

## DALIT FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE IN GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK'S TRANSLATION OF MAHASHWETA DEVI'S DRAUPADI

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### Abstract

The aim of the researcher is to identify Dalit feminist consciousness and perspective in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's translation of Mahashweta Devi's "Draupadi". Devi's narrative focuses on characters that exemplify the twin problems of caste and gender, and being a social activist, she spent several years crusading for rights of tribals. She explores a stinging indictment of destruction of tribal folks. The recognition of caste as not just a retrograde past but an oppressive past reproduced as forms of inequality in modern society requires that we integrate questions of caste with those of gender. She presents politics of domination, caste oppression, material violence, inhuman torture, repressive discourse, overarching hegemony, historical marginalization, and engineered exclusion; and liberates conventional epistemological bind. She does not endeavour to camouflage her ideology inclinations. We notice frequent authorial interventions, extended prefatory remarks, pithy concluding comments. She realises the heterogeneity and restores some of its historical and geographical nomenclature. In "Draupadi", the low caste and the female gender act as weapon for counter-offense and counter-resistance. Spivak's intention is to effect an conscious transformation of concept of the monolithic 'third-world woman' by drawing attention to the mechanics of investigating the subaltern consciousness. Draupadi depicts how a marginalized tribal woman derives strength from her body and inner feminine core to fight against marginality. Here, the woman body becomes an instrument of vicious accusation of patriarchy and hegemony. Thus, woman is caught between the interested 'normalization' of capital and the regressive envy.

### INTRODUCTION

The aim of the researcher is to identify Dalit feminist consciousness in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's translation of Mahashweta Devi's "Draupadi". Devi's narrative focuses on characters that exemplify the twin problems of caste and gender, and explores a stinging accusation of destruction of tribal insurgents. The recognition of caste as not just a retrograde past but an oppressive past reproduced as forms of inequality in modern society requires that we integrate questions of caste with those of gender. At the level of social consciousness, she is up against the male capitalistic brahmnical order. She presents politics of domination, caste oppression, material violence, inhuman torture, repressive discourse, overarching hegemony, historical marginalization, and engineered exclusion; and liberates convention. She says "I think a creative writer should have a social conscience. I have a duty towards society. I ask myself this question a thousand times: Have I done what I could have done"<sup>1</sup>. Her narrative comprises ideological/nationalist and colonizing/decolonising frames. She realises the heterogeneity and restores some of its historical and geographical nomenclature. In "Draupadi", the low caste and the female gender act as weapon for counter-offense and counter-resistance. Spivak's intention is to effect an epistemic transformation of concept of the monolithic 'third-world woman' by drawing attention to the mechanics of investigating the subaltern consciousness. Draupadi depicts how a marginalized tribal woman derives strength from her body and inner feminine core to fight against marginality. Here, the woman body becomes an instrument of vicious denunciation of patriarchy and hegemony.

"In the beginning there was no centre. In the beginning there was no margin. In the beginning there was no margin, how did centre come into existence? Then what existed before margin and centre

1 Spivak. New York: Seagull Books, 2010

There must be something, for there can never be nothing" - Rig Veda (1)

raupadi" depicts how a marginalized tribal woman derives strength from her body and her inner feminine core to fight against her marginality. Here, the woman's body becomes an instrument of vicious denunciation of patriarchy and hegemony which are ironical, anti-literary and contrary. Thus woman is caught between the interested "normalization" of capital and the regressive envy of the "colonized" male]. Draupadi is a story of Dopdi Majhen. It narrates the predicament of a tribal woman caught between the pulls of subsistence living and the appropriatory logic of feudalistic patriarchal state as well as its allied system. voice consequence of paternalistic society's discipline and it institutionalizes female agency. The gendered female is rendered 'as mute as ever' and 'is more deeply in shadow' when the epistemic violence mingles with advanced civilization, and rejects 'tolerance' for their empowerment. In "Draupadi", the victim's body is brutally abused with

unutterable ugliness since she speaks with her body, and biting irony confounds the traditional polarization of cultural (caste and class) and biological aspects. Beauvoir says, “if the respect or fear inspired by woman prevents the use of violence towards her ‘then the muscular superiority of male is no source of power.’” (2) The innocent tribal woman grows into a hardcore rebel. She becomes notorious in the circle of privileged long before the story starts. She has been a witness of the death of Bashai Tudu and her own husband; Dulna Majhi. Draupadi embodies ‘authoritative masculinity’, female emancipation, double colonization, societal power relations, master-slave dialectics, and gender dynamics. In “Draupadi”, the erotic object transforms into an object of torture and revenge where the line between hetero-sexuality and gender-violence adjoins. These contextual factors account for the quantity of women’s politicization and the quality of woman’s political life.

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Draupadi offers trivial shifts from “customs and traditions” to “barbaric”, then to “violence against women”, and then certainly

to “rights violation”. Dopdi could not save the life of her husband. They were hidden in the forest and got separated for a while. He was dipping his face to drink water. The soldier shot him as he lay and Dulna Majhi was dead. Mahashweta Devi’s Draupadi “As a symbol of subaltern defiance, I think a creative writer should have a social conscience. I have a duty towards society... I ask myself this question a thousand times: have I done what could have done”<sup>1</sup>

Devi asserts “...the human being is not made up for the sake of politics”. She declares “...I was writing her to be read, and I was certainly not claiming to give her a voice. So if I am read as giving her a voice, there again this is a sort of transaction of the positionality between the western feminist listener who listens to me, and myself, signified as a Third World informant. What we do toward the texts of the oppressed is very much dependent upon where we are”<sup>2</sup>. Spivak contextualizes ‘the conflicts, and insists the failure of condemnation: “...power, hierarchy, and responsibility for other,”

Draupadi is a tribalized reincarnation of mythical Draupadi, and the tale of rape-murder-lockup torture in police custody. It captures the torturing experience of Santhal tribe, Draupadi Meihen with multi-faced personality. Draupadi is the name of central character. She is introduced to the reader between two uniforms and

1 Rig Veda: Translated by Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Bretson

2 Simone de Beauvoir: The Second Sex; First edition 1949

that as a tribal she cannot pronounce even her own Sanskrit name Draupadi, or the ancient Draupadi... They have no right to heroic Sanskrit names. She cannot story is pronounce even her name because of the Dalit tongue and dialect.

. 1 website

“The a moment caught between two deconstructive formula on the one hand, a law that is fabricated with a view to its own transgression, on the other, the undoing of the binary opposition between the intellectual and the rural struggles”<sup>1</sup>. The tale exposes the Dalit feminist consciousness in its initial exposition itself: “What’s this, a tribal called Dopdi? The list of names I brought has nothing like it! How can anyone have an unlisted name? Dopdi and Dulana are married couple, active workers in Naxalbari movement and fights for their prime necessities. After Dulana’s murder, Draupadi is brutally molested by the policemen in their attempts to extract information about the fugitives.

Senanayak, the army chief, made use of Dulna’s body as a bait to get her but in vain. His soldiers obeyed his command waiting for long in forest despite suffering shooting pains. She combined in herself the sense of pride that derives from her illustrious lineage with practical survival plans of the Naxalites to frustrate Senanayak plans. As a counter-offense, she tears her clothes and makes herself naked as a figure of refusal in front of Police authorities, displaying her crushed body. Rajan comments, “Dopdi does not let her nakedness shame her, the horror of rape diminish her. It is simultaneously a deliberate refusal of a shared sign system [the meaning assigned to nakedness, and rape: shame, fear, loss and an ironic deployment of the same semiotics to create disconcerting counter effects and terror in the enemy” (1). She is conscious of risks that surrounds her life in the wake of the reward put on her head.

1 <http://feminisminindia.com>: draupdi deconstructive formula

She willfully toughens herself, for any eventuality and the torture it might entail. Her confidence and courage dare to look at the public without any hesitation. She laughs weirdly with the blind acceptance of humiliation, corruption, molestation. Her stubborn refusal to cover herself humiliates male office. She is defiant with self-protest, charms with counter-resistance and retaliation, and celebrates the woman power with honour, diversity and resolution. She experiences the subaltern woman within the context of historical juncture of interregnum where woman is concerned with its connotation of violation, imposition of force, destruction of psyche, and alignment of victimization. As Draupadi’s revenge excerpts “What’s the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you man?” (1). She was taken to camp and questioned for more than hour. The police officer ordered subordinates to rape her and then the entire night, till the dawn she was multiply. She was brutally and shamelessly raped by them. Spivak says, “Mahashweta’s story questions this singularity by placing Dopdi first in comradesly, activist, monogamous marriage and then in a situation of multiple rape”. “Draupadi shares the

cultural memories with secret encounters with singular figures, but its subject-representation and constitution is deliberately palimpsest and contrary” The story culminates into Draupadi’s postscript area of lunar flux and sexual difference in challenging man to encounter as mis-recorded objective historical monument. Here ,the female nudity questions the enemy :and thus, Hegel’s double negation is superimposed. She projects as an unarmed target and a ‘terrifying super object ‘with her horrifying gestures: “There isn’t a man here that I should be ashamed...what more can you do?Dopdi’s action is a visible explosion of unorthodox sexualities that has become apparent at least after a general review of the facts which becomes a

1 Breast Stories: Translated by Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak.Calcutta Seagull,1997

\_repressive response to the super power .It imposes that Dopdi’s consumed body becomes an instrumental strike against the suppression of superior authority Here, the female body acts as a weapon for resistance, the female body epitomizes as an allusion for survival. The tale explores the conflicts between morality and subalternity. From the root epic Mahabharatha onwards,the brutal and cruel exploitation and molestation begin with Draupadi’s public stripping. “Daupdi” is a reincarnation of mythical Draupadi ,as on all parallels , the spirit of Dalit woman who are in condemned state of celebrated mythical figures like ‘slaves’

**Where Sita entered the fire to prove her fidelity,  
Where Ahily was turned to stone because of Indra’s lust,  
Where Draupadi was fractured to serve five husbands  
In that country woman is still a slave.(1)**

Gramsci’s cultural hegemony represents the dominant groups in society(ruling class),that maintain dominance by securing the ‘spontaneous consent’ of subordinate groups through negotiated construction and concept of political and ideology which incorporates both dominant and dominated groups . “power is everywhere” and “comes from everywhere” but it is diffused and embodied in scientific discourse, knowledge, meta power ,and regimes of truth in constant flux persuades in society (2)

1 Untouchable saints :An IndianPhenomenon:2005 Eleanor Zelliot

2 letters from prison by Antonio Gramsci (,edited by Frank Rosengarte translator Raymond Rosenthal.)

Spivak’s however speaks on the subaltern’s ability to speak for herself (without being a mouthpiece) and suggests that if the subaltern is given a voice she is not subaltern anymore and that the terms determined for her speech(the space opened for her to speak) will affect what is going to be said and how her voice is heard. Therefore, she is suspicious of attempts to retrieve a pure form of subaltern consciousness and suggests that the effort to produce a transparent or authentic (and heroic) subaltern is a desire of the intellectual to be benevolent or progressive that ends up silencing the subaltern once again. Spivak’s conviction of ‘speaking about’ and ‘speaking for’ the female gender manifests the elite mainstream intrusion thwarted in “Draupadi”. Devi’s Draupadi illustrates P.S Rege’s poetical dictum since the female self and body connote the abjection:

**What a degradation of womanhood,  
What a parody of human god!  
She makes a hollow pleasure of sexual pain,  
A sex complex,a surreptitious parade(1)**

1Rege,Sharmila.Writing caste/Writing gender:Reading Dalit Women’s Testimonies: New Delhi :An imprint of Kali for women 2006,print

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