

Militarized Patriarchy and Subaltern Revolt in Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi

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Abstract: This paper has focused on the marginalization and militarization of the state that creates gendered violence; one can witness that Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* is relevant. Revisited in light of global discourses on bodily autonomy and current feminist movements, it emphasizes how trauma may become radical political resistance. The writer wanted to reveal how patriarchal power impacts physical dominance, rather than institutional monitoring, bureaucratic control, and ideological conditioning in the author's novel of *Dopdi Mejhen*, a tribal woman who was sexually abused while in custody. This study examines the intersectionality, indigenous rights, and feminist resistance with reference to *Draupadi* as Simone de Beauvoir's idea of women as the "Other," Judith Butler's theory of 'Gender performativity, ' Michel Foucault's framework of disciplinary power, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 'subaltern theory, ' and bell hooks 'intersectional feminism. *Dopdi*'s unwillingness to dress herself becomes a symbolic rejection of both patriarchal shame and state-imposed silencing in an era of MeToo movements, digital activism, and renewed efforts against authoritarianism. Her body challenges prevailing myths that connect suffering with passivity by evolving from a violated site of oppression into a potent tool of rebellion. This paper emphasizes that Devi's work foreshadows modern feminist tactics that recover agency with visibility, resistance, and unity among groups. *Draupadi* redefines feminist agency for the contemporary era and continues to stimulate critical engagement with institutional and gendered power structures by rediscovering the subaltern female body in a patriarchal post-colonial perspective, presented as a site of double-erased existence subjected to extreme patriarchy, caste and class exploitation it and voiceless and excluded from body politics. Gayatri Spivak emphasizes that the body is often portrayed as a commodity or passive subject. However, Maheswata reclaims the body as a site of radical resistance, where marginalized woman like *Draupadi* use their violated bodies to protest state and patriarchal power.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Digital Feminism, Gendered Violence, Indigenous Identity, Political Resistance

1. Introduction

Literature often deals with family crises from ancient times to the modern era. The treatment of women has become routine within different levels of mental and physical torment through the patriarchal structure of the family, where men are assumed to control women in the family [1]. If woman denies a man's words, the harassment begins. The research has zeal to portray the interesting short tale of contemporary Indian literature, which is Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi*, which was first published in the anthology *Agnigarbha* [2]. The work highlights the harsh reality of caste oppression, gendered violence, and official repression against the backdrop of the Naxalite uprising. Devi creates a story that turns the female body from a passive site of abuse into an active locus of resistance through the character of *Dopdi Mejhen* [3]. The narrative is significant as a radical reconfiguration of agency and voice under repressive power structures, in addition to the subject of pain. The incident is still relevant in the modern era; women have been tortured in patriarchy and have become a topic of discussion, surveillance, monitoring of women's physical autonomy and custodial brutality [4].

The politics of shame is used to enforce norms, delegitimize of subverted women as the last act of rebellion, in which she confronts the officer Senanayak and refuses to dress. Her gesture serves as a kind of political irony and symbolic inversion, turning the nude body into a symbol of insurgent power rather than

weakness. The discourse challenges prejudices of honour and modesty when she states, "*There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed of.*" In the context, Draupadi recalls the events of the Mahabharata's Draupadi revealing incident, but Devi reimagines the legendary character in a contemporary, materialist setting free from divine influence [5]. Dopdi represents subaltern opposition within a Foucauldian network of oppressive force held by a single entity of disciplinary power, in contrast to the epic heroine who is shielded by Krishna [6]. The author takes on a sharper, more aggressive realism when compared to works like 'The God of Small Things', which similarly challenges gender and caste hierarchies [7]. The paper serves as both a witness and a protest by utilising literary devices including sarcasm, symbolism, political allegory, and fragmented narration. In the end, Draupadi is still regarded as a foundational feminist work that reinterprets suffering as transformational resistance in both historical and modern settings [8].

Research Objectives

The writer aims to demonstrate how pain is transformed into a radical articulation of feminist resistance within patriarchal and state authority [9]; this study reveals the perfect mix of theoretically integrated analysis of Draupadi. The research would like to analyze Dopdi Meihen with subaltern discourse through the intersectional dimensions of gender, class, and tribal identity embedded in her characterization [10]. It examines the systems of institutional violence, militarization, and surveillance that control marginalized bodies by employing Michel Foucault's idea of disciplinary and gender theory that views gender and sexuality as social constructs produced by knowledge and power [11]. The study simultaneously explores how Dopdi's final act of naked defiance undermines patriarchal notions as fundamental tools of power used to control behavior, mobility, and reduce them into objects [12].

The author has taken the Mahabharata Draupadi's disrobing episode as a feminist myth in the context of modern sociopolitical reality [13]. The author wants to establish Draupadi as a foundational work that reclaims the female body as a site of political assertion, epistemological resistance, and transformative force in the contemporary day, which redefines feminist agency. Despite the Draupadi episode having been extensively explored in feminist literature, the majority of critical readings mostly concentrate on tribal marginalisation or gender oppression alone [14]. Few works address how trauma is strategically turned into political resistance by combining subaltern studies, intersectional feminism, and Foucauldian power theory into a unified analytical framework [15]. In addition to the mythic resemblance to the Mahabharata that has been recognized, not enough focus has been on how Devi's rewrite foreshadows current discussions on bodily autonomy, brutality in detention, and authoritarian state institutions in the twenty-first century. Patriarchy is a form of or another cause of women's oppression

Trauma Reconfigured as Political Agency

In Draupadi, trauma is drastically reinterpreted as political agency rather than as passive suffering [13]. Dopdi Meihen's rebellion is sparked by the state's intentional use of her rape in custody as a tool of humiliation and enslavement. The state's significance of sexual relationships in class societies [16]. She transforms bodily abuse into a performative act of resistance rather than internalizing shame. Dopdi defies Senanayak's command to dress in front of him by saying, "What's the need of clothes? You can undress me, but how will you get me dressed again? By highlighting the futility of using violence as a control mechanism, this rhetorical question undermines the logic of patriarchal dominance. Her further declaration, "There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed of," marks a decisive inversion of the politics of modesty. Traditionally created as a location of disgrace, the female body is re-signified as a weapon of revolt. The author turns the raped body into a language of resistance that opposes gender ideology and governmental authority through irony and symbolic reversal [17]. Trauma thus becomes a subversive force, enabling Dopdi to reclaim subjectivity. This reconfiguration redefines feminist resistance inside oppressive socio-political frameworks by turning vulnerability into insurgent action and quiet into conflict.

Gender, Class, and Ethnicity Intersectionality: A Modern View

Draupadi's persecution in Draupadi is facilitated by the intricate intersections of gender, class, and race [18]. She is targeted as a Santhal tribal woman who has been labelled an insurgent because she represents what the state views as a "dangerous" subaltern presence, rather than just because she is a woman. Her individuality is reduced by the officials to a file and a label, "Draupadi Meihen, age twenty-seven, wife of Dulna Majhi," demonstrating institutional objectification and bureaucratic dehumanization. Her body becomes a location of what feminist critics refer to as structural violence, where militarised state authority and patriarchy clash [19].

The frightening order, "**Make her.**" "**Do the needful**" reveals how language itself turns into an erasing weapon, hiding cruelty under administrative discourse [17]. The authority both uses the language of monitor

woman power and to suppress, in which the authority uses monitoring. However, this system is upended by Dopdi's subsequent defiance, "There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed of," which turns intersectional vulnerability into insurgent agency [20]. Similar dynamics still exist in modern society. Caste, poverty, and ethnicity exacerbate gendered violence, and Dalit, Adivasi, and migratory women continue to experience compounded prejudice [21]. These voices are frequently marginalized in mainstream feminist discourse due to the politics of representation. As a result, the story foreshadows the contemporary intersectionality framework by proving that emancipation cannot be isolated or abstract.

Christa Wolf viewed patriarchy as a destructive, deeply rooted system, promoting aggression, militarism, and marginalization of women [22]. Ideals like modesty, chastity, and purity serve as regulatory instruments in this framework, limiting women's bodily autonomy and disciplining their behavior. Shame functions as a control mechanism, an internalized monitoring system that guarantees compliance by instilling a fear of rejection and disgrace. According to feminist theory, women are conditioned to view their bodies as potential sources of dishonor, which is a type of symbolic violence [23].

Women's subjugation in a patriarchal system that frames male domination as natural, often using traditional religion and social rituals to justify unequal control, mobility, and assign women subordinate roles. This cultural logic is radically dismantled in Draupadi by Dopdi's reluctance to conceal her violated body [24]. She challenges the moral code that associates nudity with shame rather than acknowledging humiliation as an unavoidable result of sexual assault. The story turns the female body from an object of control into a tool for political conflict through symbolic inversion and performative resistance [25]. The deed reveals how respect itself is a patriarchal construct intended to silence women, shattering the dichotomy between shame and dignity.

Relevance in the Present Era: Through victim-blaming, moral policing, and online abuse, patriarchal shame culture endures in modern society to reduce women to objects [26]. Because female respectability is still associated with control over one's body, survivors of sexual assault are often examined for their attire, mobility, or lifestyle choices. Character assassination and cyberbullying are two ways that online venues reinforce this rule [27]. Because it challenges deeply ingrained myths that hold women accountable for violence against them, the deconstruction of shame culture is vital today. Feminist discourse continues to challenge institutions that associate silence with virtue by rejecting forced modesty and regaining physical autonomy [28]. The work is a potent statement on the pressing need to undermine honour-based gender standards in both physical and digital public realms since the author's representation foreshadows these contemporary challenges. Culture, literature and media often act as tools to reinforce patriarchy, depicting women as passive sufferers or setting roles.

Rewriting Myths as a Feminist Approach: Simone De Beauvoir refers to fabricated essentialist images of femininity that define women as the 'other' to man's subject. As Marx wrote in 1845 regarding women's oppression as anything else in our society [29]. Man, ideas as sustains themselves. Robert Hamilton points it as the feminist analysis has addressed itself to patriarchal ideology and defined the system of male domination and female subjugation in any society [30]. Myth rewriting serves as a purposeful feminist tactic in Draupadi, as the author reclaims and reinterprets the Mahabharata's disrobing incident. Draupadi's humiliation in the Kuru court, where her body is viewed as property that men wager and claim, turns into a pivotal act of patriarchal brutality. "Whom did you lose first, yourself or me?" she poses a compelling legal question during that assembly [31]. She highlights the moral and legal paradox of Yudhishtira staking her after losing his own freedom by posing this question. "I ask you, O learned men, am I won or not?" she asks the elders in attendance. Her voice, though desperate, appeals to dharma and justice within a male-dominated court.

The disrobing of Draupadi can be interpreted in a modern context as a powerful metaphor for systematic sexual violence, victim-blaming, the failure of institutions to protect individuals, and the objectification of women [13]. Draupadi is saved by heavenly intervention when Krishna uses miraculous powers by sending unending sarees to maintain her modesty and reinstate patriarchal honor. Devi's Dopdi, on the other hand, is not shielded in this way. The modern Draupadi must face violence on her own within a militaristic state structure, making the lack of divine intervention politically significant [17]. The author puts the story into tangible history by removing the metaphysical cloak through this revisionist mythology. This intertextual approach both reveals and subverts the persistence of patriarchal power from epic times to contemporary administration. Dopdi rejects the moral legitimacy of power, while the legendary Draupadi seeks justice from it. A feminist act of reclamation, turning a hallowed story of honor violations into a modern discourse of agency, resistance, and embodied political disobedience [32].

The writer has examined Militarization and State-sponsored violence, which is shown in Draupadi as

a calculated political tactic ingrained in militaristic administration [4]. Custodial rape of Dopdi Mejhen is depicted as an institutional strategy intended to quell insurrection and intimidate marginalized tribal populations rather than as an impulsive act of brutality. "Make her," was the official order. "Do the needful" illustrates how administrative language turns violence into routine and sanitizes brutality. This exemplifies institutional dehumanization, in which people are treated like disposable parts of the governmental apparatus. Importantly, the culprits are educated officials who represent law and order and national security rather than ignorant or socially "uncivilized" individuals [33]. Senanayak represents the unsettling paradox of contemporary authority—where knowledge coexists with moral failure—and is cognizant of insurgent psychology. The essay poses an unnerving question: Who will protect justice and hold those in positions of authority responsible if educated state agents commit such crimes? In the modern period, where stories of abuse of emergency powers, violence against detainees, and repression of dissent continue to undermine democratic values, this criticism is still quite pertinent. Devi's story challenges society to consider the moral obligations of people in positions of authority and governance by exposing how authoritarian tendencies can function within civilized institutions [17].

Current Significance in International Feminist Movements: Draupadi's character is still relevant in today's feminist resistance movements that fight institutional injustice and gender-based violence [34]. According to Elfriede Jelinek, a woman is bound between a repressive society and her darkest desires. The story's depiction of state complicity and custodial rape has unsettling parallels in contemporary India, where incidents like Bebina's alleged abuse in custody, Soumashree's harassment and public humiliation, and Itishree's tragic violence highlight the ongoing vulnerability of women in all areas and social classes. These episodes, which went viral on digital media, show how gendered violence is ingrained in social, political, and bureaucratic processes rather than being limited to isolated areas [35]. Beyond isolated incidents, India has seen repeated atrocities, such as the 2012 Delhi gang rape (often referred to as the Nirbhaya case), the Hathras incident, and several unreported attacks in rural and underprivileged groups. These incidents highlight the persistence of what could be called systemic misogyny, where survivors frequently face institutional indifference, victim-blaming, and delayed justice.

Dopdi Mejhen's calm and quiet is echoed in international feminist frameworks by movements like #MeToo and campaigns against custodial violence [17]. Devi's story foreshadows this politics of visibility, in which taking back one's voice serves as a form of resistance. The article illustrates the text's ongoing theoretical importance by placing Draupadi within these current battles, demonstrating how literature not only reflects social reality but also challenges and reshapes discourses of justice, accountability, and women's bodily autonomy [36].

Conclusion

In modern days, violence has become visible discrimination against white or black, wealthy or impoverished, privileged or marginalized, attractive or "ordinary," or between women who wear long or short clothing throughout history. The persistence of gendered violence, from Draupadi's disrobing in the Mahabharata to Dopdi Mejhen's prison attack in Draupadi, indicates a troubling historical pattern: oppression changes its forms but not its goal. Regardless of social class or cultural setting, patriarchal structures constantly aim to suppress, control, and discipline the female body. The ingrained logic of patriarchal shame culture is revealed by the ongoing propensity to place blame on women based on their looks, attire, caste, class, or personal preferences. Violence comes from power structures that justify dominance, not from a woman's identity or actions. By portraying resistance as real defiance rather than an abstract ideal, Devi's text effectively undermines these arguments.

Draupadi remains incredibly relevant in today's world, as feminist movements demand accountability and confront systemic injustice. It serves as a reminder that the fight against violence is not confined to a particular historical era or community. Instead, it is a global, ongoing struggle against systems that uphold inequality. In the conclusion, the book urges society to change from victim-blaming narratives to systemic reform, moral leadership, and group accountability in addressing gendered oppression.

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