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Resisting Gendered Subjectivity in Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi*

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Abstract

This thesis studies and analyzes how women characters face challenges and combat against them in *Draupadi* the novel by Mahasewta Devi. Dopdi the protagonist of the novel goes through several trials and tribulations yet stands and fight back to assert women identity & empowerment. Through a meticulous analysis of the protagonist, Dopdi Mejhen, and her tribulations as an indigenous woman, it dissects the intersection of gender, caste, and tribal identity. Devi's narrative challenges traditional gender roles and depicts Dopdi's defiance, revealing the text as a powerful instrument in dismantling patriarchal norms. By exploring this narrative's social and feminist implications, this research underscores Devi's remarkable contribution to gender discourse and her role as a catalyst for reevaluating conventional notions of womanhood and resistance.

Keywords: *Draupadi*, Indigenous women, Intersectionality, Caste, Tribal identity, Patriarchal norms, Resistance, Feminist discourse

In the narrative of *Draupadi*, researcher has explored into the multifaceted injustices confronting women and their unwavering acts of defiance. This paper seeks to unravel the diverse forms of oppression experienced by the female characters and the courage they display in response. Through an in-depth analysis of this narrative, the researcher endeavours to extract valuable insights that can bolster the collective pursuit of enhanced equality and dignity for women, transcending the boundaries of literature and permeating into the fabric of reality.

Many writers have used their words to show and fight against the wrong things in society. One of these writers is Mahasweta Devi, who wrote a great story called *Draupadi* about the strong women who live in poor areas of India. She wrote this story in 1978, and it tells us how these women suffer from different kinds of bad treatment, and how they do not give up. The main woman in the story is Draupadi, who has the same name as a famous woman from an old Indian book *Mahabharata*.

Mahasweta Devi, who was born in the year 1926, was a remarkable writer and activist in India. She had a special talent for creating stories that also spoke about the social and political issues of her time. She was a champion for the rights of the poor and the downtrodden, and her works, such as *Draupadi*, reflect her passion for making a difference in society. The story *Draupadi* is about the Santhal people, who are poor and live far away from the big cities of India. The writer tells us how hard life is for the women of this group, who have many problems that most people do not know about.

In *Draupadi*, the main character, Draupadi shows how tough and brave the women in the Santhal community can be. Her name, taken from a famous epic *Mahabharata*, has a special meaning. It displays her as another strong legendary woman who can face unfair treatments and stands up against them.

The story *Draupadi* shows how these tribal women have to face many kinds of unfair treatment from different people. They are not respected because of their gender, their poverty, their caste, and their ethnicity. The story reveals how these women suffer from many kinds of discrimination in society. The story *Draupadi* shows how women like Draupadi are treated very badly because of their gender. They have to face hurting and scary things, being used and looked down on, just like many other women who are poor and live far away from the big cities.

The story *Draupadi* shows how the women have many problems and difficulties, but they do not give up. They are very strong, and they use their pain to make themselves stronger and fight back. In the story, we see that the idea of not giving up comes up many times. Mahasweta Devi cleverly includes moments where the women in the story, in big and small ways, don't let the people who are treating them unfairly win. This shows us all the different ways these women fight back against the people who are being mean to them.

It is through storytelling that Draupadi and others in the narrative find a voice to articulate their experiences and to challenge the status quo. This narrative device underscores the importance of literature as a tool for social change. While *Draupadi* was penned over four decades ago, its themes remain strikingly relevant in the contemporary context. Gender-based oppression and the fight for women's rights continue to be pressing issues in many parts of the world.

This paper explores how women in the story *Draupadi* suffer from different kinds of unfair treatment, and how they fight back bravely. By studying this story, we hope to learn something that can help us work for more respect for women, both in books and in real life.

Stories in the novel often show what life is like for women. The novel is a powerful example that reveals how women face different kinds of unfair treatment. From a feminist perspective, the main problem we're looking at in this thesis is how the women in *Draupadi* deal with all the different ways they are treated unfairly, and how they fight back. Researcher explores these important questions:

-) What causes women to rebel against patriarchy?
-) How do they challenge patriarchy for transition and change in the society's
-) How does the author, Mahasweta Devi, use her writing to talk about the problems women face and how they fight against them?
-) How does the way she tells the story reveal about her beliefs in women's rights and justices?

In gist the book *Draupadi* by Mahasweta Devi tells a powerful story of the women who stand up against unfair treatment by men in particular and by patriarchy. It also looks at how women fight against the ways men control them. This book shows that the author really cares about showing the difficulties women face and wants to make the things fair for them. Therefore, it is hypothesised that *Draupadi* helps us understand why women rebel against men, shows us the different ways they fight against unfairness, and tells us that the author strongly believes in women's rights and fairness through how she tells the story.

The main objectives of the study are to analyze how gender, class, caste, and ethnicity intersect to create a complex system of oppression within the context of the Indian community portrayed in *Draupadi*. In order to assess the present-day significance of the narrative in *Draupadi* within the framework of continuing feminist discussions, the struggle for women's rights, and the pursuit of gender equality, it is crucial to explore the nuanced depiction of Draupadi's trials and tribulations in the

text, along with the societal conventions and power structures that influenced her narrative.

Since the publication of this novel, various critics have put forth their explanations. On *Draupadi* Some of them are presented below Kaushik Kr. Deka writes:

The name Draupadi instantly transports us to the era of the Mahabharata, a legendary epic where a pivotal moment unfolds in the royal court. Here, Duryodhana, the adversary king, infamously attempts to disrobe Draupadi in a degrading act of humiliation. In this harrowing situation, Draupadi turns to silent prayer, seeking divine intervention from Lord Krishna. It is through the miraculous intervention of Lord Krishna that she finds herself endlessly clothed, preventing the public humiliation she was about to endure. (2892)

Deka endeavors to draw a parallel between the character of Draupadi in the Mahabharata and Mahasweta Devi's titular character. In the Mahabharata, Draupadi's desperate plea to Lord Krishna to safeguard her dignity is a well-known episode. By highlighting this connection, Deka aims to establish the contextual bridge between the Draupadi of the epic and the Draupadi depicted in Mahasweta Devi's novel. This exploration seeks to illuminate the source from which Devi's Draupadi emerges within the narrative, reinforcing the thematic resonance and significance of her character in the broader literary landscape.

Similarly, Sudipta Datta, in her article “The Context and Import of Mahasweta Devi’s ‘Droupadi,’” writes:

Mahasweta Devi's rendition of the iconic character, known as Draupadi or Dopdi in her work, takes a distinct path from the Draupadi of the Mahabharata. Unlike the Mahabharata's Draupadi, who famously seeks Krishna's intervention, Devi's

Draupadi emerges as a rebel confronting the might of the police force, symbolizing the struggle against oppressive forces. (13)

This contrast underscores the divergent portrayals of the character Draupadi and highlights the unique dimensions of Devi's Draupadi, who fearlessly challenges her adversaries, setting her apart from the traditional narrative of her namesake in the epic *Mahabharata*.

Likewise, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is the one who has translated this novel into English. Here, she tries to show how she translates this novel and how its words differ from one language to another language. She also says that she is very serious to translate the lines of title character, Dropadi:

The only exception is the word "sahib." An Urdu word meaning "friend," it came to mean, almost exclusively in Bengali, "white man." It is a colonial word and is used today to mean "boss." I thought of Kipling as I wrote "Burra Sahib" for Senanayak. In the matter of "translation" between Bengali and English, it is again Dopdi who occupies a curious middle space. (391)

Spivak's analysis sheds light on the intricate relationship between language, power, and identity in the context of colonialism and post-colonialism. It emphasizes the role of language as a tool of control and resistance, with characters like Dopdi symbolizing the complexities and contradictions inherent in this dynamic.

However, Anoushka Sinha tries to set the political set of this novel where Dopdi and her people are deprived of their basic needs; they are not taken as equal as others. So, Dopdi and her people joined Naxalite Movement in order to kill the exploiters who are from high class. Sinha writes:

Stripped of their ancestral land, the burden of debt eroded their fundamental right to survive, leaving them without essentials like food, water, and shelter.

The relentless exploitation they endured over the years culminated in the emergence of the Naxalite Movement, which sought to confront those who were seen as parasitic oppressors—landowners, moneylenders, government officials, police, and the state's armed forces. In the midst of a severe drought that left them deprived of drinking water, Dopdi, her husband Dulna, and their fellow Santhals made the decision to take action against Surja Sahu, the oppressive landowner. (154)

In this passage, Sinha aims to establish the political backdrop of the novel, portraying a scenario where Dopdi and her community face deprivation of their fundamental necessities and unequal treatment compared to others. As a response to this injustice, Dopdi and her fellow Santhals become active participants in the Naxalite Movement, a revolutionary struggle aimed at confronting and eliminating the oppressors who belong to the privileged upper class.

Furthermore, Cielo G. Festino and Liliam Cristina Marins show how Devi's writing and Spivak's translation of the same writing turn as an act of presenting oppression done upon one tribe and minority. Spivak spreads this story of minority to the international community which is itself an act of resistance. They comment:

The story's themes and its stylistic choices demonstrate that Devi's writing transcends mere linguistic and artistic expression, evolving into a political statement against various forms of gender and racial discrimination. In this particular case, the focus is on the marginalized Tribal community in India. Concurrently, Spivak's translation can also be seen as an act of resistance, as it unequivocally emphasizes the importance of disseminating the narrative of suffering experienced by a minority community to reach a wider audience both within India and on the international stage. (10)

In this context, Festino and Marins endeavor to illustrate how Devi's literary work and Spivak's translation of that work functioned as a means of exposing the oppression faced by a particular tribe and a minority group. Spivak's dissemination of this narrative to an international audience is, in essence, an act of resistance in its own right.

Most of the reviews mentioned primarily focus on specific aspects of the novel, such as its connection to the Mahabharata and the distinctions between Draupadi in the Mahabharata and Devi's Draupadi. Deka aims to establish a link between Mahabharata and Devi's work, while Datta highlights the differences between the two versions of Draupadi. Likewise, Spivak delves into the intricacies of translation, whereas Festino and Marins explore the significance of Devi's writing in shedding light on the suffering of tribal communities and Spivak's efforts to bring their stories to an international audience. These reviews appear to be primarily confined to these specific aspects, thus providing a comprehensive perspective on the novel's themes and connections.

Therefore, it becomes evident through the existing reviews of the novel that none of the previous studies has examined the work through the lens of women's oppression and their acts of resistance. Consequently, adopting a third-world feminist perspective represents a fresh and unexplored approach to interpreting this novel. Such an approach is poised to provide valuable insights into the experiences of women and their strategies for addressing the challenges posed by patriarchal oppression and discrimination.

This research paper draws upon an interdisciplinary theoretical framework informed by the works of eminent scholars in the fields of postcolonial feminism, gender studies, and literary analysis. This framework provides a comprehensive lens

through which to examine the multifaceted themes of oppression, resistance, and gender dynamics within the novella.

Oppression means when some people unfairly and regularly use their power and control to treat others badly, take away their rights, and make them feel powerless. This can happen through force, treating them unfairly, or pressuring them to do what the powerful people want, all of which limits the freedom, chances, and happiness of those being oppressed.

In many places, Subaltern have been treated very unfairly. Their traditional lands have been taken away from them, their cultural practices have been stopped, and they have not been given the same rights as others. This treatment has forced them to leave their homes, caused them to lose their cultural heritage, and made it hard for them to have a good economic life.

For a long time, in India, there has been a system that treats people differently based on their caste or social group. This system has been very unfair to those in the lower castes, like the Dalits (who used to be called "Untouchables"). They have had to deal with unfair treatment, violence, and being kept away from things like education and jobs.

Women, especially those who are already disadvantaged, experience unfair treatment because of their gender. This can mean they don't get the same chances for education and jobs as men, and they may also be subjected to violence because they are women. This kind of unfair treatment often connects with other types of discrimination against marginalized groups.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's seminal work in postcolonial feminism is foundational to this study. Her concept of the "subaltern" and the idea that women's voices are often marginalized and silenced within dominant discourses serve as a

theoretical anchor. This framework would be particularly instrumental in analyzing how Draupadi's voice and agency are both suppressed and expressed within her oppressive environment.

In her several essay Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", talks about how people in power can suppress and control those who are less powerful. One example she uses is the practice of sati in Hindu culture, where widows would burn to themselves to death. Spivak says that when colonial rulers and nationalist leaders talk about saving or protecting these women, they actually prevent these women from speaking up and having a say in their own lives. So, she's showing how power, oppression, and gender roles play a role in this situation. She writes:

The subaltern as female cannot be heard or read. The female intellectual as such is a contradiction in terms. The figure of a woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization. (306)

Spivak proposes that subaltern women face oppression from both colonial and local male-dominated systems, and their efforts to resist this oppression are often ignored or co-opted by these dominant powers. She also raises the issue of whether it's possible to portray these subaltern women without unintentionally reinforcing their subordinate status. She poses the question: "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. Can one nevertheless attempt to make visible those who are invisible?" (287). Spivak's essay serves as a strong criticism of Western feminist and postcolonial theories.

These theories often assert themselves as representatives of or authorities on subaltern women, all the while failing to recognize their own role in oppressing and muting these women. Spivak urges us to reconsider our preconceived notions and ways of creating knowledge, emphasizing the importance of paying attention to the voices of those routinely left out or disregarded in the prevailing accounts of history and culture.

To understand the theme of oppression, resistance, and gender dynamics in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?", one can examine the part where Spivak criticizes Western feminist and postcolonial academics who assert themselves as spokespeople for subaltern women. Spivak contends that these scholars play a role in the intellectual harm that suppresses the voices of subaltern women, disregards their diversity, and undermines their ability to act independently. She expresses this viewpoint by stating:

The subaltern, as articulated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, remains voiceless. Merely compiling exhaustive global inventories that feature 'woman' as a token of virtue is futile. The concept of representation still retains its significance. The female intellectual, in her capacity as an intellectual, faces a specific and delimited responsibility that she should not dismiss with grandiosity. (308)

Spivak questions the idea that representation is an unbiased method capable of accurately portraying the experiences or truths of subaltern women.

Spivak highlights the constraints and inconsistencies in Western feminist and postcolonial narratives that purport to promote freedom and empowerment but ultimately reinforce Western dominance as the central figure in history and knowledge. She poses the question: "If we want to look into this question of

representation, we must first ask: Who is representing whom? What is being represented? How is it being represented? And what are the effects of this representation?" (275). She prompts us to not only acknowledge these individuals but also to explore fresh avenues for solidarity and conversation that honor the unique perspectives and varied experiences of subaltern women.

Furthermore, Spivak's work challenges us to transcend conventional approaches and imagine new ways of fostering unity and dialogue. These approaches should embrace the richness of diversity within the subaltern community and strive to empower those often silenced and sidelined by dominant narratives.

The Politics of the Female Body by Ketu H that shows how patriarchal notions have been consciously imposed on women and controlled their bodies through so-called hierarchically constructed knowledge is to look at the section where Ketu H discusses the concept of "epistemic violence" she writes:

Epistemic violence is a term coined by Gayatri Spivak to describe the process by which the colonized are denied access to their own forms of knowledge and representation, and are forced to adopt the epistemology of the colonizer. Spivak argues that this process not only silences the subaltern, but also erases their difference and diversity. Epistemic violence is a form of power that operates through discourse, ideology, and culture, and that shapes the subjectivity and identity of the colonized. (4)

Ketu H uses this idea to study how women's bodies have been hurt and controlled by different groups of people in the past. She says that powerful groups, like the colonial rulers and some native leaders, have made women's bodies seem less important, strange, or unsafe. They did this by using things like science, religion, laws, and medicine to justify doing bad things to women, like female genital mutilation,

demanding dowries, forcing women to die on their husbands' funeral pyres, making them cover up, and committing sexual assault. Ketu H writes:

The female body is a site where various forms of power converge: colonialism, nationalism, patriarchy, capitalism. The female body is also a site where various forms of resistance emerge: feminism, activism, art, literature. The politics of the female body is thus a complex and contested terrain, where multiple forces struggle for domination or liberation. (2)

This analysis underscores the complex and dynamic nature of the female body's role in society, as it becomes a canvas upon which various power dynamics and forms of resistance are displayed. It acknowledges the ongoing struggle for control and liberation, with different actors vying for influence over women's bodies.

The Politics of the Female Body by Ketu H. Katrak serves as the methodological foundation for this thesis. The researcher examines how patriarchal notions are consciously imposed on women and control their bodies through hierarchically constructed knowledge. Ketu H. Katrak places a strong focus in this text on the resistance against patriarchal values through speech, silence, fasting, illness, or strike. The researcher demonstrates the dominance of patriarchal beliefs in the Indian society of the time and the women's unwavering resistance to such ideologies with the aid of this theoretical framework.

Furthermore, Kumari Jayawardena, a renowned scholar, broadens the meaning of Western feminism from the 19th and early 20th centuries in her book "Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World." She addresses issues concerning marginalized women that Western feminism had overlooked. She advocates for raising awareness of the abuse and exploitation of women in domestic, workplace, and societal contexts.

She encourages both women and men to actively work towards enhancing the status of women in society.

Jayawardena's book *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* shows the theme of the abuse and exploitation of women at home, at work, and in society is to look at the section where Jayawardena discusses the situation of women in China under the feudal and colonial systems. She writes:

Under feudalism, women were subjected to a rigid patriarchal system that denied them any rights or autonomy. They were confined to the domestic sphere, where they had to obey their fathers, husbands, and sons. They were also subjected to practices such as foot-binding, concubinage, and infanticide of female babies. Under colonialism, women faced additional forms of exploitation and oppression by foreign powers. They were forced to work as cheap labor in factories, mines, and plantations, where they faced harsh conditions and sexual harassment. They were also coerced into prostitution, trafficking, and opium addiction by the colonial authorities and merchants. (149-50)

Jayawardena illustrates the various ways that women in China endured oppression and exploitation in their domestic, work, and social spheres under the feudal and colonial systems. She also demonstrates how women challenged these systems by joining different movements for social transformation and national emancipation. She writes:

Women played an active role in the anti-feudal and anti-colonial struggles that emerged in China since the late nineteenth century. They joined the Taiping Rebellion, the Boxer Uprising, the 1911 Revolution, the May Fourth Movement, the Communist Party, and the Long March. They fought for

democracy, socialism, nationalism, and feminism. They challenged the traditional norms and values that oppressed them and demanded equal rights and opportunities. (151-52)

This analysis highlights the dynamic and multifaceted nature of women's participation in Chinese historical struggles. Their involvement was not limited to one specific cause but spanned a spectrum of socio-political movements, reflecting their determination to challenge oppressive norms and work towards a more inclusive and equitable society.

This study solely examines Draupadi from a feminist perspective in relation to the rape, brutality, and suffering that women continue to experience in patriarchal society. It discusses how men in patriarchal societies continue to pursue women to satisfy their egos and desires. Additionally, it emphasizes the employment of various strategies for resisting these patriarchal ideals. The use of myths, agricultural land relations, rural development, caste-based subaltern narratives, feudalism, and other elements within the book are not the subjects of this study. This study primarily focuses on how patriarchal beliefs continue to be projected and how they continue to impact women's lives and their acts of defiance.

The story revolves around the character of Dopdi, a tribal woman who becomes a symbol of unwavering strength and defiance against the oppressive forces of society and authority. Dopdi is subjected to brutal violence and abuse by the police in the story, yet she refuses to be silenced or broken. She embodies the courage and resilience that many female characters in literature and real-life exhibit when confronted with oppression. Her determination to resist her oppressors and seek justice illustrates the indomitable spirit of women in the face of adversity.

The story of *Draupadi* in Mahasweta Devi's work closely aligns with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of the subaltern. It vividly portrays the voicelessness, oppression, gendered violence, physical and emotional suffering, and the lack of agency experienced by Draupadi, who represents a subaltern figure in the narrative. The story underscores the challenges faced by marginalized individuals in expressing their pain and resistance within oppressive systems, which resonates with the core ideas of Spivak's theory.

The story crafts a powerful narrative that delves into the harrowing experiences of Dopdi, a tribal woman who embodies extraordinary resilience in the face of oppression. The story serves as a compelling exploration of the strength that female characters can muster when confronted with grave injustices. Dopdi's character becomes a symbol of unwavering courage, determination, and resistance:

Then a billion moons pass. A billion lunar years. Opening her eyes after a million light years, Draupadi, strangely enough, sees sky and moon. Slowly the bloodied nailheads shift from her brain. Trying to move, she feels her arms and legs still tied to four posts. Something sticky under her ass and waist. Her own blood. Only the gag has been removed. Incredible thirst. In case she says "water" she catches her lower lip in her teeth. She senses that her vagina is bleeding. How many came to make her? (401)

Draupadi fights against the patriarchal norms and societal expectations that are imposed on her. In this particular excerpt, Draupadi is shown to be physically and emotionally traumatized after being disrobed in front of a court full of men. Despite her vulnerable state, she still manages to resist by refusing to ask for water and instead biting her lip to quench her thirst. This act of resistance shows her strength and resilience in the face of adversity.

The story is about a time when some people in India were fighting against the bad government. Draupadi is a woman who lives in a forest and helps the fighters. The police catch her and hurt her very badly. A bad man named Senanayak and his men do bad things to her many times. The story tells us how she feels and what she sees when they hurt her. She uses words like time, space, and blood to show us how much she suffers and how strong she is. "Her own blood. Only the gag has been removed. Incredible thirst. In case she says "water" she catches her lower lip in her teeth" (401). The police hurt Dopdi very badly, because they want to make her afraid and weak. This is how they treat many women who are poor and have no power. They think they can do whatever they want to them.

But Dopdi does not let them break her spirit. She does not give up or beg for mercy. She speaks out against them and shows them that she is not afraid. In case she says "water" she catches her lower lip in her teeth. She senses that her vagina is bleeding. How many came to make her? (401) Dopdi's story shows how women can be strong even when they face terrible things. She does not let the pain and fear stop her from fighting for what she believes in. She stands up to the people who hurt her and tries to make them see that they are wrong. She is an example of how women can resist oppression and keep their dignity.

The story shows how women are often subjected to violence and exploitation by the powerful men who control the society. Dopdi's gang-rape by the police is a shocking example of this, as it shows how the state uses sexual violence as a weapon to suppress and humiliate the rebels. The police do not see Dopdi as a human being, but as an object to be used and discarded. They do not care about her dignity, her rights, or her feelings. They only want to satisfy their lust and their hatred. The

novella exposes the brutality and injustice of this act, and how it affects Dopdi's body and mind:

Shaming her, a tear trickles out of the corner of her eye. In the muddy moonlight she lowers her lightless eye, sees her breasts, and understands that, indeed, she's been made up right. Her breasts are bitten raw, the nipples torn. How many? Four-five-six-seven-then Draupadi had passed out. (401)

Draupadi's voicelessness is evident in this narration. She is subjected to physical and sexual violence, and her inability to speak or resist effectively due to her traumatic experiences reflects the suppression of her voice. Spivak's theory emphasizes how the subaltern are often silenced by dominant structures of power, and Draupadi's helplessness illustrates this phenomenon.

The narration conveys both the physical and emotional pain that Draupadi experiences. Her tears and the description of her breasts being "bitten raw" evoke a sense of agony and suffering. Spivak's theory addresses the emotional and psychological trauma that subaltern individuals endure, and Draupadi's portrayal aligns with this aspect of the theory.

In this part of the story, Senanayak makes Draupadi look at her body after he and his men have done bad things to her. She sees that her breasts are hurt and bleeding, and she thinks about how many men have touched her. She has a tear in her eye, but she does not make any noise. She looks down, because she has no hope or happiness left. She knows that Senanayak has made her look like a victim and a show for him. This shows us how Senanayak tries to make Draupadi feel less than human, and how he uses bad things to control and shame her.

It also shows how Dopdi resists this violence, by refusing to be broken or ashamed by it. She challenges the police with her courage and her defiance, and asserts her identity as a woman and a fighter:

She turns her eyes and sees something white. Her own cloth. Nothing else. Suddenly she hopes against hope. Perhaps they have abandoned her. For the foxes to devour. But she hears the scrape of feet. She turns her head, the guard leans on his bayonet and leers at her. Draupadi closes her eyes. She doesn't have to wait long. 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. (401)

In Spivak's theory, the subaltern refers to those who are marginalized, oppressed, and often denied a voice within dominant discourse and power structures. Draupadi's character in the passage is emblematic of this voicelessness. She finds herself in a harrowing situation, where her agency and ability to speak out or resist are severely constrained. The passage highlights how Draupadi is denied the autonomy to express herself or exert control over her own body, emphasizing her subaltern status.

Spivak's theory also addresses the intersection of gender and oppression. In this story, Draupadi's gender is a crucial aspect of her subaltern identity. Her experiences, including sexual violence and objectification, reflect the gendered aspects of oppression faced by subaltern women.

The part of story given above shows how Draupadi is suppressed and violated by the police, who use sexual violence as a weapon to subjugate and humiliate her. She is treated as an object, not a human being, and her body is used and abused by the men who rape her. She has no agency, no voice, no choice in what happens to her. She

is reduced to a piece of cloth, a white symbol of purity and innocence that is stained by the blood and dirt of the men who defile her. She is left alone in the dark, hoping for death or escape, but she hears the footsteps of another rapist approaching. She closes her eyes, trying to block out the horror, but she knows she cannot escape.

The image of Draupadi's arms and legs tied to four posts symbolizes the helplessness and confinement imposed upon her. It underscores the powerlessness of women subjected to sexual violence and societal oppression. Despite her physical vulnerability, Draupadi's inner strength will become evident as the story progresses.

The lines given above uses vivid imagery and metaphors to convey her pain and resistance. The moon vomits a bit of light and goes to sleep, suggesting that even nature is disgusted and indifferent to her plight. The dark remains, implying that there is no hope or justice for her. A compelled spread-eagled still body, indicating that she is forced into a position of vulnerability and submission. Active pistons of flesh rise and fall, rise and fall over it, describing the mechanical and dehumanizing act of rape that reduces her to an inanimate thing.

Despite her harrowing circumstances, Draupadi's awareness of her own condition is a testament to her resilience. She recognizes the brutality inflicted upon her, including the bleeding she experiences, which adds to the vivid portrayal of her suffering. Her consciousness and determination to endure despite the pain exemplify the inner strength that female characters often display when faced with oppressive situations.

The story reveals the brutality and injustice of the patriarchal system that oppresses and exploits women like Draupadi, who are marginalized and exploited for their gender, class, caste, and ethnicity: "Then morning comes. Then Draupadi Mejhén is brought to the tent and thrown on the straw. Her piece of cloth is thrown

over her body” (401). The narration shows how Draupadi is treated as a worthless and disposable object by the police, who have raped and tortured her all night. She is brought to the tent and thrown on the straw, like a piece of garbage or an animal. Her piece of cloth is thrown over her body, as if to cover up the evidence of their crimes. The cloth is also a symbol of her identity and dignity, which they have tried to destroy.

The story reveals the lack of respect and compassion that the police have for Draupadi, and how they view her as a mere thing to be used and discarded. It also contrasts with the later scene, where Draupadi stands up and confronts them with her naked and wounded body, refusing to be ashamed or silenced by their violence. She challenges their authority and exposes their hypocrisy, by showing them that they are the ones who are guilty and shameful. She reclaims her cloth and her identity, and asserts her power and agency as a woman and a rebel.

However, despite the physical and emotional trauma she endures, Draupadi refuses to be silenced. Her unwavering defiance against her oppressors highlights the indomitable spirit of women who endure extreme adversity.

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? (402)

The phrase of the story tells us how Draupadi is brave and strong against Senanayak, the police officer who hurt her and did bad things to her. Draupadi goes near him, laughing in a way that he does not get. Her laughter is very strong, meaning that no

one can stop it or make it quiet. It is also very scary, loud, and sharp, meaning that it makes people afraid and surprised. Her laughter shows that she is not scared of him or his men, and that she still has her spirit and her voice.

She also has blood on her lips, which shows that they have hurt her, but she does not mind. She puts the blood on her hand, which is a way of saying that she does not like them and she wants to fight them. She then asks him a question that makes fun of him and his manhood. She says that he can take off her clothes, but he cannot put them back on, meaning that he cannot change what he has done to her, or make her feel good or proud again. She says that he has only shown his own badness and guilt, and that he has no power over her. She also asks him if he is a man, which means that he is not a real man, but a weak and mean person. She asks him about his human being and his power, and shows him that she is not a victim, but a fighter. She shows him her naked and hurt body, which is a sign of her strength and resistance.

Through Dopdi's character, Mahasweta Devi challenges societal norms and expectations placed upon women. Dopdi defies the traditional roles assigned to her by her tribal community, transforming into a symbol of resistance. Her journey becomes a commentary on how women can break free from the constraints of their circumstances and rise against oppression.

Mahasweta Devi uses Dopdi's character to question and confront the prevailing societal norms and expectations imposed on women. Dopdi boldly rejects the conventional roles dictated by her tribal community, emerging as a powerful symbol of defiance. Her personal journey serves as a profound commentary on the potential for women to shatter the shackles of their circumstances and rise against oppressive forces.

In her narrative, Mahasweta Devi employs the character of Dopdi to challenge and directly address the prevailing societal norms and expectations imposed upon women. Dopdi fearlessly defies the conventional roles prescribed by her tribal community, emerging as a formidable symbol of resistance against these constraints. She serves as a living testament to the capacity of women to break free from the shackles of their circumstances and to stand up against oppressive forces.

Dopdi's journey is a profound commentary on the resilience and determination of women in the face of adversity. Her unwavering commitment to her own agency and autonomy underscores the idea that women, even when confronted with deeply entrenched patriarchal structures, have the power to reshape their destinies and challenge the status quo. Dopdi's story, as crafted by Mahasweta Devi, continues to resonate as a testament to the enduring strength of women who dare to defy societal expectations and assert their individuality.

Mahasweta Devi portrays the horrific consequences of gender-based violence and oppression that women like Draupadi endure. However, it also hints at Draupadi's inner strength and resilience, which will likely drive her actions as the story unfolds. Through her character, Devi sheds light on the indomitable spirit of women who, despite enduring unimaginable suffering, find the courage to confront their oppressors and seek justice.

Dopdi's transformation and her courageous stand against oppression challenge the preconceived notions and limitations that society often imposes on women. Her narrative underscores the innate strength that women possess to break free from restrictive roles and confront injustice head-on, inspiring others to question and transcend the boundaries placed upon them. "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-?" (402). The narration shows how Draupadi revolts against Senanayak, the officer who raped and tortured her. She looks around and spits a bloody gob at his white shirt, which is a gesture of contempt and defiance. She stains his shirt with her blood, which is a symbol of her life and struggle. She also says that there is no man here that she should be ashamed, meaning that she does not feel any shame or guilt for what they have done to her, but rather she feels proud and dignified. She says that she will not let him put her cloth on her, meaning that she will not accept his attempt to cover up his crimes or to control her body.

She also challenges him to counter her, meaning that she dares him to face her or to do anything worse to her. She shows him that she is not afraid of him or his power, and that she has nothing to lose. She asserts her agency and identity as a woman and a rebel, and confronts him with her naked and wounded body, which is a sign of her strength and resistance.

Dopdi's resilience is not just an individual struggle; it represents a collective resistance against oppression faced by tribal communities. Her steadfast determination to seek justice and reveal the truth behind her suffering aligns with broader themes of social justice and equity. Mahasweta Devi's storytelling techniques, including the use of powerful imagery and evocative language, further emphasize the theme of female resilience in the face of oppression. The visceral descriptions of Dopdi's pain and the vivid portrayal of her defiance make the reader deeply empathize with her plight.

Even though she goes through a lot of pain and sadness, Dopdi doesn't let anyone shut her up. Her strong determination to stand up to those who hurt her shows how incredibly brave women can be when they face really tough times: "Draupadi

pushes Senanayak with her two mangled breasts, and for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target, terribly afraid” (402). This narration of the story shows how Draupadi uses her body as a weapon against Senanayak, the officer who raped and tortured her. Draupadi pushes him with her two mangled breasts, which are the signs of his violence and cruelty. She does not hide or cover her breasts, but exposes them to him, as a way of confronting him with his own guilt and shame. She also challenges his masculinity and authority, by showing him that she is not afraid or submissive, but defiant and powerful. She makes him feel afraid to stand before an unarmed target, meaning that he realizes that he is not a real man or a hero, but a coward and a villain.

In summary, Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* provides a poignant examination of the theme of female resilience amid oppression. The story, chiefly through Dopdi's character, offers valuable insights into the inner strength women can muster when faced with extreme challenges. It stands as a potent reminder of the unyielding spirit possessed by individuals who steadfastly resist silencing in the face of societal oppressions, thus solidifying its position as a seminal work within the domains of feminist literature and social commentary.

Dopdi's character serves as a compelling exemplar of resilience in the story. Her unwavering determination to confront the harsh realities imposed upon her by oppressive forces illustrates the enduring courage that women often exhibit when subjected to adversity. Through her journey, Devi skillfully highlights the strength within women, emphasizing their capacity to rise above circumstances that seek to subdue them.

Furthermore, *Draupadi* resonates as a significant piece in the realm of feminist literature and social commentary. It underscores the importance of acknowledging and

addressing the systemic oppression faced by women, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds. By portraying Dopdi's courageous defiance, the story not only honors the resilience of female characters but also calls upon society to reflect on and rectify the injustices endured by women. In doing so, it contributes to a broader discourse on gender equality and empowerment, making it a pivotal work in the ongoing struggle for women's rights and dignity.

In the world of stories and discussions about society, the tale of Draupadi, as written by Mahasweta Devi, stands as a powerful example of how strong women can be even when faced with great challenges. Draupadi's story allows us to explore the lives of women who are often overlooked and mistreated because of the unfairness and violence in society. By looking at this story through the ideas of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, researchers have learned a lot about the struggles Draupadi faces and how she refuses to give in to the mistreatment.

One of the central themes that has emerged throughout this thesis is the pervasive and insidious nature of oppression faced by women like Draupadi. Draupadi's character embodies the voicelessness and subjugation that is all too familiar to subaltern women in society. She is subjected to physical and sexual violence, her voice is suppressed, and her agency is stripped away. This portrayal aligns perfectly with Spivak's theory, which emphasizes the systematic silencing and marginalization of subaltern voices. In Draupadi, we find a vivid embodiment of the subaltern woman's struggle to articulate her suffering within a society that often dismisses her plight.

Another important part of this story is the violence that Draupadi faces because she's a woman. She gets hurt in terrible ways, especially because she's a woman. Spivak's ideas help us understand that gender plays a big role in how the

subalterns are treated. The violence against Draupadi shows that women in the subaltern not only face regular oppression but also violence that's connected to their gender. This is why it's so important to have a feminist perspective that looks at gender issues and how they connect to oppression.

Even though Draupadi can't speak up or fight back in a loud way, she still shows us that she's strong from the inside. She doesn't give up, even when things are really tough. This tells us that the subaltern, including women like Draupadi, have a hidden strength even when it looks like they don't. This goes against the idea that the subaltern are completely powerless, as Spivak's theory sometimes suggests. It shows that they can resist quietly and keep going even in the face of terrible circumstances.

To sum it up, Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* teaches us a lot about how women in the subaltern face oppression and how they can show incredible strength in response. When we use Spivak's ideas to look at this story, we see that it's not just a story about one woman but a story that represents the struggles of many. Draupadi's story reminds us of the need to fight for change, equality, and justice for all women who have been silenced and oppressed. It shows us that the strength of women from the subaltern of the society like Draupadi, should inspire us to work towards a fairer and more just world for everyone.

Conclusion: The Resilience of Women in Subaltern Narratives

In her narrative, Mahasweta Devi employs the character of Dopdi to boldly challenge and confront the entrenched societal norms and expectations that weigh upon women. Dopdi's unwavering defiance of the traditional roles dictated by her tribal community establishes her as a formidable emblem of resistance, standing firmly against these oppressive constraints. She serves as a living testament to the indomitable spirit of women, illustrating their capacity to break free from the confines of their

circumstances and rise against the forces that seek to subdue them.

Dopdi's journey offers a profound commentary on the remarkable resilience and unwavering determination of women when confronted with adversity. Her steadfast commitment to asserting her agency and autonomy reinforces the idea that women possess the power to reshape their destinies, even within the deeply rooted patriarchal structures that surround them. Mahasweta Devi's portrayal of Dopdi's narrative resonates as a powerful tribute to the enduring strength of women who dare to challenge societal expectations and assert their individuality.

Through a subaltern perspective, this exploration of gendered subjectivity in *Draupadi* not only dismantles established power hierarchies but also illuminates the potential for marginalized voices to disrupt and redefine the discourse on gender. "Draupadi" remains a compelling testament to the enduring fortitude of those who resist the confines of gendered subjectivity, offering an inspirational narrative that transcends the confines of its pages.

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