
THE VOICE OF CREATIVE RESEARCH

A Woman's Scorn is Her Deadliest Wrath: A Comparative Analysis of Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* and *The Hunt***Rupali Jain**

PhD Scholar

Department of English,
Bundelkhand University,
Jhansi, U.P., India

&

Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
Delhi University, Delhi, India**Dr. Shipra G. Vashishtha**The Department of English,
Bundelkhand University,
Jhansi, U.P., India.**Abstract**

Mahasweta Devi is a well-known name in Bengali Literature, as well as the worldwide New Literature now, contributed to the fame Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has brought through her very authentic translations. *Draupadi* and *The Hunt*, two of the short stories Spivak translated, are the primary source of this paper to bring forth the subjugation and marginalisation faced by the tribal women of India in a post-independence India. This paper purports to flesh out the deep resilience developed in the women as a response to the colonial and patriarchal roots of that oppression.

Keywords: Family Relations, Social Structure, Mythology, Tradition

Mahasweta Devi is a versatile genius. She has a wide range of concerns in her literary works. In *Draupadi*, the reader is introduced to the Dopdi Mehjen with her age, her relations with her husband and the unclear status of her death. She is an active member of the Naxalbari Movement and a devoted one at that, constantly working towards the common goal of resisting imperial propaganda. Because of her involvement in such movements that the government has essentially termed terrorist attacks, Dopdi is hunted down and brought into the custody of Senanayak. Senanayak then instructs his men to do whatever it takes to get the required information out of Dopdi. It is interpreted as a green pass for multiple men- the police officers- to rape and mutilate the young female captive. Dopdi, completely degraded in her physical body gets up the next day, comes out and washes her naked black body in front of every one of her assaulters. She refuses to put on her clothes, walks towards Senanayk and says, "The

THE VOICE OF CREATIVE RESEARCH

object of your search, Dopdi Mejhen. You asked them to make me up, don't you want to see how they made me?" (Devi 402).

The Hunt, on the other hand, presented a protagonist not very well explored in Indian Literature. This heroine of Devi is a child of a young tribal woman, and a white landlord named Dixon. Before leaving India and selling his lands and bungalow, he gave his housekeeper an unwelcomed (later very accepted) parting gift. The story revolves primarily around the day-to-day chores she performs for the current inhabitants of her biological father's lands. The job varies from cleaning and maintaining their house, giving oil massages and baths to the mistress of the house to the tasks of selling the fruits and gains of their harvest for the best price and taking a minimal amount of money and clothing as her wage. The story takes a turn with the introduction of the Collector, who expresses his lustful desires for Mary, who is engaged to marry Jalim, a Muslim marketeer in her village. The Collector follows and stalks Mary everywhere she goes till one day when he almost makes his moves. It is handled intelligently by Mary, who tells him that she will come to him on the last day of the festivities; when that day arrives, Mary goes out on a drinking spree and cuts the Collector into tiny little pieces of meat with her well-known machete. She enraged as she was, contains herself and plans for the future, one where she runs off with her fiancé into a new town and makes a new life.

With the story of Dopdi, one is forced to think about the mythological yajnaseni Draupadi of *Mahabharata*. Draupadi is born out of pure fire and then, marries the five Pandavas- which is usually interpreted as an affirmation of the polygamy by the Indian cultural forebearers, but truly, was it right? The explanation they give is that she was born with this destiny and that it was her fate. Yet, one could very well interpret none of what happened to her as her fate; she is won by Arjuna and distributed among his brothers on one idiotic command of Kunti that her sons couldn't violate, thus dividing Draupadi into five pieces. Her stripping down in the dicing was the result of a phallic competition amongst men who decided for her that she was a mere object to be placed in poker, and then went to war to demonstrate a more toxic version of their hideous masculinity. Eventually, even her sons are murdered in her sleep, and all she could do was watch. Dopdi Mehjen, on the other hand, is a dark-skinned tribal woman who is involved in a movement against oppression, while being constantly on the run for her life. She is not just stripped of her honour by the stripping of her clothes, she is gang-raped multiple times on the instruction of the so-called big man Senanayak who has told them to "make her". Beauvoir's argument of a person 'becoming' a woman due to society's treatment of her comes to mind here, as the men in this story make a woman based on her genitalia. They contend that by reminding her of her vagina and the way it can be penetrated they would achieve their goal. This one notion of a woman's honour lying between her legs is exactly what Devi rejects in her work. Dopdi Mehjen proudly walks out, as Devi writes,

"Draupadi's black body comes even closer. Draupadi 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 as terrifying sky splitting, and sharp as her ululation, '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

THE VOICE OF CREATIVE RESEARCH

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."

There is a reclamation of the name of Draupadi by Dopdi, who in herself embodies the very fire the original character was born with. She doesn't need men or any army to reclaim her honour, she simply stands in her skin, loud and proud, and that is more than enough for her.

Mary Oraon, carrying on the tradition of Devi's strong heroines, goes one step ahead and plays her every move intelligently. Her choice to marry a Muslim is as affected by her birth as an outcast (a biracial tribal woman) as much as it is affected by her upbringing and her life. She works hard and does not appreciate anyone who makes her feel inferior. That doesn't mean that she feels superior because of her white father or that she has enough self-respect to not give in to the next mediocre man who comes along and lusts after her. And when someone like the Collector comes along and doesn't understand the simplest of the answers, no, she takes up her machete. She, just like Dopdi, relies on no one but herself. Devi writes,

"Mary caresses Collector's face, gives him love bites on the lips. There's fire in Collector's eyes, his mouth is open, his lips wet with spittle, his teeth glistening. Mary is watching, watching, the face changes and changes into? Now? Yes, becomes an animal. —Now take me? Mary laughed and held him, laid him on the ground. Collector is laughing, Mary lifts the machete, lowers it, hits, lowers. A few million moons pass. Mary stands up. Blood? On her clothes? She'll wash in the Cut. With great deftness she takes the wallet from Collector's pocket. A lot of money. A lot of money. She undoes the fold in the cloth at her waist and puts the money with her own savings. Then first she throws Collector in the ravine, his wallet, cigarettes, his handkerchief. Stone after stone. Hyenas and leopards will come at night, smelling blood. Or they won't. Mary comes out. Walks naked to the Cut. Bathing naked in the Cut her face fills with deep satisfaction. As if she has been infinitely satisfied in a sexual embrace. In the women's gathering Mary drank the most wine, sang, danced, ate the meat and rice with the greatest relish. At first everyone mocked her for not having made a kill. Then Budhni said, 'Look how she's eating? As if she has made the biggest kill.'"

She does right by herself on her own. There is no man involved, well, except for the one who rightfully died. Neither Dopdi nor Mary are the subaltern who is silenced. The attempts are made, yet none of them ends up becoming that. Their scorn is their wrath, for they formulate the core of the resistance of writers like Mahasweta Devi. Women like Draupadi and Mary continue to create new and inventive visions of life even if it is full of cynicism and nihilism for that is exactly what this new cruel world inspires in them.

Works Cited

Devi, Mahasweta. "Writing and Sexual Difference." *Critical Inquiry*. 8:2 (1981). 381-402. Web. 29 June 2022.

THE VOICE OF CREATIVE RESEARCH

Devi, Mahasweta. The Hunt, Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory, 5:1 (1990). 61-79. Web. 29 June 2022.

De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*, New Delhi: Vintage Classics, 2015. Print.

Silva, Neluka. "Narratives of Resistance: Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi." *SARE: Southeast Asian Review of English*. 55:1 (2018). 53-66. Web. 29 June 2022.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*. pp. 21-78. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988. Print.