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Mahasweta Devi's *Dopdi*: a Challenge to Patriarchy

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Abstract:

Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi is a study in feminism, an objection against domination. The backdrop is the famous Naxalite Revolt of Bengal in the 1960s. It started with the uprising of the peasants and subsequently a major Revolt broke out. Here the story is of a Santhal tribal woman Dopdi who joins the rebels but fights her lone battle against the military atrocities. The battle is that of a woman fighting against a gang of rapists in the uniform of a policeman.

Keywords: *Feminism, Naxalite revolt, Peasants uprising, Santhal, Dopdi, lone battle*

Feminism has always been considered as one of the movement like any other movement either socially or literally. Sometimes it gets a place in literature with all other theories which have less of a sentimental approach. Feminism has come down to us or has evolved gradually as a theory, but the lot of the females, the marginalized section of the society, has changed less than slowly over the years. we are still fighting the same age old battle of repression and suppression; the same mental and physical humiliation; the same trauma of being born a woman. The woes and the stigma of a female humiliated remains the same. There seems to be no end to the mental and physical violence faced by the women in the society.

The name Dopdi is actually a rural or tribal version, a mis-pronounced version of the name Draupdi. The character of Draupadi in the Mahabharata and the Dopdi of Mahasweta devi is so different yet there is a meeting point where both try to fight against the injustice meted out to them in their own manner. Draupdi is a queen, royal, beautiful, she has five husbands although married to one. She is seen to be more powerful compared to Dopdi, but was she powerful? Did she object to being 'shared' by five brothers? Was she asked whether she would like to have all five men as her husband? Dopdi on the other hand is a poor tribal woman, wronged all through by the feudalistic power in the society.

In the Mahabharata it is God himself (Lord Krishna) who comes to save Draupadi from the humiliation, but there is no God to save Dopdi. The revenge motif in both the case is very much prevalent; however there is some kind of difference. The revenge of Draupadi is one reason behind the Mahabharata. In Mahasweta devi's Dopdi, there is no revenge taken for her humiliation, she decides on her own method. She tries to avenge her wrong doers. She emerges as a new female.

Dopdi is not portrayed as a soft, delicate beauty; she is introduced as washing her hair in the middle of the jungle and waiting to hear any unwanted sound. She is like any wild animal, crude, agile, alert and strong.

Dopdi the female rebel member of the Naxalite movement was on the run but was ultimately caught by the armed forces and tortured to get information, and when she tolerates all tortures and does not reveal whatever information the policeman wanted. the worst torture is used on her, that of being brutally gang raped whole night and day, which leaves her bleeding and wounded and bruised. Rape is a weapon used on a woman on any pretext. If there is an enmity between two men or between two communities, between two nations it is brought upon the women. Women in a society specially Indian society is considered to have certain values and honour and if one wants to take revenge upon that community and that particular society it is the women folk that needs to be attacked, attacked and destroyed physically and mentally so that the society is shamed.

Dopdi is no extraordinary woman at the beginning of the story. She was just a simple tribal girl who was given the name Dopdi by the wife of the landlord's wife. She does not become a rebel by choice but rather by chance. Mahasweta Devi does not give a physical description of Dopdi, she can be any one of the village tribal girl that one comes across, going about her daily chores. She joins her husband and becomes an important member of the outfit, she was the informer of her group and the group had faith in her. One can sense her strength as a rebel member and as a faithful member that too, when she who could have easily reached her camp (thereby risking the life of other members of her group) and been safe maybe. She however decides not to let the armed person following her to know about her group and their hideout and in that process she gets caught. She was a very faithful member and so strong was her loyalty towards her people that she had the courage to even risk getting caught by the policemen, knowing what fate awaits her in their hands. She tries very hard to put off the policemen from her trail but as she does not succeed she decides to warn her group so that even though she may be caught they will be able to shift to some safer place.

She belongs to that section of the society where the rich make and break their own laws, where upper class and upper caste are the only human beings living and all the rest are to live off on whatever they get as tokens of 'kindness' from them. That the caste system was barbaric and inhuman can be seen from the treatment meted out on the tribals by those landlords who were the supreme masters of the village.

Mahasweta Devi's Dopdi Mejhen and her husband Dulna, like all other militants were not born as militants. Circumstances that too very extreme ones made them join the rebelling group. Here the case of Dopdi is not just that of a woman struggling in a feudal set up, but that of a woman who is also portrayed as unwomanly ie a woman who does not have the feminine attitude, she is an enemy a terrorist an anti social element of the society.

The one thing that comes to mind about Dopdi is the fact that the men in the guise of policemen were also intimidated by the fact that she is not just a common woman. Dopdi was not like any other women and the hatred brews or grows more because of the fact that she is in a way challenging patriarchy by being a member of a rebellious group. It is indeed interesting to note that Dopdi becomes a rebel because of the atrocities meted out by these men and to escape that, at the end she becomes a worse enemy than her husband also who is also a rebel. From feminist perspectives the story of Dopdi is that of a woman who decides that silently bearing all sorts of physical and mental torture is not going to lessen the humiliation in any manner. Hence she decides to oppose her wrong doers in another path breaking manner. She decides that she will avenge herself in her own way. She will wait neither for social justice nor for Divine justice to give her solace.

The commotion is as if the alarm had sounded in a prison. Senanayak walks out surprised and sees Draupadi, naked, walking toward him in the bright sunlight with her head high. The nervous guards trail behind. What is this? He is about to cry, but stops.

Draupadi stands before him, naked. Thigh and pubic hair matted with dry blood. Two breasts, two wounds. What is this? He is about to bark. Draupadi comes closer. Stands with her hand on her hip, laughs 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?

Where are her clothes? Won't put them on, sir.

Tearing them. 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 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. Gayatri' Chakravorty Spivak "Draupadi" Page no 402)

We have yet to come to terms to the fact that men and women are equally important in the house, or outside, to talk of larger issues and to come to a solution of extreme cases like rape and to fight for justice for rape victims remains a very distant dream. Hence when in Literature one comes across a character like Dopdi who decides to take her revenge in her own way. She does not wait for any other stronger force or some man to take revenge on her behalf. 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. Dopdi is the new woman born and even if she is not able to bring some magical change which is not possible, it is predictable that she is going to usher a new outlook of woman. This new woman has challenged patriarchy without any movement and without any sound. She begins another war in her own silent manner.

References

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