

Narrativizing the 'Subaltern' Voices of Resistance: A Saga of Marginality in Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi*

Rofiqul Islam, Research Scholar, Teaching at Asleha Girls' College

Article Received: 06/12/2022,
Article Accepted: 06/01/2023,
Published Online: 15/01/2023,
DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2023.5.01.21

Abstract

Power, resistance, and justice are permanently embedded in a tangled relationship in a societal structure. This relationship is carried out by different groups of the organization or people's movements. The Resistance of Subaltern voices, though marginalized, as explored in the selected works of Mahasweta Devi, insinuates their courage and determination. As a researcher, I would like to explore the marginalized condition of the Adivasis. The idea of marginally is dynamic, cross-disciplinary, and multifaceted. The word 'marginality' has been constructed from the word 'margin'. Now margin means at the edge. However, 'Marginality' is the position on the edges, preventing their access to resources and opportunities, freedom of choices, and the development of personal capabilities. In society, the gay, the lesbian, the transgender, the black, the physically challenged, the minorities, and the women are supposed to be marginalized. Apart from these multifaceted layers of marginality, the Adivasis (the tribal people or the nomad of India) are ethnically the worst marginalized section of society that is removed from mainstream power politics.

Keywords: Subaltern, Marginality, Naxalite, Tribal, Politics, Adivasis.

She composes a vast number of plays, short stories, and novels. In her writing, she delineates the plight of women as victims of the politics of gender, class, and caste. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak translates *Draupadi*. *Draupadi*, or *Dopdi Mejhen*, is the central character in the short story that is named, constructed, oppressed, and silenced. However, she did not lose her indomitable will and courage to resist and deconstruct the old structures of racial and gender discrimination.

The term 'subaltern' originates from Antonio Gramsci's writings and underlines a subordinate position regarding class, gender, caste, race, and culture. It was popularised by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay titled "Can the subaltern speak?"(1985). She writes, "The subaltern cannot speak. (Spivak 308).

"Subaltern' means nothing but the colonized/ oppressed whose voice has been silenced. Leela Gandhi explains the term clearly in the following lines :

In 1985 Gayatri Spivak threw a challenge to the race and class blindness of the Western academy, asking, 'Can the subaltern speak? (Spivak, 1985). By subaltern' Spivak meant the oppressed subject, the members of Antonio Gramsci's subaltern classes, or, more generally, those of inferior rank. Her question followed the work begun in the early 1980s by a collective of intellectuals now known as the Subaltern Studies group. Further, they described their project as an attempt to study "the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender, and office or in any other way." Fully alert to the complex ramifications arising from the composition of subordination, the Subaltern Studies group sketched out its wide-ranging concern both with the visible "history, politics, economics and sociology of subalternity" and with the occluded "attitudes, ideologies and belief systems-in short, the cultural informing that condition." In other words, 'Subaltern Studies' defined itself as an attempt to allow the people finally to speak within the jealous pages of elitist historiography and, in so doing, to speak for or to sound the muted voices of the truly oppressed (Gandhi 1-2).

Prof. Bijay Kumar Das, in his book *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, has finely expressed the viewpoints of Spivak in the following words :

According to Spivak, we cannot recover the voice of the subaltern. To establish her viewpoint, she speaks of widow immolation in India on the plea of performing Sati' at the re of the husband. Spivak stressed gendered subaltern—that, women, who are doubly oppressed by colonialism and patriarchy in the Third World countries. She argues that there are contexts "wherein contesting representational systems violently displace/silence the figure of 'gendered subaltern.'" (Das 148).

"Draupadi" was published in Mahasweta Devi's collection of short stories, titled "Agnigarbha" (Womb of Fires, 1978).

Draupadi is one of the central female characters of Mahabharata. Draupadi's husband, Yudhishthira, bets Draupadi in a game of dice. Before that, however, everything was lost by betting on the game. Yudhishthira bets on Draupadi and loses her too. The winning side undressed Draupadi in front of everyone. At that time, Krishna incarnated as Dharma and started to cover Draupadi in the form of clothes from the invisible. Thus, this saved Draupadi from being humiliated in front of everyone. Mahasweta Devi reimagined Draupadi of Mahabharata in her story. She has become the tribal woman Dopdi Meghan. In her story, the men succeed in stripping the heroine of the story. Mahasweta Devi not only highlights the plight of tribal women in her story; besides, he has unveiled the picture of how women are oppressed due to the caste system of society. Here, Devi depicts Dopdi not merely as a victim but she is equal to men who fight for her rights. Even when Dopdi was stripped bare, she stood as a symbol of strength.

Spivak's question, "Can the subaltern speak?" is ambiguous. That is because we do not know who asks this subaltern or the superior imperialist. Subaltern has retained her question-the voice forever. She has spoken. For example, in an article called "The plight of Hindu widows as described by a widow herself," written in 1889, the writer describes the misery of a wife following the death of her husband:

Those tasks is assigned to three women from the barber caste [...] those female friends jump all over her and violently tear all the ornaments from her nose, ears, etc. In that rush, the delicate bones of the nose and ear are sometimes broken. Sometimes [...] tufts of hair are plucked off [...]. At such times grief crashes down on the poor woman from all sides [...] there is nothing in our fate but suffering from birth to death. When our husbands are alive, we are their slaves; when they die, our fate is even worse [...]. Thousands of widows die after a husband's death. However, far more have to suffer worse fates throughout their lives if they stay alive. After she died, however, they started praising her, saying she had died for the love of her husband [...]. If all (such) tales are put together, they will make a large book. The British government banned the custom of sati, but as a result, several women who could have died a cruel but quick death when their husbands died now have to face an agonizingly slow death (Tharu and Lalita 359-363).

In this short story, we witness the misery of Dopdi Mejhen after the murder of Dulna Meghan. She becomes a victim of double oppression only because it is Dopdi who joins the Naxalite movement, and her identity is a woman who is raped by none but by the then-military after the commanding words of Senanayake, "Make her. Do the needful." (Devi 195). After the rape incident, Draupadi does not howl or behave like a helpless victim. The way she speaks, even Senanayak feels powerless and shaken. She says

"..... What is 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 the bloody gob at and says.

Mahasweta Devi depicts the severance of the high caste and low caste. The low-caste poor farmers and peasants underwent countless suffering at the hands of the rich ruthless Zamindars, the Sahibs, and the indigo planters. In the name of democracy, the government always silences the voices of the tribal through various hegemonic forces of the government. This is how Mahasweta Devi documents the socio-economic and religious oppression of Dalit women. Marginality, subalternity, and dehumanization are the main themes of Devi's short story *Draupadi*.

References

Ashcroft Bill, Griffith Gareth, Tiffin Helen. *The Empire Writes Back*, New York, London: Routledge, 2001.Print.

Das, Bijay Kumar. *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*. Atlantic, 2001. Print.

Devi, Mahasweta. "Dopdi" in *Breast Stories of Mahasweta Devi*, New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1993. Print.

Gandhi, Leela. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1999. Print.

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahasweta_Devi

Sinha, Kamaljit. "Deconstructing Patriarchal Structures in Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi"." *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies* (2016). Print.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the subaltern speak?" *Marxism and Interpretation of Culture*. 1998. Print.

Tharu, S. and Lalita K., ed. *Women writing in India*. New Delhi: OUP, 1991. Print.