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PROTEST OF WOMEN IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S SHORT STORY  
"DRAUPADI" AND "THE HUNT"

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DOI- 10.5281/zenodo.6988429

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**Abstract**

*The study shows the protest of tribal women in the short stories of "Draupadi" and "The Hunt" by Mahasweta Devi. The superiors and the powerful people of the upper class society contrive to exploit a particular group of people in almost every possible way – economically, socially, politically and religiously. Draupadi and Mary are the two tribal women who protest against injustice. Draupadi, her husband Dulna with the others punishes corrupt Surja Sahu who has refused to provide any water to the villagers without any cost. Though, inside his house, government tubewells and wells have enough water. Later on Draupadi is arrested and thorough out the dark night, she have been multiple times brutally raped. Her vagina bleeds, nipples torn and breasts are mutilated. But those beasts cannot win over Draupadi's indomitable, never surrendering spirit. Still, naked blood drenched Draupadi stands fearlessly and threatens the force commander. She compels him to walk back with fear. "The Hunt", is another story of protest of an eighteen years tribal girl. Her life has been changed when the lecherous man like Tehsilder Singh arrived in the forest. Mary tries her best to protect her from the grab of cunning Tehsilder Sing. Later on, she killed that lecherous man to save her womanhood. In both the cases women have not compromises with the injustice or accept sexual exploitation silently as her destiny. They become vocal and bravely fight for right without any fear. Here, Mahasweta Devi shows that woman cannot be subdued in respect class, caste, gender, social-political and economic power.*

**Key Words:** Protest, women, Draupadi, rape, injustice, Sexual exploitation.

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**Objective of the Study:**

To study the protest of two tribal women Draupadi and Mary, the two women characters in the short stories of Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" and "The Hunt". How the two tribal women become vocal against injustice and exploitation. And above all, no power can subdue their self reliant women spirit.

**Methodology:**

Two Short stories "Darupadi" and "The Hunt" are taken as primary sources. Various articles on Mahasweta Devi's short stories and Dalit literature are taken as secondary sources of the study. Analytical method would be adopted to study the protest of two tribal women against injustice.

**Introduction:**

Mahasweta Devi's short story "Draupadi" and "the Hunt" are the stories of protest of tribal girls, Draupadi and Oran girl Mary. Mahasweta Devi depicts women characters very strong. Draupadi and Mary both seem to resembling with the strong Saal tree. The struggle of the down trodden tribal people won't be an important matter in so called contemporary civilized world. Here, protest equals to identity of the Tribal. The chronicle of protest against injustice would significantly proclaiming existence. Satpal singh explain: Protest is an act of disapproval, of disagreement with something or somebody. It is an expression of dissent and non-acceptance of the conventional. It is a voice of conscience and manifests itself in numerous ways, particularly in crusades

against wrong and in equities mankind is afflicted with. Protest is a craving for change, a desire to build up new, equitable and just socio-political order. (Singh: 47)

#### **Protest of Draupadi:**

In the short story “Draupadi”, Draupadi is the protagonist. Draupadi and her husband Dulna Majhi both are fugitives and resident of Cherakhan, Bankrajharh.; “Name Dopdi Mejhen, age 27, husband Dulna Majhi(deceased), domicile Cherakhan, Bankrajharh, information whether dead or alive and/or assistance in arrest, one hundred rupees....” (Spivak: 16) They are in the wanted list of the Government. Mahasweta Devi portrays the character of Dopdi as a symbol of protest. The author uses the mythical name of Draupadi from the great epic *Mahabharata*.

The writer wants to show that since the age of *Mahabharata*, the status of women have not been changed in the course of time. Draupadi of the *Mahabharata* has five husbands. In the game of dice her eldest husband has lost her with his all assets. In front of the king and her five husbands, Draupadi has been molested as well as stripped by the Kauravas. In *Mahabharata*, Lord Krishna appears as a protector to save Draupadi’s honour but there is no magical appearance of divine like protector in Mahasweta Devi’s Dopdi. The suffering of Mythical Draupadi is entirely a patriarchal conspiracy. Vandana Gupta remarks:

Dopdi, in her story “Draupadi,” is a revised and demythicised incarnation of the epical Daupadi, who belongs to the Snathal trib. In her reincarnatin, she is placed within contemporary historical contexts where her ancestry is traced to Champabhumi of Bengal and her present status is described to be that of an activist in the naxalite movement of the seventies.(Gupta: 69) Dopdi Mejehen belongs to the tribal community. Woman like Draupadi, always wants to live ordinary easy life. Her needs are limited “if she had some kerosene, She’d rub it into her scalp and get rid of her lice. Then she could wash her hair with baking soda.” (Spivak: 24) At that time, Birbhum district was under the clutches of draught.

People became helpless due to the scarcity of drinking water. All the water sources had been dried up. Crops and domestic animals were dying without water. Corrupt rich business man Surja Sahu only could manage water. “Surja Sahu arranged with Bididi-babu to dig two tubewells and three wells within the compound of his two houses. No water anywhere, drought in Birbhum. Unlimited water at Surja Sahu’s house, as clear as a crow’s eye” (Spivak: 26) Villagers requested Surja Sahu to share water. In reply, Sahu denied. “Get your water with Canal tax, everything is burning. What’s my profit in increasing cultivation with tax money? Everything’s on fire. Get out of here. I don’t accept your Panchayat nonsense. Increase Cultivation with water.” (Spivak: 26) Denial of water to the poor villagers fixed his death. Dopdi and her husband Dulna murdered Surja Sahu with the other member of the protesters.

As result of consequences “*Operation Bakuli in Bakuli*” (Spivak: 26) took place. Many poor tribal people were shot dead by the Government force in open fire. Thereafter, Dulna was brutally murdered by the Government force. Draupadi also knows her final destiny. Though, she tries her best to protect herself as well as help the other protesters who hide in the forest. By the treachery of some villagers, she is caught by the forces and taken to the custody. By the order of the commanding officer, she is being gang raped by the soldiers throughout the night:

Then a billion moons pass. A billion lunar years. ... Draupadi, strangely enough, sees sky and moon. Slowly the bloodied nailheads shifts from her brain. Trying to move, she feels her arms and legs still tied to four posts. Something sticky under her ass and waist . Her won blood. ... She senses that her vagina is bleeding. How many came to make her? Shaming her, a tear trickles out of the corner of her eye. In muddy moonlight she lowers her lightless eye, sees her breasts and understands that, indeed, she’s made up right. Her breasts are bitten raw, the nipples torn. How many ? Four-five-six-seven – then Draupadi had passed out. ...

Again the process of making he begins. Goes on . The moon vomits a bit of light and goes to sleep. Only the dark remains. A compelled spread-eagled still body. Active pistons of flesh rise and fall, rise and fall over it. (Spivak: 31-32)

When she is called to face the commanding officer, naked Dopdi with her wounded blood drenched body steps forward towards the officer. She does not feel any need to wear the sari. Why does she will be ashamed of her nakedness? These men in uniform raped her brutally like animal. Naked Dopdi approaches towards the officer and pushes him through her wounded blood drenched breasts. And then so called brave officer cannot stand against her.

He is afraid to stand before an unarmed naked woman. “ draupadi pushes Seanayak with her two mangled breasts, and for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target, terribly afraid.” (Spivak: 33) Here, Dopdi Mejehn is much braver and more vocal than the mythical Draupadi. In myth, Draupadi was the instrument of sexual pleasure and here Draupadi is also a sex object but she overcomes the limitations and gives her fight to the last all alone against brutality and injustice. Throughout the night those animals can't break her courageous determined soul. There is no power which can subdue Draupdi's iron like mind. She is beyond reach.

#### **Protest of Mary:**

Mahesweta Devi's "The Hunt" is another story of protest of a eighteen years Oran girl Mary. The story is all about self respect as woman and protest of a tribal girl. The story of "The Hunt" evolves round the *Kuruda* village, near "the Gomo-Daltonganj line". (Spivak: 1) In the short story, the author shows the impact of the advancement of urbanization. Man and Animal both are being disturbed by the intervention of the railway in the area. People look at the train with great amazement and even the animals like elephants are "run off trumpeting, trunks raised." (Spivak: 1) Prasadji bought the Dixon's bungalow with its adjacent seventy five acre forests

of full grown *Sal*-trees at a very cheap rate. And along with the bungalow he got Mary and Bhikni as bonded labour:

He pays Bhikni a wage. With Mary the agreement is for board and lodging, clothing and sundries. The Dixon bungalow was built as a residence for whites. Bhikni says the whites kept twelve ayahs-servants –sweepers. Under Prasadji Mary alone keeps the huge bungalow clean. (Spivak: 2)

The mother and the daughter both are working day and night at their master's bungalow for food and shelter only. Mary is the illegitimate daughter of the previous Australian land lord Dixon's son and Bhikni, the Oran woman. A clever timber broker, Tehsildar Singh, manages Prasadji, Lalchand and Mulni and purchases the *Sal*-trees of *Khurda* village at very low price. He is not satisfied with the purchasing of only *Sal*-trees but he wants to enjoy Mary's youth. Just he wants to seduce Mary. In the beginning Mary protests against his approaches. "As she moved on she took out a sharp machete and said in a lazy voice, Brokers like you, with tight pants and dark glasses, are ten a rupee on streets of Tohri, and to them I show this machete." (Spivak: 9) She warns him again and again but Tehsildar Singh does not give his ear. As the story proceeds, she realizes that she has no way to save herself from the animal like Tehsildar Singh. At the end huntress Mary hunts down that evil lecherous Tehsildar Singh:

Mary is watching, watching, the face changes and changes into? Now? Yes, becomes and animal. – Now take me? Mary laughed and held him, laid him on the ground. Tehsildar is laughing, Mary lifts the machete, lowers it lifts, lowers. A few million moons pass. Mary stands up. Blood? On her Clothes? (Spivak: 16) Mary escapes to embrace the uncertain life of town, in the dark cover of hunting-night. The author, Mahasweta Devi wonderfully unifies Mary with the forest of *Sal*-trees. The *Sal*-trees planted by the Dixon are not like the local 'dwarf' *Sal*-trees. Trees trunks are so high as if they touch the sky. Here Mary is not like other Oran girls. She is tall like the Dixon's *Sal*-

tree not 'dwarf' like the other Oran women in general. Even her complexion is not dark like them. As the *Sal*-trees are brought to the towns after cutting down the forest, the socio-economic condition of Mary is also compelled her to leave the forest. At any cost, she has not compromised her dignity as woman. Rather, she protests and punishes at the cost of her shelter and livelihood. Mary symbolically functions as mouthpiece for the Oran women. Mahasweta Devi wonderfully proves that woman can go to any extent to protest against injustice or to protect herself from exploitation.

**Conclusion:**

Draupadi and Mary both are the tribal women of the forest who make protest for their rights and dignity. Their self reliance can't be judged in the scale of social, political or economical power of the so called civilized world. Murder of Dulna won't stop Draupadi's movement. She has been always in her course without food or shelter. Draupadi has learnt the lessons of life not in a school rather in the society. It's that corrupt society, where only rich people grows day by day and common poor people won't get even water to drink. When common woman folk like Draupadi steps forward to protest, they labelled her as terrorist. To stop her they raped throughout the night but could not rape her indomitable spirit. Her soul is intact

with Iron determination. Her tigress like approach may compel those cruel authoritative instrumental creatures to slide back with fear. The Oran girl Mary is representing the face of tribal exploitation generation after generation. Sarcastically, She is the product of exploitation. As a bonded labour her mother was not vocal but she has that courage to protest. Her self esteem determines to stop exploitation and punish the exploiter. Mary can escape without punishing Tehsildar Singh but it's the woman's dignity and self respect which can't be compromised. Draupadi and Mary two women's voice cross the horizon of marginal world.

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