

OOZING OUT OF SENSITIVE FEMININE PSYCHE AND OSMOSIS OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINE PSYCHE IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S "DRAUPADI"

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Abstract

*In the creation of God, there is no center and margin and no subordination and domination. Biological differences facilitate man's innate tendency for domination that offers subordinate status to woman in the patriarchal power structure. Gender ideologies and discriminations are the creations and designs of the patriarchal society. This becomes the basis for formation of human psyche. This structured social system, in due course, becomes so biased and oppressive to womanhood. The core of feminine ideology becomes a weapon for degradation and elimination of woman. The oppressive social context demands certain human attributes whether feminine or masculine which are to be absorbed, developed and practised for survival. The survival struggle makes a woman to disannul the programmed cultural construction. Mahasweta Devi's *Dopdi*, the protagonist of her short narrative "Draupadi" deviates from the designed framework and challenges the male power and shatters it to nothing. In the process of struggle against political power, she has absorbed masculine traits. She has shown unimaginable courage to assert herself. She becomes an independent woman turning upside down the imbibed ideologies and constructs her own doctrines.*

Keywords: *Gender ideologies, masculine traits, deconstruction, reconstruction, oozing out, osmosis.*

God created Eve as a companion to Adam, not as a subordinate to him. In the Vedic and the Epic periods, there was no unequal gender society. Women were at the forefront of all religious and social activities. Changes occurred only in the post-Vedic period. Women's freedom was curtailed. In due course, man's innate tendency for domination regulates women based on his demands. Society becomes patriarchal. Patriarchy means 'rule of the father' which has undergone changes. Today, it refers to a social system in which the father is the head. It is a power structure which offers a dominant position to men. Women obey and become submissive.

A cardinal feature of patriarchy is the conceptualization of gender roles. It fixes the gender ideologies and designs the socio-cultural behaviours of men and women that define appropriate socialization. It views men as strong, decisive, rational, courageous, authoritative, violent and protective while women as weak, indecisive, irrational, craven, submissive and soft. It is entirely a social creation and a cultural construction. The conceptualization is based on the sex differences which are biological in nature. Because of this physiological difference, women are at disadvantages and are vulnerable to violence, and other kinds of discriminations and social injustices. Woman, as an individual, is an inessential part of the patriarchal society but as a female, an essential need of the man.

Socialization means internalizing the norms and ideologies of social culture. It involves both learning and teaching. In every social system, there is a dominant hegemonic and idealized form of masculinity that is considered proper to men. For instance, in the Hebrew Bible, David of Israel says, "I go the way of all the earth; be thou strong therefore and show thyself a man" (2.2). The legends, the epics, and the traditionally and socially constructed mythical models mould women as self-sacrificing and self-effacing. In the words of Virginia Woolf, she becomes 'an angel of the house'.

Socialization is strongly associated with the formation of feminine psyche. Women are systematically deprived, controlled, confined, and later suppressed. Deliberately, they are kept unaware of their potentialities and are denied to develop their capacities and competencies which are necessary for autonomy that may be a threat to the dominant position of the male. Social discrimination, social injustice, economic dependence, sexual violation or abuse, consequent insecurity and inculcated ideologies cause women to be bound to home. Gradually body becomes the very medium through which femininity is constructed. Virginity becomes her beauty; her blush becomes her grace. Woman is framed to think that any damage to her virginity, modesty and honour is a great loss, a shame or an internal death. Simone de Beauvoir's argument substantiates this view: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society" (qtd. in Leighton 34).

Mahasweta Devi though calls herself a humanist, shows her special concern for women and their sufferings. Her "Draupadi" accentuates the protagonist Dopdi's sufferings and oppression at two extreme levels--- as subaltern and as feminine gender. In her efforts to restructure the society, she projects Dopdi not as a victim to the social system and cultural construct but as a woman who deconstructs the traditional myth and the conceptualized gender roles and reconstructs them. Finally, she emerges as a masculine gender in courage and even what a man cannot be, she is.

The differentiae of feminine and masculine identity are present in all humans. Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung believed this view. Theorists like Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler suggest that one is not merely masculine and feminine. In specific contexts, people may exhibit both masculinity and femininity to different degrees as decisive moment demands. The oppressive and suffocative context creates a crisis that is to be confronted with; the oppressed protests and violates the established systems. They are forced to divert themselves from the patriarchal designs. Crisis can make a man submissive and a woman courageous. The social perceptions of human traits and the perception of historically significant brave women warriors like Rani Lakshmi Bai, Rani Chennamma substantiate this truth.

This paper analyses how in the struggle of undoing the master-slave distinction and the class differences, Dopdi's inculcated ideologies are oozing out and osmotic action of absorbing masculine ideologies occur. Further, it brings the readers to focus on how in trying situations, when survival becomes a struggle and a question, long continuing oppression becomes so claustrophobic and the oppressed needs to be breathed and the very feminine identity becomes an instrument to subdue and to eliminate her, no one can head off Dopdi cutting and turning over the feminine ideologies. Finally, it concentrates on how Dopdi emerges as an autonomous woman who decides her own identity and behaviour, toppling the cultural construction at the culmination of her political punishment.

Dopdi, as tribals called her, the central character of Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi", is a twenty-seven years old tribal woman. Like all other designed women of the patriarchal society, she loves her husband, and she has a desire for a beautiful family with children. But choking subjugation, struggles for physiological needs, her natural tendency for fighting against social injustices, force her to become a Naxalite revolutionary and a veteran fighter who can challenge the political, the legal and the male power. Extreme oppression, though born as a woman, makes her embody the masculine traits to undo the binary opposition.

Dopdi is introduced to the readers by two medallioned uniforms as the most notorious--- labelled-- -as notorious just because as a Third World woman, she fights--- for her rights and a long--- wanted female. "NAME DOPDI MEJHEN, age 27, her husband Dulna Majhi (deceased), domicile Cherakhan, Bankrajarh, information whether dead or alive and/or assistance in arrest, one hundred rupees. . ." (Devi 19). She is a powerful revolutionary, who can elude the army power by her dexterity. She is a proof for the inability of the army to capture the field hands.

Dopdi and her husband are the chief instigators in murdering Surja Sahu and his son for their denial

of sharing the water in their wells with the tribals when the whole Birbhum is in the draught. In the Operation Bakuli, in 1971, three villages are cordoned off and machine-gunned. Dulna and Dopdi have escaped by faking dead and have gone underground for a long time in *Neanderthal* darkness. This underground couple's skill in concealment and their guerrilla style of fighting with primitive weapons cause so much of anxiety and depression to Captain Arjan Singh who was the architect of Bakuli and again is on the Operation Forest Jharkhani. They strategically work under false names virtually in every landowner and inform the killers. Money lenders, landlords, grain brokers, anonymous brothel keepers, army informants are terrified at the jubilant and dancing couple. This ululating black-skinned couple becomes the cause for Arjan Singh's diabetes. Armed search cannot pierce the darkness of the forest and capture them. Hence the Operation Forest Jharkhani continues its search.

Under the shadow of either premature or forced retirement, Arjan Singh is relieved from the Operation Forest Jharkhani. Presently, the case is on the desk of Mr. Senanayak, Bengali specialist in combat and extreme Left-politics. He respects the opposition only in theory because he firmly believes that they can be neither understood nor demolished if they are treated with attitude. He believes in the power of guns. His theory is "*in order to destroy the enemy, become one*" (Devi 22). He gets rid of the young by means of '*apprehension and elimination*'.

Dulna was eliminated with the help of the army informant Dukhiram Gharari, a traitor to his community. Senanayak decides to follow the hunter's way, not the approved soldier's style that is to use Dulna's body as a bait to draw the prey. But his estimation of tribals as 'brutes' fails him that no one comes to be trapped. The First World Scholar Senanayak's pride in his sagacity and his thirst for credentials to survive with honour make him biased in his view and he fails to observe the plain truth that "the hungry and naked are still defiant and irrepressible" and "those who are working practically will not be terminated so easily" (Devi 26, 27). Spivak's observation gives a clear focus on the attitude of Senanayak:

The entire energy of the story seems, in one reading, directed towards breaking apparently clean gap between theory and practice in Senanayak. Such a clean break is not possible, of course. The theoretical production of negative capability is a practice; the practice of mowing down Naxalites brings with it a theory of historical moment. (Spivak 254)

"Sherwin and McLeod distinguish three kinds of self-trust: trust in one's capacity to choose and decide effectively, trust in one's ability to act on the decisions one makes, and trust in one's own judgment" (qtd. in Mackenzie and Stoljar 26). Both Senanayak and the young revolutionaries trust their selves. They trust in their capacities to decide and act. When the revolutionaries don't want to be captured in open combat, "they have found a trustworthy courier. Ten to one it is Dopdi" (Devi 25). They have identified stratagem and loyalty in Dopdi. "No doubt it is she who is saving fugitives now" (Devi 25). On the contrary, Senanayak regards Dopdi a weaker sex with a weak emotional disposition. His perception of Dopdi is grounded on Shakespeare's view in *Hamlet*, "Frailty thy name is woman!" (1.2.146). He orders to catch Dopdi Mejhena, for he believes that she can easily disclose the hideouts of the fugitives.

So far, the readers have perceived only the reported image of Dopdi. When the readers first see her, she appears with the very feminine attitudes. She picks out and kills the lice in her hair. She wishes for kerosene bath to get rid of lice. But her next thought proves that she becomes the very definition of a warrior. She thinks, "The bastards put traps at every bend of the falls. If they smell *kerosene* in the water, they will follow the scent" (Devi 27).

Courage means a bold inclination to confront death, threat of death, agony, torture, or any pain. The interaction between Dopdi and Mushai Tudu's wife portrays the two different feminine images that enlighten the perception of the readers. This time Government has announced one hundred rupees award on her head and has made a lot of preparation to arrest her. Tudu's wife asks, "Can't you run away?" (Devi 28). Dopdi, unrelenting in her mission, says, "No. Tell me, how many times can I run away? What will they do if they catch me? They will *kounter* me. Let them" (Devi 28). Certainly, her words remind the readers of

Caesar's words in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: "Cowards die many times before their deaths: The valiant never taste of Death but once" (2.2.32-33). Her words concretize that Dopdi has imbibed the hegemonic masculine psyche in her blood. On the other hand, Mushai Tudu's wife's words, "We have nowhere else to go" (Devi 28) paint the craven image of womanhood.

Dopdi is taught what torture is in the police custody. She strengthens her mind by rewinding the strategies to term with tortures. She assures Tudu's wife that she will not tell anyone's name. She thinks, "If mind and body give way under torture, Dopdi will bite off her tongue" (Devi 28-29). As a real warrior, who is always alert, her "spines of suspicion are always furled in her mind. Hearing 'Dopdi', they stiffen like a hedgehog's" (Devi 29). Her flashback reveals the readers that the extreme social repression which dragged her to involve in the rebellious act and to endorse the Naxalite ideologies.

Dulna and Arijit become the catalysts to Dopdi for Osmotic action of imbibing the traits of masculinity, and oozing out the very core of feminine ideologies. She remembers the words of Dulna: "Dear this is best! We won't get family and children this way. But who knows? Landowners and money lenders and policemen might one day be wiped out!" (Devi 31). The very core of femininity that is motherhood is erased from her mind by Dulna. She loves her husband and shows her loyalty to her comrades as an act of faith towards him. Dopdi's commitment to the domestic world is transferred to the political sphere. Designed gender roles are deconstructed and reconstructed by Arijit to bridge together the reading and the doing to restructure the society.

Dopdi keeps walking across villages, fields, bushes, rocks to evade the cops, exhibiting the skill of cunningness. She feels the urgency of great dangers under her ribs. She wants to inform the revolutionaries to change their hideouts, to postpone their plan to do to Lakkhi Bera and Naran Bera and the news of police notice to capture her. The pure unadulterated blood of Chambabhumi gives her strength not to betray her friends. She silently affirms her loyalty: "I swear by my life. By my life Dulna, by my life. Nothing must be told" (Devi 32). Even at the face of danger, she doesn't lose her mental stability or emotional balance. The veteran fighter psychologically prepares herself to face anything. Aggressiveness is one of the qualities of a brave warrior. The warhorse Dopdi is capable of violent thought of erasing the opposition, the mark of male identity. She touches her waist and feels in her palm the comfort of a baby scythe. She is not afraid of death. Instead, the cop is deadly afraid of death. Long continuing exploitation, social injustices, and political atrocities have dragooned the soft feminine gender to undergo significant changes. Mahasweta projects Dopdi ferocious like a tiger. She thinks of running the fucking jackal of a cop out of breath, throwing him in a ditch and finishing him off.

Arijit's voice, like gurgle of water, running in her memory, directs her. She understands a much harsher but easy and clear rule: "Dopdi returns good; doesn't return bad. Change hideout. The clue will be such that the opposition won't understand even if they do" (Devi 33). She remembers that Dulna doesn't lose anyone's life when he dies. She inculcates from what is learned that nothing must be told. No one is to be destroyed for her own sake. Dopdi cannot trick the cop. Shomai and Budhna, half-breeds, have betrayed her. She has lost her hope. She is apprehended. Arijit's voice is heard formulaically. It directs her to the next step: "Just as you must know when you've won, you must also acknowledge defeat and start the activities of the next stage" (Devi 34). She immediately responds to his voice. Spivak observes that "it is his voice that gives Dopdi the courage to save not herself but her comrades" (253). She spreads her arms, raises her face to the sky, turning towards the forest, with her entire force, she ululates thrice. At her third burst, the birds in the outskirts forest trees flap their wings. The echo of the call rather her message travels so far.

Dopdi is completely silent to a long questioning hour. Her determined silence has shattered his baseless belief that she will lead to the others. Her political enemy's deflated ego orders, "Make her. *Do the needful.*" (Devi 35). A billion moons and lunar years have passed. Opening her eyes, Dopdi senses something sticky under her ass and waist, her blood. Her vagina is bleeding. She realizes what has

happened to her. She is gang-raped. The unrelenting doyen is shamed and insulted unimaginably. She has incredible thirst. Her dignity makes her bite her lips to prevent them involuntarily uttering the word water. A teardrop trickling out of the corner of her eyes discloses the trace of feminine spirit that worships virginity as an honour. But the consequent reactions and behaviour suggest that her teardrop also becomes a symbol of oozing out the feminine identity. Suddenly she hopes against hope. But again the process of making her goes on. Spivak in her introduction to Mahasweta Devi's *Breast Stories* opines, "In 'Draupadi', what is represented is an erotic object transformed into an object of torture and revenge where the line between (hetero) sexuality and gender-violence begins to waver" (vii).

Virginity and motherhood are the very mediums by which woman is deified and ironically the very mediums by which woman is degraded. Rape becomes a weapon to Senanayak to beat her down psychologically and to tear the very core of femininity. Anger at his shattered hope, revenge for deflated ego, and unbearable irritation at indomitable spirit shown by a marginalized woman revolutionary all mixed together make Senanayak orders the cops to make her to eliminate her psychologically. To a male, elimination means a natural biological death but to a female, it means an internal death.

In the morning, she hears the word 'move', not Arijit's voice. His simple, easy, and harsher rules are only to save the fugitives and the Naxalite ideologies, not feminine ideologies. With her final ululation, the direction of Arijit is over. Now she is left alone and caught in the vicious mesh of legal and male power. She is to decide and act for herself. Spivak's words will enable us to have clear insight into the context in which Dopdi is placed:

Of course, this voice of male authority also fades. Once Dopdi enters, in the final section of the story, the postscript area of lunar flux and sexual difference, she is in a place where she will finally act *for* herself in *not* "acting," in challenging the man to (en)counter her as unrecorded or misrecorded objective historical monument. (253)

She is summoned to move to the Burra Sahib's tent. With her red eyes, she gets up, pours the water down on the ground and tears her piece of white cloth with her teeth. It is a violent response to aggressive oppression. Diana Meyers's argument facilitates our understanding of her behaviour: "Agents subject to oppressive socialization may exhibit high degrees of episodic autonomy, that is, the capacity to decide what one wants in weighing up one's desires or how to act in a particular situation" (qtd. in Mackenzie and Stoljar 18). She does not weep silently. She behaves not as society dictates, but she acts on her self-direction, an attribute of autonomy.

Senanayak is surprised to see Dopdi walking nakedly towards him in the bright sunlight with her head held high where she emerges as a new woman, not as a victim. Believed to be a comprehended object becomes an incomprehensible object to the corrupt and wily Senanayak. Mahasweta Devi projects Spivak rightly observes: "The army officer is shown as unable to ask the authoritative ontological question, what is this?" (253). Spivak further says, "She (Dopdi) remains publicly naked at her own insistence. Rather than save her modesty through the implicit intervention of a benign and divine (in this case it would have been god-like) comrade, the story insists that this is the place where male leadership stops" (252). He cannot respond to the words of Dopdi: "You asked them to make me up, don't you want to see how they made me?" (Devi 37) He cannot see the object of his search nakedly. Highly embarrassed the feel--- which he has not when he orders the cops to make her--- Senanayak asks, 'Where are her clothes?'" (Devi 37). Dopdi's naked black body comes closer and frightens him. She shakes with indomitable laughter that he cannot understand. Laughter becomes a symbol of her unyielding spirit. It becomes her language. A subaltern woman speaks through her laughter which is an implicit expression of her unbeatable spirit. It insinuates that she will not fall prey to his tactics and he cannot beat her down to the earth. Dopdi in her terrifying voice like her sharp ululation says, "What is the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man?" (Devi 37) A highly insulting question that can provoke any man violently is, "Are you a man?" But Senanayak is unable to react to her question. Instead, he is confounded and is afraid

of a marginalized Third World woman. His hegemonic masculine psyche is decimated.

The dress is a mark of civilization to a man, but to a woman, it is more a mark of honour than civilization. When a male power cannot intimidate, subjugate, and cow down her spirit, then dress becomes his tool. By stripping off her sari, he tries to insult, to shame, to revenge, to suppress, and finally to silence her. In the sacred epic *Mahabharatha*, the celebrated heroine Draupadi cannot prevent herself from being stripped off her sari by Dushyanta with all her rational arguments with the courtiers and appeal to them. With unbearable pangs, she prays to Lord Krishna to save her modesty and honour, for she does not want to give up the socially reinforced values that are incorporated into her self-conception of womanhood. Lord Krishna does a miracle and saves her. She remains fixed within the patriarchal construction. But Mahasweta's Dopdi is not saved either by the divine power or benign human power. Unlike epic heroine Draupadi, she refuses to be fixed within the boundary of the patriarchal system, when she is avenged. She pulls up the very root of the feminine identity and demolishes it into pieces as she tears her piece of white clothe. In this regard Spivak's remarks on Dopdi are suitable to quote here: "Dopdi is (as heroic as) Draupadi. She is also what Draupadi written into the patriarchal and authoritative sacred text as proof of male power could not be. Dopdi is at once a palimpsest and a contradiction" (252). Mythical Draupadi becomes an instrument to demonstrate the male power and to strengthen the glory of Dharma, whereas Dopdi, the feminine power, challenges the male power and the Dharma of womanhood. In this regard, Kaufman states, "the challenge of feminism to men is one of dislodging the hegemonic masculine psyche. This is not a psychological interpretation of change because it is the social challenge to men's power and the actual reduction of men's power that is the source of change" (qtd. in Yuehua 86).

Virginity, a creation of mankind, becomes carrier of meaning and significant when that value is endorsed by woman. When that value becomes a device to degrade woman, the oppressed cannot be within the constructed systems. Dopdi's tearing her white cloth into pieces becomes a symbolic representation of her destroying the whole oppressive system which controls woman. Her refusal to put on her cloth is her denial of accepting the semiotics of the sign-system. She is autonomous enough to decide her own behaviour. She is naked at her own insistence. Spivak states that "there is nothing "historically implausible" about Dopdi's attitudes" (252). Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan's remarks add insight into the psychological perception of Dopdi's behaviour:

Dopdi does not let her nakedness shame her, the horror of rape diminish her. It is simultaneously a deliberate refusal of a shared sign-system (the meanings assigned to nakedness, and rape: shame, fear, loss) and an ironic deployment of the same semiotics to create disconcerting counter effects of shame, confusion, and terror in the enemy. (qtd. in Nair)

Dopdi spits a bloody gob at Senanayak's white bush shirt and says: "There is not a man here that I should be ashamed. I will not let you put my cloth on me. What more can you do? Come on, *kounter me come on kounter me*?" (Devi 37) Dopdi pushes Senanayak with her two mangled breasts. They become a double edged weapon which is used by Senanayak to silence Dopdi. With the same weapon Dopdi baffles Senanayak and "for the first time, Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed *target*, terribly afraid" (Devi 37). Spivak's comment on Dopdi's attitude illuminates our understanding:

It is when she crosses the sexual differential into the field of what could *only happen to a woman* that she emerges as the most powerful "subject," who, still using the language of sexual "honour," can derisively call herself "the object of your search," whom the author can describe as a terrifying superobject "an unarmed target." (252)

A close investigation of Dopdi's character and behavioural changes display that the undoing the binary opposition center and margin, rural and intellectual is not as important as compared with the significant changes that the struggle has brought on the character of Senanayak and Dopdi and on the hegemonic masculine psyche and sensitive feminine psyche. Asphyxiating social context has the force to

change the power structure and explode the long built social construction. Strangling situation demands and determines the attributes needed on the part of humans. In this regard, the belief that the biological differences decide the identity is an illusion.

Dopdi and Senanayak are subject to the social force and the crisis and their impact on them. Osmosis that has occurred on the psyche of Dopdi has been performed by Dulna and Arijit. Senanayak is terrified and is forced violently to change his attitude and to be silent. It is performed by Dopdi. At the crisis, Dopdi's refusal to accept the semiotics of nakedness and rape cannot be considered as an emotional disorder. It is a functional change. The power structure is reversed. Dictated becomes the dictator; frightened becomes the cause of fear; victimized becomes the victimizer. Here it is apt to quote a remarkable statement of Spivak: "A functional change in a sign-system is a violent event. Even when it is perceived as "gradual," or "failed," yet "reversing itself," the change itself can only be operated by the force of a crisis"(271). In the end, she has flabbergasted the proud Senanayak and has shattered his masculine psyche. To the bewilderment of men, shattering the illusion of masculine power, she demolishes the assigned and designed feminine identity and incorporates the hegemonic masculinity into her self-conception. One can modify Shakespeare's view and state, 'Courage, thy name is Dopdi!'

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