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Dopdi, as the Leader of Subalterns (Analysis of the Character Dopdi, in Respect of the Hardships Faced)

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ABSTRACT

The short story of “Draupadi” (Devi, 1997) written by Mahasveta Devi is a Bengali piece of work that has gained widespread popularity in the recent years. It highlights the life of a tribal Naxal woman who fights for her own cause and for her people who are the deprived class. The story is translated in the English version by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, narrates the way that she mentions about the loss of specific Bengali essence from the story while converting it into English. However, the story pretty much highlights the essence that Mahasveta devi wanted her readers to feel. The research on this topic will be covering a number of aspects regarding the leadership of a woman after so many hardships and the problems and oppression faced by them. The Naxalite movements that this particular group is a part of and along with that their fight against the oppressive higher class who have power in their hands, will be thoroughly analysed. The special analysis that this paper is going to witness is the comparison of the mythological celebrated woman, Draupadi of Mahabharata with the tribal Draupadi or Dopdi, as she likes to call herself, bringing into consideration the situations that both of them went through. Keeping this in mind there has been a lot of similar experiences and situations that can be safely assumed about the author that she specifically wanted her protagonist to go through.

Keywords: *Female leadership, Naxalite movement, Oppression, Draupadi, Honour outrage.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The story “Draupadi” (Devi, 1997) is set in 1970s where the Naxal movement had gained pace in the state of West Bengal along with their genocidal rapes of women becoming quite frequent. The story that is originally part of the short story book, “Breast Stories” (Devi, 1997) highlighting the significance of feminism that Mahasveta Devi was well aware and advance of

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her age. The story revolves around apprehending Dopdi as she has been behind every Naxal attack against the oppressors, and her treatment by the police officers after the interrogation. The third world police officer with a first world scholar degree called “Senanayak” (Devi, 1997) orders for raping Dopdi and then after the night passes, she makes a statement as in, “There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed.” (Devi, 1997) tells us the intensity of the rape she had witnessed. Moreover, the most appreciative quality that she exercised was that this brutal rape hadn't put down her morale and still stood straight without her clothes and challenged the patriarchy by her incompatible spirit.

The story starts by introducing “Dopdi Mehjen” (Devi, 1997) and her husband “Dulna Manjhi” (Devi, 1997) who belong to the Santhal tribe of West Bengal tracing their origin to the Santhal revolution that took place during the British era in against the Britishers. The Santhals have always been associated with the peasant tribal community who have their ethnicity and ways of living. However, they are often to as the third world community due to their incapacity of adopting to the modern lifestyle. The above mentioned Santhal couple is like a positive figure to their community people as they raise violence against the oppressors of their community. Dulna Manjhi. They kill wealthy landlords as in the story the instance for the murder of “Surja Sahu” (Devi, 1997) as he built two tube wells and three wells in the compound of his both the houses directing all the water supply to the restricted people. This resulted in absence of water in a lot of places within the area and many facing scarcity. The Santhal tribe located in that community also faced problems and did multiple approaches to fix the problem, but it wasn't rectified. Only then “Dulna Manjhi and Dopdi Mehjen” came to their rescue. They murdered “Surja sahu” and from their Draupadi got her name. (Devi, 1997).

Usually as seen in the Indian society, the name “Draupadi” isn't given to any girl because the mythological character Draupadi had many hardships and was brutally played on her honour. The giving of this name to the main protagonist shows contempt in the mind of the wife of Surja Sahu. The character uses her name as “Dopdi” (Devi, 1997) could be derived as two possible meanings. Firstly, it maybe the tribal Santhali version of the word “Draupadi” or maybe there was not much literacy spread to pronounce the word correctly.

(A) Research Methodology

This research paper will be following a qualitative research as the researcher wish to analyse the aspects in the story of Draupadi. The research will be dealing with subjective exploration including gathering and examining information to get ideas, concepts and ideologies. The researcher will be analysing various aspects and will try to give a new breakthrough through

this particular research.

The objective of this paper is to analyse the leadership of the main protagonist, Draupadi and her character similarity with the mythological heroine “Draupadi” of Mahabharata, the Indian epic. The instances shown in the story about her behaviour as a leader, is very appreciative and has caught a number of crowd’s attentions. These behaviours will be analysed separately in this paper and the researcher will try to give her understandings regarding it.

This particular research work will be solely based on the instances showcased in the story and other literary sources and research papers on the above-mentioned aspects through online databases and sources.

(B) Literature Review

1. In the research article of “Questioning Subalternity: Re-reading Mahasweta Devi’s ‘Draupadi’”, (Bhaskor Chandra Dutta, 2019). The author analyses the atrocities faced by the tribal girls that has been well portrayed in the story. The brutal rape and torture that was faced by Dopdi in the story, was something that on average most of the tribal women witness, but can’t speak about it, because of being a subaltern. But on the contrary, Dopdi was someone who faced it, but was among those, who could speak.

2. In this research article of “Marginalization and the marginalized as critical analysis of Mahasweta Devi’s “Draupadi”” (Rajan, 2021) the researcher draws a direct analysis between the protagonist of this story created by Mahasweta Devi and the mythical character Draupadi who was married to five men and had to face a lot of humiliation and had a hard life.

3. Resurrecting Subaltern History- Mahasweta Devi’s “Draupadi”: A Mythical Study in Translation (Goswami, 2015). In this paper the author is of the opinion that she contrasts the fact that the subaltern cannot speak or act on any kind of crimes that happen to them. In this article the author proves that through ‘Dopdi’ being, as created by Mahasweta Devi, a subaltern can effectively speak and when she speaks the others can’t stop her.

4. In the wonderful article of “Resistance as Embodied Experience: A Study of Mahasweta Devi’s “Draupadi” and “Behind the Bodice”” (Sinha, 2019). In this research article the research showcases two important stories that has been written in the Breast stories by Mahasweta Devi which is a collected work of short stories. It addresses the major aspects, that has been written featuring Draupadi and Behind the Bodice, is where it states that the protagonist in both the stories are the victims of state oppression. Since the current research is restricted to Draupadi, (Devi, 1997) we find instances where Draupadi has been subjected to

state oppressions and was given a third-degree brutal torture, which also constituted rape, by the policemen.

5. Another major article is, the “DECONSTRUCTING PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURES IN MAHASWETA DEVI’S “DRAUPADI”” (Sinha D. K., August, 2016.), This research articles views the story from a patriarchal point of view highlighting that how a woman is suffering in the crunches of patriarchy present in the society, that is constantly hampering the women’s exercise to power.

It also highlights that the “patriarchal discourse which are a frequent sighting in the political social and ideological forces” (Sinha D. K., August, 2016.) of equality in a society constitutes to be so difficult for the well-being of a tribals as in the story Draupadi.

6. "Examine the theme of resistance in Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" (Afreem). In this research article, the theme of resistance in the story of Draupadi has been examined and analysed very precisely. The author is of the opinion that being a subaltern who are already oppressed in the hands of the higher classes and are not much willing to speak about themselves or to stand out to any kind of atrocities, Draupadi been a subaltern and even being a woman stands for herself after the worst that can happen to a her as a woman, she still has the confidence to stand up and speak for herself letting all the men present there, of higher classes, speechless.

7. “MAHASWETA DEVI’S “DRAUPADI” AND THE MYTHIC METHOD: A CONTRAPUNTAL READING” (Mandal, September, 2019). This research paper solely talks about the mythical character of Draupadi in Mahabharat. It also talks about the story focusing on the Naxalbari movement. But the point of focus is very different. The main theme of this paper is to draw and compare the acts of rape that was suffered by Dopdi in the story by Mahasweta Devi and the disrobing of Draupadi in the story of Mahabharata.

8. “CONFRONTATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF MARGINS IN MAHASWETA DEVI’S DRAUPADI” (SYAL) This research article focuses on the fact that in Naxalbari movement, the men and the women both walked shoulder to shoulder in the different activities that they carried out. The women who were the part of the Naxalbari movement and were tribals were thought of that they could not speak or stand up for themselves but Draupadi stood and for herself. In the concluding part of the story Draupadi stands up to her oppressors and she displays immense resistance (SYAL) towards them and is empowered.

9. “Archetypal Deconstruction in Mahasweta Devi’s Draupadi” (Dwivedi) This research paper again talks about the mythical Draupadi and the Draupadi of Mahasweta Devi’s story. In this, the author of this article claims that both the characters are archetypal representation

(Dwivedi) of each other with Draupadi being the tribal queen (in reference to her leadership) and her subjection to the rape was exactly same as the retelling of the disrobing event of Draupadi in Mahabharata.

10. “Of Draupadi and Dopdi—a Re-reading of the Agitprop in Mahasweta Devi’s ‘Draupadi’” (Hazra, May, 2016). The author of this article stated that Mahasweta Devi's entire purpose in the story's astonishingly unique conclusion is caustic subversion—subversion of the modes of control that age-old patriarchy has exercised and become used to over submissive femininity (Hazra, May, 2016).

The answer that was given by Draupadi when she stood for herself was to slash the ‘male complacency’ (Hazra, May, 2016) and through this Mahasweta Devi made her point for the downtrodden and the unprivileged who have struggle in their daily life in order to survive.

II. ANALYSIS

Mahasweta Devi is different from the authors of the contemporary world. She has always chosen to write about the unexplored genres and her name is a common name now, in the world. Her writings are usually in Bengali and it is translated widely in English for the rest of the world to read about her works. The particular story that is in question in research, that is Draupadi (Devi, 1997) finds its origination in a collection of short stories called the “Breast Stories” (Devi M.). When asked about such an unusual name for this book, Devi suggested that Breasts are responsible for the origin of the world and hence all the stories written in this book have an extensive feminist touch in it and shows the female protagonist standing up for herself. The story of Draupadi (Devi M. , 1997) is the same story that narrates the fightback of a woman who stands up for herself and speaks with empowerment and confidence even after the worst thing that can happen to her, has happened.

The above literature that was being reviewed, all of them had similar research objectives, that was drawing an analogy with the mythical queen Draupadi and the leader of the subaltern. The characters, undoubtedly have a sharp similarity between them. It can be stated as what happened with Draupadi in the Mahabharata is a history and the history repeated itself, when she was reborn as the tribal leader.

Since the above-mentioned aspect, as cited, has seen a number of interpretations, the researcher would like to start with the analysis of the most eye-catching theme, where Draupadi is being compared to a phoenix who rises from its own ashes. Towards the end of the story where she has been subjected to multiple rapes by the police officers in the camp, who apprehended her.

Draupadi was raped the entire night by all the police officers on the command of their superior

“Senanayak”. Draupadi when she opens her eyes finds herself tied in a spread-eagled positions and the wounds on her body was enough to tell her that there were many of them. The story has a line, that explains the helpless condition of the woman, that is, “Suddenly she hopes against hope. Perhaps they have abandoned her. For the foxes to devour” (Devi M. , 1997) this statement tells us about the psychological condition of Draupadi, that she hopes better that she is devoured by the foxes than to be raped and mutilated again and again by the policemen. This however reflects the mindsets of the women in the Indian society, that nothing is above modesty of a woman. However, as the story progresses, we see that even after such brutalities, Draupadi is strong enough to confront Senanayak who was afraid of her, for the first time he was afraid of an unarmed victim. The brutalities couldn't break her spirit. She laughed indistinctively and walked naked, stating that there was not one man who she should be ashamed of there. (Devi M. , 1997).

This highlights the birth of a phoenix bird from its own ashes. The phoenix is a mythical bird who raises from its own ashes, after it dies, being burnt in a fire. This bird gives a number of metaphorical meanings. The rise in itself symbolises revolt, that even if the outwardly forces strive to break somebody, that person can still turn around and stand for themselves. The same instance happened with Draupadi. The rape and the humiliation along with the number of sexual injuries, signifies the fire, that turns the phoenix into ashes. The actions of Draupadi the next morning she was told to come to the superior, metaphorical signifies her rebirth as a powerful spirituality, who is not afraid of anybody.

These instances have not only metaphorical values within themselves but also are a great teaching for the females and the society. Apart from this, the story has a number of tinges of feminism, showing that an empowered Draupadi can face all the men who brutally raped her last night when she was helpless. And a few hours they are afraid of her spirit. Mahasweta Devi makes it a prominent point that apart from being a tribal, the way she reacts to the atrocities that she faced, it makes the world realise that the subalterns can speak about their atrocities and she being the leader can terrify all those who oppressed her just a few hours ago.

III. CONCLUSION

The story has got a number of things that are very prevalent in the present day to day life. The atrocities faced by the tribal people and the Santhals are huge and it goes noticed by the Indian media. Mahasweta Devi's work on such an unexplored path makes the world aware of their atrocities and how much severe they are in nature. The fact that the tribals don't speak about it for as most of the society assume, that they are not very vocal and can't stand up for themselves

makes the crimes against them, go unnoticed.

The three factors that has been highlighted by the author, were firstly, whether the subalterns can speak about their oppression by the upper caste, then yes, they can. The acts of Draupadi after she was brutally assaulted and raped by them, clearly shows that they can. She was able to terrify the rest who had raped her, being unarmed.

Further the sharp comparison of the mythical Draupadi with the protagonist of this story as the tribal queen through the literatures above is like the history repeating itself. The mythical Draupadi too, had a very difficult life and had to face humiliation in front of a number of men in an assembly where she was disrobed. The same happened with Draupadi the leader of the subalterns as she was brutally raped by all the police officers that were present in the camp, that was found to apprehend her.

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