor a princess, unlike Draupadi, she is described as washing her hair in the middle of the forest who is expected to hear an unwanted sound any time, she abreast her husband in Naxalbari movement. Devi presents Dopdi, less a victim, but equal to males who fight for their rights, she joins the Naxalite movement along with her husband. She was an important member (the

informer) of the gang, all the mates ha trust in her. She decides not to get the policemen or the armed persons come to know about their hideout by following her. She is so powerful strong and faithful that she risks her life knowing the aftermath consequences of being caught. She tries her best to keep the policemen away from their group and when she is not able to make it happen and is caught, she warns her group to shift to a safer place. The character of Dopdi completely contradicts that of Draupadi.

But, the kind of treatment Dopdi gets from the male counterpart is similar to the treatment Draupadi gets to a great extent. At the time when Indian armed forces succeed in apprehending Dopdi with the help of Senanayak, she is being interrogated for a long time, but when she refuses to give any information about her group then the leader, Senanayak directed his soldiers to "Make her. Do the needful". (p.401) Throughout that night, Dopdi is physically and mentally tortured, raped and mutilated by many lustful men. Despite her strong and powerful character, she is objectified the male. In *The Story of Draupadi's Disrobing*, Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan states, "Sexual molestation of any form happens to be patriarchy's method of social control rather than pathology of sexual violence as such." (p.102) Whereas Draupadi of the epic is considered as a criminal just because she laughed at the confusion of Duryodhna when he enters the Pandava's palace of Maya and questioned the trusties of wisdom, Devi's Dopdi, on the other hand, is the anomaly to Senanayak, who stands firmly on his class and gender. Both the women are eventually punished by the representatives of 'patriarchal society' by stripping clothes of the one and raping multiple times the other.

But this Draupadi is not a kind of lady who would think that by bearing all the torture silently, she will lessen the humiliation. She is the kind of woman who stands up naked against the authority and makes their lips sealed as she says:

".....What's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man? She looks around and chooses the front of Senanayak'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, counter me-come on, counter me-? Draupadi pushes Senanayak with her two mangled breasts, and for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target, terribly afraid." (p. 402)

The guard appointed to escort Dopdi to Senanayak's office, arranges her to wash and dress herself yet she pays no regard to him and tears up her garments, in this manner startling him enough to call for help. A confused Senanayak shows up to locate a bare Dopdi, with her

battered body and ravaged bosoms in plain view strolling with her head held high, challenging him to take a gander at the result of his requests. She laughs loudly at his incensed articulation also, says that there is nothing more he can do to hurt and mortify her. Dopdi reveals to Senanayak that he issued orders for her to be stripped, assaulted and tormented was a run of the mill exercise of phallic power. In any case, he isn't man enough to drive her to dress herself once more. The story closes on an intense note as a bare Dopdi, with her valor and resolute refusal to cover her stripped body, renders a few watchmen and the self-important officer vulnerable, terrified and uncertain of the course of move they should make to repress an unarmed lady.

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