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**Subaltern Body: Politics and Poetics of Agency in Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" (1978)**

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**Abstract**

Mahasweta Devi (1926–2016) employs mythical figure Draupadi from the Mahabharata as the voice of Naxalites of Bengal in her short fiction "Draupadi" (1978) which sits in the nexus of Bengal's societal transformation in the 1970s, hoping to end caste-based discrimination and economic exploitation in her society. This study examines the resistance of Santhal tribal women in India's historical Naxalite insurgency to retain their dignity and identity, establishing their own agency and solidarity through "Draupadi" (1978). Furthermore, it examines the text through the lens of agency in relation to the subaltern body as a site of resistance, drawing upon Michael Garnett, Gramsci, and Spivak. Devi's protagonist Dopdi, a Naxalite activist, is chased and raped in an attempt to suppress insurgent organizations, resulting in the loss of their land and identity. But the so-called 'subaltern' ultimately resists and 'speaks' when pushed to the ultimate margin. Finally, Dopdi emerges as empowered who displays an unusual form of resistance. The transformation of the protagonist from powerlessness to empowered quest of agency, emerging as site of resistance dismantles the social hierarchies and oppressive ideologies figuratively and literally. Using Draupadi as a prism, the author analyzes her society and offers a perceptive assessment of its current situation; and speaks symbolically through her literary imaginings. Devi's politically conscious persona, Draupadi, opposes power and seeks to rethink and rewrite the historical and geopolitical circumstances through the lenses of agency and inner freedom of a subaltern body and sexuality as the locus of resistance.

**Keywords:** Subaltern, naxalite movement, identity, resistance, genderization, agency

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## **Introduction**

This study examines Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" (1978) through the prism of agency in relation to the subaltern body as a locus of resistance by analyzing how this re-presentation of "coming to agency" takes subaltern body as a site of resistance that dismantles all kinds of hierarchies. Devi's subaltern body speaks literally and symbolically against the injustice and anarchy, offering a new insight for the new generation to follow. Devi's revisionist feminist tale "Draupadi" depicts the experiences of a marginalized woman within the background of the Indian Naxalite movement's historical turning point. Dopdi, an active worker of the Naxalite movement is hunted down and raped in a bid to conquer rebellious groups. "Draupadi," shows resistance in two different ways: first, through tribal uprisings, and second, through Dopdi, a Naxalbari activist who is pursued and raped in an effort to subdue insurgent organizations. Devi's protagonist, situated at the point of breakdown between myth and its real-life context finds that one can secure agency through extreme, terrifying measures. The tribal have lost their land and identity. The rape, humiliation and degradation of the margins into a mere non entity eventually turn into a resistance. The so called 'subaltern' woman ultimately resists and speaks when pushed to the ultimate margin. As an agent and site of resistance, the protagonist's journey from a vain state of helplessness to an empowered quest for agency destroys the repressive ideas against the subaltern, speaks figuratively, and alters the current social order.

Spivak's assertion denies the gendered subaltern's ability to represent her and achieve voice and agency. Her contention that "the subaltern as female cannot be heard or read" also averts Devi's particular concern for women and their issues make the text a site of resistance. A subaltern body goes through active transformation, regains its autonomous self and defies the existing discourses about it. Newly awakened agency, a capacity to act and react autonomously resists against the oppression. Devi's story "Draupadi" emphasizes the miseries of urban women in a capitalistic society in which a woman has been reduced to commodity in the wake of consumerist culture. The paper examines how this re-presentation of "coming to agency" uses the subaltern body as a site of resistance that speaks both literally and symbolically, to subvert dominance and discrimination, dismantling all kinds of hierarchies. The analysis of Devi's writings makes us feel that the situation of the oppressed and violence meted out to women throughout India remains the same. "Draupadi", a rare document of violence and resistance by a poor, illiterate tribal woman who, in her ultimate denial to clothe herself, not only exposes the ugly and horrifying face of political repressive forces including government, bureaucrats, feudal masters and the state sponsored delinquents, but also challenges the might of post-colonial state embodied in the figure of Senanayak.

## **Methods and Materials**

Various critics have interpreted Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" to talk about the subaltern, myth, and gender. The critics have pointed to the problems of protest and resistance in Bengal's historical shifts during the 1970s. This study has used the theoretical insights of Garnet, Spivak and Gramsci on subaltern body and agency.

This research tries to evaluate the text via the lens of agency in connection to the subaltern body as a place of resistance, drawing on Michael Garnett, Gramsci and Spivak. Analyzing the anguish, trauma, and awakening of agency experienced by the protagonist, which leads to a stage of resistance in the narrative, adds to the intellectual discussions in contemporary tales from several theoretical vantage points. The internal and environmental causes of waking the 'self' described by Garnett's agency apply to Devi's subaltern characters as well. People who are subjugated on several different levels are referred to as "subalterns." In terms of class, caste, gender, religion, and culture, they are ostracized. Additionally, members of inferior social and political classes such as the illiterate peasantry and less affluent cultural groups are viewed as subalterns. They are not canonical, underrepresented, and poorly taught. In general, subaltern people are oppressed populations that are always directly or indirectly ruled by elite class ideas.

Mahashweta Devi has received numerous critical appraisals on her literary technique and texts. The period of socio-political transition gives rise to the people like Draupadi in Devi's short fictions. Mahato (2021) claims the narrative uses "the rhetoric of nationalism and politics within it" in a number of different ways. Across time and geopolitical areas, Draupadi becomes the main subject of theater productions, highlighting urgent issues like violence against women and marginalization (p. 54). She opines that the narrative documents the political transformation of Bengal during the 1970s. She looks at Mahasweta Devi's main character as a political figure who aspires to social change. In a similar vein, Basak (2020) has examined the book in light of the Mundas' struggle and the historical background of the Bengali Naxalite movement. He acclaims:

Still from a distance of many centuries Draupadi remains powerful enough to make her presence felt and force Dopdi to grow under her spell. She is too potent, too canonical to grant a minimal space to Dopdi. So Dopdi has to scrape the 'public memory' hard, not alone Vyasa's text, to make room for herself. (p. 332)

In a novel way, Draupadi's disrobing is used to draw attention to the state's crimes against the battling Mundas.

Likewise, Komal Prasad Phuyal (2024) talks about the atrocities the West Bengal and its people have been living through. He admits that one of the most notable windows into cultures during periods of historical change in South Asian literature is the tale of Draupadi. The tale and its hero have frequently been adopted by creative writers to express

political opinions about society (2024, p. 171). He further asserts that Mahasweta Devi's 1978 work "Draupadi" subverts the middle-class values of honor and shame, thus appropriating the character and story. Devi's shift to the left enables her to inspire Adivasi youth to take charge of their own lives and prepare for sacrifice on behalf of their nation. (2024, p. 172)

Devi develops the civil society's claims to openness, fairness, and equity as well as the debates over social reality that take place in the shadows of double polarization. Devi's "Draupadi" (1978), shows how a marginalized tribal lady fights against her marginalization by drawing strength from her body and her feminine core. According to Sachin Upkar (2016), women's bodies serve as a violent, counter-canonical, anti-literary, and contradictory means of denouncing patriarchy and hegemony (p. 31). Upkar explicates that "Draupadi" represents "hegemonic masculinity," "female liberation," "double colonialism," "societal power relations," "center-periphery articulation," "master-slave dialectics," and "gender-bender dynamics" (p.31). In "Draupadi," the line between heterosexuality and gender-violence blurs, and the amorous object becomes an instrument of torture and retaliation. These contextual elements are responsible for the quantity of women's politicization and the quality of women's political life.

Devi's "Draupadi" (1978) is based on the negative effects of realpolitik and human suffering. Her female protagonists also provide as a platform for exploring the variety of alternatives open to women. The "choice" of this subject, according to Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (1993), can only be the result of a "heavily compromised consensual contract between the individual and the social institutions in which she is involved [...] in the case of the subaltern subject the access to choice is itself an unusual event" (p.162). The Naxalite movement has several facets, links that are mutually inclusive between class and nationalism, class and patriarchy, and patriarchy and nationalism, and female figures have very little to no potential for political engagement.

This story hardly hits a comment on the grim situation of the tribal and marginalized in the face of democracy. Devi's wrath falls on the perpetrators of injustice for the poor which has reduced the world to a hunting ground. The poor and the subaltern who are the real owner of natural resources as well as their products are denied even a human existence. The condition of women in the present patriarchal society remains the same irrespective of time and place. In this regard Jyothi and Katyayani (1998) explicate:

A woman has always been subjected to hardship and a lower position due to male chauvinism and economic dominance. Once the author decides to focus on the fundamental problems afflicting society, he transcends time and geography and becomes global. Devi is therefore equally important to us and to the downtrodden women of West Bengal. (1998, p.132)

Drawing on subaltern women's experiences she reconstructs them to reflect on the politics of subalterization, genderization and marginalization. She refuses to use the public distinction in unproblematic way; she rather incorporates the political issues of gender and sexuality while narrating her woman-centric ideas. Dopdi becomes a metaphor of resistance. She serves as a symbol for the millions of indigenous women who are resisting injustice and have the guts to stand up to imperialism and patriarchy.

Jhanjhanodia & Mishra (2016) observes the narrative as the restoration of women's voice through Draupadi's struggle in the contemporary world. As they have determined:

Mahasweta Devi blends mythological context in her story to trace the lost voice of Draupadi. She further establishes Foucault's post-structuralist connotation that it's only through the discourse of power that the exploitation of Marginalized people happens. Relying upon these theoretical frameworks, we can say that Mahasweta Devi wants modern Draupadis to step forward to defend themselves. (2016, p. 45)

While analyzing Devi's "Draupadi" from the viewpoints of gender and tribal people, the problems of exclusion have received particular attention. Devi has critiqued the constraints of the power system in the modern world by fusing gender and tribal characteristics into a single character, Draupadi.

The tribal woman is marginalized in more than one way as she lives in a constant fear of victimization. Male chauvinism and economic hegemony have always subjected a woman to suffering and inferior status. Despite this a courageous woman Dopdi dares to resist and cope up with the predicament for the sake of tribal and female solidarity. Devi's particular concern for women and their issues make her texts great areas of feminist research. Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha (1993) commented on Devi's diversified literature and noted that caste and class oppression are linked to women's captivity. But in the greatest of her work, she investigates the articulation of class, caste, and gender in the particular situations she describes rather beautifully and with resonance (p. 235). Devi does not romanticize the tribal woman rather her writings realistically shake each reader out of his slumber and ask for renewed understanding with regard to tribal identity and their rights. Devi successfully portrays the problems of ethnic groups that whatever be the region- rural or urban, the plight of woman remains the same.

Through a critical analysis of Devi's "Draupadi," Pandey and Murmu (2021) bring up the subject of caste and untouchability in Bengal. Critics have concentrated on the text's change from Dopdi to Draupadi as she develops into a complete rebel capable of upending the state's central authority. According to what they have written,

Draupadi Meihen's body, which had become the easy target of the corrupt men, finally emerges as her weapon which gives her immense strength and courage to laugh at the masculinity of the officers. She knows that no more harm can be caused to her

because the extreme form of punishment she could have received for being a Dalit woman and a rebel has already been implemented on her – rape. Having been easily stripped off her clothes, she has nothing else to be afraid of. (2021, p. 79)

By opposing the power of both cultural and legal authorities, the rebel girl questions the foundation of society. The police use violence to discipline her despite the fact that she is from an untouchable caste. The conflict between the governmental system and the socially marginalized groups is made clear by Draupadi's disobedience of state authority.

## **Departure**

Devi's "Draupadi" (1978) is largely interpreted by the critical scholarship that currently exists as a text that addresses a voice against prejudice and injustice. Several critics have also examined caste, class, gender, regionalism, and other forms of prejudice in Bengal to reveal the ways in which governmental authorities torture Draupadi. Critical scholarship up to this point has failed to confront the shift of the subaltern body, which seeks to rethink the historical and geopolitical circumstances through the lenses of agency and inner freedom. Devi uses the mythological character of Draupadi as Dopdi to explore the changing surroundings of their civilization. Devi's politically conscious persona, Draupadi, opposes power and seeks to rewrite it by bloody struggle. A vulnerable subaltern body dismantles the social hierarchies literally and figuratively.

Despite the fact that this research heavily draws on ideas from the body and resistance movement, it does not provide a thorough analysis of the theory. Instead, it focuses on the influence of subjugation as a key factor in cultural transformation and the necessity of resistance for self-discovery. The study's main goal is to show how an altered self with awakened agency might act as a site of resistance. Through physiological change and the learning of the ability to resist, the body affirms its self-worth and identity.

Gramsci, an Italian Marxist, coined the term "subaltern" in 1890. The passage was included in Gramsci's best-known book, *Prison Notebooks*, later that year in 1935. When the Italian state underwent a historic transformation in the 1870s, Gramsci (1992) introduced the term "subaltern" to refer to the members of society who were left out of the process. Subalterns are therefore characterized by variety and are not a genuine class in and of them. The subaltern classes, in the words of Gramsci, "basically refer to any 'low rank' individual or group in a particular society" (p. 66). A ruling class's hegemonic dominance causes subalterns to suffer. They are denied the fundamental right to take part in creating their local history and culture due to the elite's hegemonic dominance.

Similarly, Spivak (1994) explores the history of oppressed women and expands on how the term "subaltern" was first defined. In India, women are marginalized more than men. The subaltern, as Spivak contends, "have no history, are mute, and are even more

thoroughly shrouded in shadow because they are female" (p. 13). Spivak addresses the issue of subalternity by considering the gender issues, particularly those faced by Indian women during colonial times. Based on her examination of Sati traditions under British colonial control, she gives light on the condition of Indian women.

According to Spivak, the subaltern's spokesman acts as both their master and source of life. "The little peasants' proprietors cannot represent themselves, they must be represented," she claims (p.71). Spivak's fight to give the working class a voice is against intellectual elites who only share their understanding of the subaltern voice from an elitist perspective. Subalterns are positioned as passive subjects rather than active participants in a conversation. Spivak urges the academicians to investigate how intellectual attitudes affect their ability to accurately represent the underprivileged. She makes it abundantly evident that the subaltern is speechless. The prejudice of the elite intellectuals invariably affects the underclass.

Likewise, the theorist of agency Michael Garnett has underscored the human constraints, fear and phobias as barriers to the arousal of agency. Agency is a capacity of a person to act or resist against any sort of injustice or discrimination. Without agency, resistance is not possible. Garnett connects inner freedom and agency to enlightenment, which involves overcoming limitations. Agency is the ability to behave in a certain setting where tension exists while simultaneously causing it. Furthermore, agency is not an individual endeavor but rather a result of historical dynamics and communal dynamics. "Losses of inner freedom are not explicable in terms of failures of deep agency, that is, in terms of motivation by alien needs," explains Garnett (p.3). Agency and inner freedom go hand in hand. A profound or authentic agency is what one seeks when seeking inner freedom. In order to develop agency, one must get over their fears and other internal and external limitations. People are unfree due to both internal and external factors, where inner freedom leads to enlightenment.

In his book *Agency and Inner Freedom*, Michael Garnett (2011), concentrates on the premise that "waking of agency is not possible without self-sacrifice. An awakened agency is one that attacks the frail social systems (p.6). In her stories, Devi explores the relationship between the ego and society. She demonstrates how dominant groups in society have disregarded the needs of marginalized groups. Garnett also emphasizes a person's "secret self" and "public self." Garnett asserts that "those in power govern the public selves of marginal or subaltern persons" (p.8). The tribe of Devi has historically been at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale. They are excluded from mainstream societal values, conduct, and recognition and lack their own public space.

When people are liberated from both internal and external forces, their sense of agency awakens. Some people suffer from particular phobias, some have highly illogical drives, some are blinded by prejudice and superstition, and yet others have ideological

qualities that restrict their freedom. Being independent or autonomous demands inner freedom, which is not an easy undertaking. "The idea that interior states can impair freedom in basically the same way as outward obstacles might, namely by prohibiting the agent from doing what one would otherwise be able to accomplish," claims Garnett (p.4). Agency is impossible due to a lack of internal freedom, independence, and self-governance. Agency is not feasible when someone is not self-sufficient. Finding inner independence and autonomy is challenging. Everyone is physically and mentally constrained, albeit to varying degrees. Garnett proposes two paths for an active agent to take: create opportunities for self-governance and freedom, i.e., the theory of freedom; and the theory of agency, with an emphasis on creating identification and authorship among enormous barriers (3-4). Agents are constantly subject to internal and external restrictions, and the deep agency model resists both of these influences.

For a long time, the subaltern in Indian society has questioned and rejected discriminations. They fight against numerous forms of discrimination on a constant basis. Without agency, according to Miguen Tamen (2012), resistance is impossible. There are two types of resistance, he claims: overt and covert, that can be used to weaken social structures (p.12). While overt resistance is obvious, covert resistance is veiled since it is not publicly shown. Subalterns can use both overt and covert opposition as strategies for social change. In India, subalterns have largely engaged in both overt and covert opposition. Dopdi, Ajit, and other rebels retaliate forcefully against the injustice committed by wealthy groups. Some subalterns have created their own worlds in which they live happy lives. They don't adhere to elites or fight against injustice. They dismantle the discriminations subtly rather than attacking them outright.

Dopdi, the main character of Devi, has a distinct 'self' construction that is essential to the emergence of agency. Additionally, it sheds light on the connection between literature and resistance to demonstrate how the body may serve as a political arena for the empowerment of those who are marginalized. This emergence of agency occurs here among the dominated ones due to both internal and external factors while going through transformation.

### **Results and Discussion**

In an era of historical transition, Devi uses *Draupadi* to find critical sensitivity. Devi has discovered a voice for change in Dopdi, an ideologically transformed person who aids in analyzing the current state of affairs. The socio-political change Bengal was going through at the time is reflected in the Adivasi movement's rebellion in the 1970s. In this regard, Devi chooses *Draupadi* in her short story "Draupadi" (1978) from the *Mahabharata* as a tribal rebel who plays a crucial role in her pursuit of justice.

Devi's 1978 short story "Draupadi" highlights the class differences that allowed

the central government to gain widespread support from the middle classes and elites by highlighting Dopdi's working-class status and exploiting this vulnerability to allow the middle-class "gentleman" Senanayak to take advantage of her. When examining the main aspects of the Naxalite war, the antagonistic class relationship between revolutionary and captor is demonstrated. At the intersection of myth and its "real-life" setting, Devi's protagonist learns that even in fictional stories, achieving agency necessitates going to great, "terrifying," lengths. The story's protagonist, Dopdi/Draupadi, is raped frequently, illustrating how political developments influence "female" experience and influence negotiations. Devi challenges the Senanayak's power by forcing her protagonist to reject everything:

She looks around and chooses the front of Senanayak's white bush shirt to spit a bloody gob at and says, There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed. I will not let you put my clothes on me. What more can you do? Come, *encounter* me –come on, *encounter* me—? (1978, p. 402)

Draupadi acknowledges that she has nothing left to lose by defying Bengal's rule, which is modeled after that of the colonial overlords. Her indigenous challenges immediately struck at the heart of the aristocratic establishment, shattering it to pieces. Draupadi shakes with an indomitable laughter that Senanayak simply cannot understand. Devi does not let her protagonist "Draupadi" to suffer in quiet, in contrast to other passive rape victims. In spite of being injured and nude, Draupadi faces her rapists head-on and outwits them, refusing to let them sexually abuse her body. Devi provides voice to the voiceless; her literary work aims to awaken citizens' consciences by getting them to recognize, categorize, and consider things that go unseen and unheard to the unaided eye and ear. By asking Senanayak, "Are you a man?" and "There isn't a man of whom I should be ashamed," the subaltern woman is empowered rather than destroyed, and in doing so, she not only challenges Senanayak but also puts the masculinity of bourgeois nationalism in jeopardy.

Devi's commitment to politics implies that the limits of aesthetic acceptability must be crossed in order to address political issues. She contends that cultural efforts and practices shouldn't be constrained by what is typically considered to be "art." Regarding the historical interregnum, Devi (1978) explicates:

The Naxalite movement between the late sixties and early seventies, with its urban phase climaxing in 1970-71, was the first major event after I had become a writer that I felt an urge and an obligation to document. [...] A responsible writer, standing at a turning point in history, has to take a stand in defense of the exploited. Otherwise, history would never forgive him. (Devi, quoted in Silva 54)

The Naxalite movement is multifaceted, with linkages between class and nationalism, class and patriarchy, and patriarchy and nationalism that are mutually inclusive, and

the female figures have little to no opportunity for political action.

The subaltern woman can be re-presented and portrayed as an “agent” particularly at certain specific historical junctures. The depiction of the gendered subaltern as an empty space, an inaccessible blankness, and agency less is problematic on several counts. As Bart Moore Gilbert (1997) asserts, “the more the subaltern is seen as wholly other, the more Spivak seems to construct the subaltern’s identity neither relationally nor differentially, but in essentialist terms” (p.102). The failure of the Subaltern Studies Scholars to analyze the subaltern in connection to the other social groups surrounding them—for which she criticized them—is ironically replicated through this image. Further, Spivak’s presentation of the gendered subaltern creates a complete victim and in turn makes the oppressor an all-powerful force. A conception of the subaltern woman as “an empty space, an inaccessible blankness,” also implies a notion of identity as fixed and unchangeable. Devi’s “Draupadi” captures the experiences of a subaltern woman within the context of the Naxalite rebellion where the protagonist Dopdi, is involved in the social movement. She is presented as a strong woman from the outset, it is at the very moment that she should become the “silenced victim” as per the traditional schema but she instead emerges as an agent.

The word “agent” has association with notions of free will and of exerting power and authority. Dopdi’s role in the resistance movement however reveals that her contribution is crucial to the success of the movement, she struggles to exert power and authority rather it is Arijit’s voice that acts as a guide and dictates her actions throughout the sequence where she deliberately leads the policeman astray. Dopdi proves herself to be of vital importance to the movement. It is Dopdi who goes in to the village in search of food and to spy on the activities of the police (p.191). For instance, “Dopdi has seen the new camp, she has sat in the bus station and whiled away the time, smoked a ‘bidi,’ and found out how many radio vans and police convoys had come...” (p.194). She mentally prepares herself for the confrontation with the policemen who follow her; she keeps recalling the instructions she has received from Arijit and the other gentlemen.

According to Senanayak and the *Army Handbook*, the insurgents’ only connection to Dopdi and her fellow tribal members is what has made them a force to be reckoned with. This is amply illustrated when the superior fighting power of Dopdi and Dulna is analyzed as follows:

[...] Guerrilla warfare using primitive weaponry is the most abhorrent and revolting method of combat. [...] Dopdi and Dulna fall under this type of combatants because they also kill with a hatchet and scythe or a bow and arrow, and their fighting prowess exceeds that of the gentlemen. Not all gentlemen become experts in the explosion of “chambers”; they believe that if the pistol is held still, the power will release on its own. However, because Dulna and Dopdi lack literacy, their race has

repeatedly trained using weapons. (p.188)

Women's participation in militant groups is analyzed and judged not according to their value or importance for women, but according to their use for the movement in question devalues the complex issues surrounding the female combatant. Devi does not limit herself to such a representation of the subaltern woman's role in the resistance movement, as a result subaltern woman has emerged as an agent. Thus, within this context, Dopdi as a strong, resilient female character, breaches the gender and cultural norms of her society and appears to be an agent.

Spivak (1994) admits "Draupadi", superficially reflects a familiar tale from the most revered Hindu epic, Mahabharata. Draupadi in the epic, the most celebrated heroine married to the five sons of Pandu, provides an example of polyandry, not a common system of marriage in India (xiii). Mythical Draupadi resists against the commodification of gendered body after the act of *vastraharan* in quest of agency which ultimately leads to a devastating battle.

The story of Dopdi has backdrop of the Naxalbari movement of Bengal, which started as a rural revolt of landless workers and tribal people against landlords and money lenders. A primitive or tribal woman's suffering is much worse than an aristocratic woman's. The worst kind of sexual aggression against women is rape. Giving all the vital information about the famous criminal Dopdi right at the beginning of the story, Devi (1978) states:

NAME DOPDI MEJHEN, age 27, husband Dulna Majhi [deceased], domicile Cherakhan, Bankraharh, information whether dead or alive and/or assistance in arrest, one hundred rupees. (p.19)

Dopdi, a tribal member of Devi, struggles for water, food, and survival. The author uses words to depict the tribal people's situation. She illustrates how complete helplessness might ultimately spark rebellion or even resistance. The most important question that this text poses is not only why Dopdi is raped, but it also analyses why women fall as an easy prey to be raped. Through this story, the author challenges the 'Comodification' and 'Subsequent victimization' of a woman's body. Dopdi remains unconquered and her defiance is not only an act of militant spontaneity but an infallible challenge to the male-dominated world.

Michael Garnett (2011) concentrates on the premise that "waking of agency is not possible without self-sacrifice. An awakened agency attacks the society's weak structures (p.6). Devi examines all of the political problems in India as well as all of the discriminations that are practiced there. Dopdi, the main character, experiences disillusionment and learns the ability to fight for subaltern freedom in India. She actively took part in the freedom movement and exhibited affection for India's underprivileged.

Dopdi has taught her to sacrifice herself for the cause. Her norms of behavior are controlled by the ancient Santal tribe code, which states that one should never betray one's tribe. As a result, when she is arrested and initially interrogated before being raped and tortured, she chooses a passive resistance strategy. Devi has not presented the rape scene in a voyeuristic mode but from the point of view of the rape victim. Thus, Senanayak departs Dopdi after his fruitless "questioning session," saying, "Make her. Do the Needful" (p.195). The story reenacts Dopdi's consciousness and loss of consciousness, as well as opening and closing of her eyes. As Dopdi loses unconscious, the first rape scenario is not actually shown. Instead of offering their feelings, hers are. A tear seeps from the corner of her eye, embarrassing her. In the muddy moon light, she lowers her lightless eye, sees her breasts, and understands that, indeed, she had been made up right' (p.195). There is however no room for doubt. These impressions highlight the rape's savagery and its harsh truth. The second rape session successfully avoids voyeurism since Dopdi awakens. In the final scene she realizes that the experiences she went through are those uniquely female ones and it is at this point that Dopdi metamorphosizes into a powerful agent.

Two different types of imagery are used to describe the constant torment Draupadi endures. Devi uses animal metaphors and military metaphors to convey the repeated rapes that were followed by the mutilation of her breasts. These metaphors not only dehumanize Dopdi but also highlight the animalistic ethos that permeates the field of warfare. By using this tactic, the story's dominating power dynamics are reversed. The guards are terrified by Dopdi's animalistic behavior and helpless to stop her from tearing her clothes with her teeth. It makes them confront the changes they have done to her. Ironically, animalistic violence committed by men is frequently justified and legitimized, but female animalistic actions are labeled "irrational" since they go against social norms. Devi explicates the plight of Dopdi as:

Draupadi rises. She squirts the liquid onto the ground. She uses her teeth to tear the cloth. The guard believes she has gone insane after observing such bizarre behavior and flees to get help. He can escort the prisoner outside, but if the prisoner acts strangely, he is at a loss on what to do. [...] Draupadi is exposed in front of him (Senanayak). Blood-stained hair on the thighs and the pubis. Two wounds, two breasts. [...] Dopdi Mejhen, the subject of your quest. Don't you want to know how they created me since you requested them to create me? (Devi 196)

The excerpt above builds to the story's climax, which raises issues related to female insurgency and defiance of patriarchal and military oppression. These moments allow for a wide range of readings because they are intended to represent rebellion and transgression while undermining the foundations of military and patriarchal dictatorships. Does this highlight the constrictive nature of lonely revolt? Is Dopdi's triumph just a plot

device, a singular unwillingness to submit to the author's torment of her character, rather than anything reproducible or applicable to a group of people?

Dopdi regains her own strength without the voice of male authority where she thinks of Kali. In the last sequence of events she realizes that responding to these experiences re-inscribes her identity, an identity that she has retained, as a loyal and loving wife like the mythical Draupadi and a pureblooded Santhal, even during her time in the forest when there was a transgression of gender and social codes. Dopdi's refusal to wash herself and erase the signs of the night's brutality, and her refusal to allow the policemen to clothe her embodies her vigor of resistance. What purpose do garments serve? She asks them. You can take my clothes off, but how will you dress me again? Are you a man? [...] There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed" (p.196). Here she challenges their masculinity. This symbolizes a reworking of the scene of humiliation in the *Mahabharata* where the mythical Draupadi was "saved" from the humiliating experience of being stripped, through divine intervention.

In Devi's history of the subaltern, which emerges as a dialogue against the oppressively hegemonic Itihas Puranic history of India, Sharma (2017) acknowledges that "myth as an essential source and vehicle of hegemonic control serves to contain and condition the responses of the marginalized "other"" (p.5). Senanayak fails to predict her moves for the first time despite having extensive theoretical knowledge of the tribal people, including how information is stored in their brains. This is essential for Dopdi's development as an agent. The refusal to share the information also involves the articulation of an alternative identity. Only in name, Devi's contemporary Draupadi resembles her namesake, who was raped and left bleeding between her legs. In selecting the Draupadi myth as a model for the subaltern woman, Devi calls attention to the politics of transformation of body through agency and inner freedom to dismantle hierarchies.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

This study sheds light on the plight of marginalized members of the Naxalite movement in West Bengal, India, and explores how their consciousness empowers them to fight back against and overcome all forms of prejudice that are pervasive in society. This study demonstrates how the ruling class in India continues to exert control over the public personas of the underclass. They have given some thought to their sense of autonomy. People that are ostracized have worked extremely hard to obtain both internal and exterior independence in order to become autonomous. However, they are still subject to internal and external pressures. They haven't acquired deep agency as a result. Marginalized individuals should not be constrained by internal or external factors in order to fully exercise their agency, end injustices, and build connections. For them, subaltern consciousness serves as a source of agency. When people are aware of their social subordination, they

might use overt and covert resistance to weaken the social institutions. While overt resistance is obvious, covert resistance is veiled since it is not publicly shown. The subaltern uses both overt and covert resistance as means for social change. Without the subaltern's interpretation, resistance is impossible. Subalterns start to resist when they understand their status. Even the act of interpretation is political. Without agency, neither resistance nor interpretation is conceivable. Every interpretation is a form of resistance, and every form of resistance is an interpretation. Resistance aids the underprivileged in deconstructing their subordination and develops their autonomous self in the society.

By using the feminine body and sexuality as the site of resistance, the mythological character Draupadi is recreated as Dopdi in order to create a counter-narrative. The idea that the subaltern cannot speak is dismantled by the protagonist's transition from an empty state of helplessness to an empowered quest for agency and an appearance as a location of resistance. The mythological figures of Draupadi and Dopdi both challenge gender norms, raise the question of whether women can be commodified, and serve as sites of resistance. Dopdi defies the conventional notion that she should become the "silenced victim" and instead emerges as an agent after discovering and changing herself into a strong woman early on. By dramatically re-articulating her identity at the end of the story, she transforms into an agent. A key element in her development as an agent is the appropriation of a strong female identity and a fundamental break from the identity dictated by authority and patriarchy. Her deeds and awakening of agency demonstrate that literary imaginations can depict the subaltern woman as an agent. In her paper "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak asserts that female subalterns cannot be read or heard, yet Devi's "Draupadi" successfully disproves this assertion. In Dopdi, a submissive woman cries out for attention both literally and figuratively.

Devi highlights the politics of body change through agency and inner freedom to demolish hierarchies by using the mythical Draupadi as a model for the subaltern woman. This exposes that "Draupadi" can be an example to set real world activism for the contemporary and future generation where the margins or subalterns can delve into the intersection of battle fronts. The very research work can be expanded to the horizons of body's political rights of transformations where it goes through separation, liminality and communitas inventing a new stable world order. It goes beyond the Feminist or classist studies; rather it can employ all New Historicist assumptions for craving new approaches in the academic researches.

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