

She is More than a Sex Object: Tribal Women and their Suffering in Reference to Mahasweta Devi's 'D2' (Doulati and Draupadi)

Prof. Reepal A Tandel

PhD. Scholar, Department of English
Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Surat, Gujarat, India
Assistant Professor in English
Rofel Arts and Commerce College, Vapi, Gujarat, India
viharya14@gmail.com

Abstract: Indian society has many folds in its structure and multiculturalism. Tribal community and their crushed, hidden, and hazy identity were undercover until the 20th century; especially Tribal women became merely a showpiece in paintings of some artist or on the sophisticated high-class wall. Their features, cultures, and oppressed existence are beautifully painted by painters who attract the Indian common mass. Their glossy nakedness and dark complexion serve a beauty to luxurious drawing-room, but no one peeps inside their unvoiced soul to know their suffering and their yearning of getting a particular identity till many writers like Mahasweta Devi, Gita Mehta, Kamala Markandya, Amrita Pritam started depicted them through their literary works. Numerous works in literature unfold the predicament of 'Tribal hero', 'Tribal Folks', 'Tribal family' but a handful of narratives found for 'Tribal heroines'. Tribal women's studies have been remarkably declined that needs to be restored, and literary writers took that flag in their hands to raise voices against these marginalized, socially outcast second gender folks. Their unnoticed plight is well defined in the works of social activist Mahasweta Devi. The present research paper is an earnest attempt to critically analyze the treatment of the ethnic group, their exploitation at the hand of the upper crust with reference to Mahasweta Devi's 'Doulati' and 'Draupadi', that delineate the tribal women's trauma, their suffering, victimization and contrast between these two leading feminine characters is brought forth. The protagonists created by Devi mirror the tribal living standards with one coin on two sides, which means being a tribal feminine figure. They have one common problem, but their dealing with those tantrums has two distinctive sides. It also implicates the need to refiguring the sidelined segments of the social spree to make the readers aware of their culture, social status, trauma, and troubles faced due to their low caste born, forcing them to be marginalized, nameless, unsung and misconstrued.

Keywords: Tribal heroines, Outcast, Hazy identity, Unsung ethnic group, Marginalized

I. INTRODUCTION

The 20th century was marked by the upsurge of various maneuvers in the Indian context, whether women, farmers, Dalits or the Tribals. Many cultural folks rose together, came up with issues related to and demanded solutions. Many believe that their exploitation was based on their specific identity allotted to them by a social spree. Literature, a mirror to society, joined the battle to be a platform of justice for those exploited souls through women's literature, Tribal literature, and Dalit literature.

Much of the tribal folks are oral, and as they were far from the social center. Tribal literature remained in the dark for so long that it is produced in numerous indigenous languages, but the world is unknown. Their unique identity, existence and culture are getting lost. The deep feeling of 'left over' and 'outsiders' paved the way for the rise of tribal literature and literature to come to its rescue, born the contemporary tribal literature.

Everyone wants tribal literature but not tribal. From time to time, non-tribal writers dwell into the tribal lifespan, pen down their struggle, and show them to society. It is being said tribal literature came into existence in 1991 to protect tribal

identity in the face of reinforced exploitation due to economic liberation. The uniqueness lies in their geographical, societal and linguistic context as it differs from the other form of literature.

Many tribal writers adopted poetry as their strong weapon to portray their life and struggle. While the form of autobiography is very few as tribal communities believe in the group, self-centeredness is refused hardly by them. Their collectiveness is their ornament and a medium to express themselves in poetic form rather than the autobiography.

Tribal are marginalized, so is women. Indian society is going under a drastic transformation in the matter of tribal and women. Once, this second sex remained inside four walls of the house and could not come out without a veil. Many writers now break their docile, submissive, puppet-like image. Many writers, including women writers, break boundaries, come out, and express their views on numerous subject matters. Today's women can carry any responsibilities on their shoulders. They are not mere playing supporting roles; they can eventually take charge of their life and even the life of other members related to her.

II. LITERATURE – A POWERFUL MEDIUM

A decade ago, women had no right to show their teeth while giggling, and now the table turns, they can laugh in full ecstasy and walk neck and neck with masculine gender. Though 21st-century women have gained much space and crafted their identity to be felt by the world, there are some internal parts of Indian villages where tribal women are still marginalized and longing to establish their identity. Their poor, pitiable bounded uneducated life failed to gain them their cultural rights even. One can easily identify the difference between uneducated tribal women and well educated, economical stable women.

Indian English writers vastly contributed to bringing forth the dull, miserable and lifeless condition of a tribal woman. These writers have served a hot plate of their fearless women protagonists who are illiterate yet fight hard to abolish the exploitation, which comes from being victims to victory.

Writers like Mahasweta Devi, Kamala Markandya, Amrita Pritam, Gita Mehta and many more have delineated the browbeaten status of these tribal heroines who are physically tortured, even raped in most of the cases, but mentally strong enough to protest against and gain their self. These activists and writers vividly describe the real-life problems that these illiterate poor tribal females face in the hands of mainstream social surroundings. Tribal females are treated as sexual objects only to satisfy rotten-minded men and their wild pleasure.

These novelists shouldered the responsibility of providing articulation to the problems faced by socially and economically shelved tribal second sex to make readers aware of their victimized situation along with utter poverty, illiteracy, suffering, cultural and language challenges, casteism, gender issues, superstitions and many more that cut them off from societal structure.

III. ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND 'D2'

Mahasweta Devi- an eminent Bengali writer and social activist who fought for the justice and fundamental rights of the suppressed tribal mass; she has penned more than 100 novels and short stories collections and bagged countless awards Sahitya Akademi, Jnanpith, Ramon Magsaysay, Padmashri, and Padma Bhushan. She was a woman of dynamism and compassion, reached the international platform due to her immense contribution to literature and especially sang the unheard voice of tribal.

Her novella 'Doulati the bountiful' sketches the sad saga of an Adivasi girl of 14, namely Doulati – a daughter of a tribal bonded worker, who was at a very tender age of 14, victimized to repay her father's loan and eventually forced and thrown into the horrifying dark world of prostitution. Devi has portrayed the effect of abuse of woman's bodies through her. She shed light on the hardship of bonded labour and his family.

*"Its fate's decree to become a Kamiya; no one can evade what he (lord/fate) writes down, for Ganori what he is born into is what he, unfortunately, has to become, a slave. (22)"*¹

Through this, Devi throws light on the powerlessness of tribes over their fate and accepts slavery. She points out the cunning injustice served by the upper crust people in the name of false law as tribes have no other choice than to follow the rules made by that upper crust.

¹Devi, Mahasweta and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "Doulati the Bountiful." WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly, Vol. 42 No. 1, 2014. P. 22

Adivasi Ganori daughter Doulati was promised marriage by Paramananada in exchange for the loan cancellation taken by her father. Doulati was sold to pay 300 Dollars in debt by her family. Her misfortune plays a trick, and instead of becoming a bride, she becomes a prostitute. Her virginity and Puberty field body earned her landlord a high price. Her body and her tender emotional stage are Crushes at every stage of her prostitution with every changing client. She has been used until her body is useful. There is no escape for her unless and until the final destination. She was carrying the burden of being a tribal and outcast, one with a feminine body. Being a socially and economically shelved crushed soul, Doulati would never be free herself from money lenders. The loan is terminated with the pathetic demise of the Doulati due to the terminal illness at the age of 27. The story turns into the national allegory as Doulati dies on the night of the 15th of August when India celebrates Independence, but unfortunately, she was born a slave and died a slave. Devi has delineated a picture of tribal women spread all over the Indian map when the country is in elevating freedom.

Devi's other story, "Draupadi", vividly narrates the exclusionist view of the tribal women and describe how they are thrown out of the social structure. Originally written in Bengali and later translated into English by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Draupadi is a young, Fearless Santhal tribal woman. A resemblance to Mahabharata Draupadi- Dopdi- as she is called in the tribal fashion is a rebellious soul. The essence of inequality and mere injustice troubled Dopdi inside, who feels disgusted when being called 'untouchable.'

Devi's Draupadi unveils two distinctive manifestations of resistance- the first is the tribal revolution, and the second is exhibited by Dopdi Mejhen- a proactive worker of Naxalbari, who is tracking down gang-rapes.

After this brutal, violating act, endless silent suffering, and dark, haunted nights, she emerges daringly, heroic tribal tigress, resisting her naked and bleeding exploitation and becoming the emblem of Draupadi Mahabharata. Although this tale is about the enslavement and ill-treatment of tribal, it chiefly emphasizes the maltreatment of women through the infringe of their bodies, especially this tribal second sex repaying the price of their raising voice against the unjust.

'Your Sex is a terrible Wound', – says Draupadi. (28)²

Though her rape appears at the end of the short story, it becomes the beginning rather than the climax. Alike Mahabharata, the chiraharana episode is not the end of Draupadi's life, but it was the beginning of the mythology that creates history. Unlike other passive rape instances, Devi does not let her heroine Dopdi suffer in silence. Women's breast suggests her tenderness and motherhood; Dopdi uses those breasts and fills them with courage enough to push Senanayak with her mangled breast. Mahasweta Devi gifted voices to those silent, crushed tribes through her writings. She becomes a metaphor of resistance; she is representative of millions of tribes who lives in constant fear and victimization. Their forest home, rights and dignity are snatched away; Devi realistically portrays the humiliation they have to face due to their language.

IV. CONCLUSION

Thus, it conveys awareness that the free and independent India has to go a long way in fetching fairness to those entire ethnic groups who are sidelined. The tribal protagonists of Devi 'Dopadi' and 'Doulati' vibrantly strike a harmony with B. S. Mardhekar's poetry on conquered female sexuality from his magnum opus '*Kahi Kavita*' for which he was charged with obscenity and taken to court.

*'What a degradation of womanhood,
What a parody of human good!
She makes a hollow pleasure of sexual pain,
A sex complex, a surreptitious, Parade!'* (18)³

Dopdi fights against marginality while Doulati dies inside this marginality. Mythological Draupadi's name has been modified in a tribal avatar and becomes 'Dopdi'; she denies being an object of male desire while Doulati dies with the stigma of becoming the puppet of male chauvinism. The journey from mythological Draupadi to present Dopdi and Doulati portrays the women's position in Indian society that has not changed that much than in the past. All these characters are disrobed at a different level. The only similarity among them is their femininity. Ancient Draupadi, although being a royal queen, has to undergo such a shameful act, while on the other hand, readers can imagine, if this society

² Devi, Mahasweta. Breast Stories. Tr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Calcutta; seagull Books, 2010. P. pg.28

³ Engblom, Philip. "Woman and Goddess in the poetry of P.S. Rege" *Images of Women in Maharashtrian Literature and religion*. Ed. Anne Feldhaus. Albany: U of New York. P. Print. 18

could not spare a royal queen, how can tribal-like Dopdi and Doulati expect to be spared being an ethnic group? They are merely a toy in a male-dominated structure. They are abused and mentally harassed. Being uneducated and under privilege, these dark-skinned foresters are just an object that can be sketched on painting sheets or magazine covers, but justice, identity, rights cannot be served to them. Tribal women are prone to sexual harassment even in the present scenario by the upper class and their community. In urban areas, where they seek to work, they are labelled as a sex symbol, black beauty, glossy skinned whose femininity could be used in any possible way. They are the entity of mockery and ridicule.

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