

Unveiling the Trauma of Dalit Women in Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi***Meenu Susan Jose**, Research Scholar, Ph. D English (Full Time), Roll No: 2201070018, Annamalai University**Dr. S. Florence**, Professor, Department of English, Annamalai University**Abstract**

Trauma is the result of a terrible event in a person's life that makes it impossible to identify herself and leaves her unable to deal with emotions. Trauma is an intractable unconscious problem that highlights the fundamental inconsistency between experience and language. The focus of trauma theory is on the traumatic event that devastates and ruins an individual's psyche and, more significantly, makes it difficult to express in words. In this situation, it is important to give priority to the geographic, cultural, and economic aspects of an individual's community. Trauma can result from both individual and group events. Trauma can have a devastating effect on a person, making one immune to all human emotions and feelings. The trauma that the tribal community, particularly women, experienced is depicted in the writings of Indian Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi. Devi's short story *Draupadi* was published in her collection *Agnigarbha*, which was later translated into English by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. This paper tries to point out the transcending trauma of Dalit women that affects the stability of their lives.

Keywords: Trauma, Suppression, Exploitation, Tribal Community and Atrocities

Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* is set against the backdrop of Bengal, India's history of tribal subjugation. As a result of trauma and dependence on their new masters, the colonized continues to endure oppression even after being emancipated from the bonds of British authority. The fact that the marginalized group in the society continues to face injustice even 74 years of Independence is pitiful. It is a true story of a fight between the police, who take advantage of the tribal community, and innocent tribes who are turned violent by the offenders. The people who worship nature are forced to go through a traumatic experience, which occasionally leads to violent rebellion. This particular text of Mahasweta Devi is about a tribal woman's journey from bondage to freedom, and in this context, the protagonist Draupadi justifies her struggle. Gayatri Chakravorty opines in her work *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, for if, "in the context of colonial production, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in Shadow compared to her male counterpart" (287). Many people in gender and feminist studies were shaken by the pain and suffering of Draupadi.

Women are abused and raped whenever there is a war. Rape has been used as a military tactic since the Trojan War and the Middle East War. In these kinds of warfare, women are always the victims. They are cursed from birth because of their fragility. In this setting, trauma is very common. According to Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, the ruling class subjugates the working class through the deployment of oppressive governmental machinery. In *Draupadi*, Mahasweta Devi portrays the tribal lady Dopdi Mejhen as a person of flesh and bone who refuses to submit to the violence of the state's unjust power, as symbolized by Senanayak. She endures extreme pains of atrocities inflicted on her by the state power. Her body gives up but not her mind when the police subject her to the beast. "Her breasts are bitten raw, the nipples torn. A compelled spend-eagled body. Active pistons of flesh rise and fall, rise and fall over it" (401), yet this iron lady does not become traumatized rather she has used her brutally raped body as a weapon to raise against this traumatic experience which is the driving force of the story. This incident also highlights the patriarchal mindset in which women are viewed as objects of desire and things to be won over. The Communist Manifesto asserts that "the State is nothing more than a committee tasked with overseeing the Bourgeoisie's common concerns" (405). The apparatus of the state is meant to subjugate the helpless. Here, we witness the State protecting landowners such as Surja Sahu while suppressing the impoverished tribal people, who are merely defending their means of subsistence. However, it is intentional to deny the natural rights of the indigenous people on this planet. Mahasweta Devi has makes an honest effort to convey the notion that the ruling class and the state view the marginalized as a threat, and as such, they seek to terrorize, traumatize, and control them in order to maintain their positions of power within the hegemonic system. The state's panoptic nature results in its intervention in the primitive way of life of the tribal people. Mahasweta Devi has attempted to convey the idea that the insurrection is just waiting for the populace to acknowledge it.

Dopdi Mejhen, the widow of a revolutionary spouse who was initially shot dead by the military, remains devoted to him and his political views out of love and social obligation. She behaves like a simple Naxal informant, but this is the first time she acts like a woman—that is, until the moment of her rape and her refusal to put on clothes. At the end of the narrative, the Army officer Senanayak approves of her rape, and Dopdi, despite being raped several times, insists on staying nude. "What is the use of clothes? you can strip me, but can you clothe me again?" (402). She is taken into custody. Rape is associated with the strength of manhood in a patriarchal society, which creates trauma. However, Dopdi has a new notion of who she is and actively works to

disprove the idea of trauma. She creates a meaning that Senanayak is unable to understand by asserting herself as a subject rather than an object of the masculine narrative: Draupadi pushes Senanayak with her two mangled breasts, and for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target. What more could they possibly do to Dopdi now that she is in danger and humiliated. She is stoic, unflappable, and unmoved. She is comparable to the speaker in Milton's first book of *Paradise Lost*, who, following a loss, exclaims, "all is not lost; the unconquerable will, And the study of revenge, immortal hate" (02) She maintains her poise throughout. "Her black body comes even closer, and Dopdi shakes with a burst of indomitable laughter that Senanayak simply cannot understand. Her ravaged lips bleed as she begins laughing" (402). By showing Dopdi's burned body as a crucial blow against the trauma imposed by male power, Mahashweta Devi validates the voice 'The instrument effect' identified by Michel Foucault, explains the opposite form of protest against women's traumatized states as a result of male power.

The term 'Draupadi' reminds of *The Mahabharata*, especially in a hall where the the enemy chief pulls on her saree, but Lord Krishna's miracles transform her into an eternally clad figure. This painful moment in the life of the mythical queen, Draupadi, also known as Dopdi due to her tribal background, is the driving force behind the Kurukshetra battle between two groups of cousin brothers. However, Mahashweta Devi's Draupadi does not seek male authority to safeguard her honor. Mahashweta Devi redefines 'honor' in a woman's life, using her body to make a powerful statement against male hypocrisy rather than pursuing sensational attributes. Despite suffering terrible physical abuse all the night, she keeps her male comrades' identities a secret. While the male power could examine and sympathize with her severely injured body in the open, she is emotionally and psychologically unharmed by the rape experience. She defies every horrific circumstance and event that would have caused a normal person to give up on life. Because of the incorrect meaning of the word "chastity," makes many other women to get mentally scarred when a woman is raped due to her tormented body and terrified mind. Chastity is one of the issues in Indian civilization that keeps women as slaves for hundreds of years. In *The Ramayana*, Sita must undergo a fire trial to demonstrate her virginity. In a society like this, Draupadi suffers twice. She is a victim of both class hierarchy and patriarchy in the first place. In addition to dismissing the idea of trauma in this particular setting, Mahashweta Devi's lady Dopdi protests in the nude and, after dissecting trauma, explains what trauma means to the oppressor. If the sensational appeal is removed, the same naked female body that subjugates a male body that dominates it during the night without her consent can also subjugate his male psychology during the day. Dopdi uses her wounded black body as arms to question the fake dignity of patriarchy.

Senanayak was once a source of trauma and terror for the tribe, but in the end, a lady of spine who was sexually assaulted by a tribe member revealed herself to be a source of trauma for those who oppress and take advantage of the so-called patriarchal society. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asserts in her essay *In Other Worlds*, "I translated the Bengali short story into English as much for the sake of its villain Senanayak as for its title character Draupadi (or Dopdi)". (122) Despite being destined to live a painful life in a tribal tribe, Dopdi is not a palimpsest. Her horrific past drives her to take exact revenge on those responsible for her pitiful state. Dopdi is a combatant. She battles fiercely for the rights of all people. She is unable to put up with the way she is being treated. Dopdi is a tribal woman who is illiterate and the embodiment of freedom and fairness. She does not fight alone in this battle. She defends the rights of every tribal member. She does not receive much of her painful experience from her community. It originates from the upper caste of mainstream Hinduism. In the indigenous community, women are not denigrated. She falls prey to societal fabrication and her suffering is not normal. She suffers because she is a woman from a marginalized tribal class. Tribal existence includes an intolerable traumatic experience as part of it. The patriarchal social architecture that causes pain in a woman's life is abundantly evident by Mahashweta Devi, although in an oblique way. Dopdi provides snippets of the horrific tragedies and severe suffering that the community endures. The story of the protest against injustices against humanity is told through Dopdi. She acts in this way because she is compelled to by the horrific event that occurred in her life. She is no longer afraid of terror. In this sense, Spivak noted that "she is unique and, in a patriarchal and patronymic setting, even a "attacker" in the strange, unpaired, and uncoupled meaning" (183) This is how the Dopdi in the short story differs from the Draupadi in the Mahabharata. While Dopdi is not submissive and Draupadi is, they both experience a similar type of trauma. Although Dopdi is disobedient, her actions get her into deeper difficulties. After being apprehended, she is raped. Like many women in Indian society, she is susceptible to violence from men. She maintains her composure even in difficult circumstances. The readers find it shocking how she handled the traumatic events following her arrest. She is imprisoned by the horrible event. When she refuses to give the information the officers seek, the officer tells her to "do the necessary." Then a billion moons, parts, and straining to move, she feels her arms and jumps stuck to four posts while perspiring profusely beneath her waist and ass." (401) Her decision to go nude to Senanayak demonstrates her resilience in the face of injustice and humiliation. Senanayak is rendered weak by the helpless Dopdi; this is her strength. Her response to those who have caused her trauma is that she is naked. She is the ideal counterpoint to Seetha in *The Ramayana*. Dopdi has the power to take revenge on her attackers. She can proudly say that her honor doesn't lie in between her legs. Dopdi suffers from trauma but her traumatic experiences result in violent

reactions. Her traumatic upbringing exposed her to a variety of social ills, to which she responds differently. She is not interested in always being obedient. She is a fiercely independent woman with the ability to triumph in any circumstances.

Works Cited**Primary Source:**

Devi, Mahasweta Devi. *Breast Stories*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. New York: Seagull Books, 2010. Print.

Secondary Sources:

Althusser, Louis. *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, 1970. New York: Monthly Review Press. Print.

Balaev, Michelle. *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*. New York: Palgrave, 2014. Print.

Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma Narrative, and History*. London: John Hopkins University Press, 1996. Print.

Devi, Mahasweta. *Draupadi in Breast Stories*. Tran. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Calcutta, Seagull books, 2010. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980. Print.

Marx, Karl. *The Communist Manifesto*. Oxford: Oxford UP Press, 2008. Print. Milton, Jonh. *Paradise Lost*. New York: Dover, Mineola, 2018.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Can the Subaltern Speak? Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988. Print.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. London: Routledge, 2006. Print