

**Dopdi , a revolutionarist to a haunted woman in Mahesweta Devi's Draupadi**

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**Abstract:** Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" is a multi-nuanced tale, capturing the saga and times of its character Dopdi, a Santhal tribal, at the junction of modern expand mentalist situation and subsistent subaltern endurance. It raises the issues of category, social group and colonialism, and their complicity in the configuration of hegemonic patriarchal state condition and how this normal structure maintains itself through violent 'othering' of the borders. Negotiating a variety of ideological locations – the intellectual pressures of her own hamlet, the exigencies of naxalites activism, and the ambush of armed forces/state – Draupadi/Dopdi encapsulates the gendered life of the process of othering, i.e., how the mainstream-margin resentment uses the woman body/sexuality as a site of honour/dishonour to justify patriarchy, its principles and norms. Mahasweta employs a very 'rugged and zigzag' account route in this story. Her technique, however, emerges as an appropriate vehicle to represent the thematic aggression and brutal thematic of the story.

**Keywords:**

Dopdi, Brutal, Tribal, Bakuli, Patriarch, Male, Myth, Operation, Senanayak, Naxalite, Santhal

**"Draupdi" is a story of Dopdi Majhen;** it is a story of victimisation of a woman who dares to confront the oppressive system. It narrates the quandary of a tribal woman caught between the pulls of subsistence living and the appropriator logic of feudalistic-modernist patriarchal state and its allied system. Dopdi Majhen, a naxalites informer-activist, is a Santhal. She, along with her companion Dulna, had rebelled against the tyrannical state –feudal nexus. In the time of dearth, Surja Sahu – the feudal kingpin of the area in involvement with the state - had got two tube wells and three wells dug within the compound of his two houses. When the whole Birbhum was reeling under famine, he and his ilk refused to let tribals share their 'unlimited' water sources. This instigated the anger of the suffering tribals and led them to join the naxalites group, headed by Arijit, and culminated in the 'revenge- killing' of Surja Sahu and his sons. In the result of this killing, and consequent upon the fierce and haphazard manhunt launched by the state through 'Operation Bakuli' Dopdi and Dulan were forced to run away and live the life of fugitives. Working in dissimilar guises with different landowners in and around Jharkhani line, they, completely sacrificing their family and needs, devoted themselves to the cause of movement and the social utopia and economic liberty it promised. They kept on informing their comrades about the faction of the army. Their devotion and their ability to survive created a horror among moneylenders, landlords, grain brokers etc.

**The foxy character of Senanayak:** In order to repress the Naxalite movement and hold the deviance inherent in it, the state launches 'Operation Jharkhani', initially under Arjan Singh and then underneath Senanayak, "a specialist in combat and extreme left politics". Dulna, who could not survive this deceitful attack/hunt, fails to match Senanayak's cunning. Betrayed by his own people, he was entrapped while drinking water and 'countered'. Since then, Dopdi Majhen is on the 'most wanted' list of the police and is living life incognito. It is at this stage that the chronicle begins. So far she has proved a counterpart for Senanyak's cunning and has, so far, eluded his clutch. Senanayak is an experienced person sentinel of state ideology. He has his own philosophy of tackling/struggle the enemy; he believes in destroying his rival by becoming one with it. Hypothetically he aligns with the fatalities/tribals, and hopes that the world would one day observe to the predicament of the subaltern and change for the better, even if gradually. But in rehearsal he believes in their physical obliteration. He thus embodies a

regal ambivalence: though by his means of ‘anxiety and elimination’ he may be getting rid of the young/youth at the equivalent time, he believes in delivering the world’s bequest into youth’s hands. To him, the most appalling way of fighting is guerrilla fighting with prehistoric weapons like bow and arrow, hatchet and scythe.

**Attitudes of Tribals:** Tribals – Dulna and Dopdi Majhen being clever in the use of these weapons – by evasion belong to this category of fighters. To deceive Dopdi, he uses her own folk, person like Shomai, Budhna and Dukhram Gharari, whom he had earlier used to annihilate Dulna Majhi. Senanayak used Dulna’s dead corpse as bait to get her but in vain. His soldiers obeyed his order waiting for long in the forest despite suffering shelling pains as the large red ants bit them. Dopdi, however, is a personification of elasticity and a great survivor. She combines in herself the sense of pride that derives from her celebrated lineage with the practical endurance tips of the naxalites to annoy Senanyak’s designs. A daughter of Champabhumi, she is proud of her ancestry, her pure untainted black blood. She is proud of her forefathers who had fought for and protected their women’s blood and honour and saved it from being tainted by foreign invaders. She despises the betrayers of her husband as a spot on community. She follows Arijit’s counsel in letter and spirit, not only to save her ‘self’ but also to keep her comrades out of dilemma. Consequently, regardless of her love for Dulna, she does not come to maintain his dead body. Senanayak’s clear failure to ensnare Dopdi along with Dulna, however hardens his resolve to ‘capture’ her, dead or alive. Dopdi is aware of the risks that enfold her life in the wake of the payment put on her head, and wilfully toughens herself, physically, emotionally and mentally, for any eventuality and the torture it might entail. She tells Mushai and his wife who know of her incognito existence as Upi Majhen, to deny any acquaintance with her in case of her capture.

**Impact of Jharkhani :** This is a moving gesture wherewith she ensures that her fortune may not shrink back on the sympathisers. She takes care not to respond to her real surname under any circumstances. She is not afraid of being caught or encountered. Through autosuggestions she prepares to come to terms with torment: Come what may, she will prefer to bite off her tongue than to eloquent anything. She is equally aware of the weakness her sex/body may put her to. But despite all this data, she is not ready to utter a word and annihilate others’ life for her survival.

**Various precautions:** But these safety measures don’t prove full attestation. Like Dulna, her own people ultimately undo her but before being captured, she makes a last trench effort to equivocate her captors and sound her comrades as to the impending danger. She desperately tries to enter the forest she knew so well to counterbalance the police trail, but the disorder that the footsteps following her produce in her mind, beguile her. Instead of incoming the forest, she moves towards the camp. She starts moving on stony terrain but to her surprise, she is blocked by Rotoni Sahu, Surja Sahu’s brother, Shomai and Budhna. Still she does not give up so easily. With her spreading arms, with face towards the sky, she turns towards the forest ululating with the power of her whole being. She is successful in sending the message to her comrades to alter their hideouts. She is detained and brought to the camp in the evening.

**Dopdi as the Draupadi of Mahabharat:** For two hours no one touches her and she is allowed to sit on a chair. But before going for his banquet, Senanayak ordered his soldiers to “make her”. Attached to the four posts with gag in the mouth, she is repeatedly battered by a number of cops, till she passes out. On regaining her senses she sees that her breasts are compressed raw, the nipples are tattered. She is still tied but the drss is removed. Despite this ‘seemingly billion astral years long physical and cerebral assault’, she is determined not to give up and

utter the word 'water' even when she is tremendously thirsty. She mistakes this break in the process of her 'making up' as being neglected for the foxes to eat greedily. But the process of 'making up' starts all over again. She is abridged to a still body.

**Goddess kali appeared in the character of Dopdi:** In the morning, when Draupdi is brought to the pavilion and given cloth to cover her body, she refuses to dress herself. She becomes disobedient. With her exposed wounded body, she prepares to go to Senanayak's tent. The guards on task think that she has gone crazy. They don't know what to do. So they rush to their master for instructions. Senanayak too is surprised to see unclothed Dopdi/Draupadi walking towards him with her head elevated. Draupadi comes nearer to him. She is not at all shy or mortified of her nakedness. She rather laughs at Senanayak when he enquires about her clothes. In a razor-sharp, shocking sky-splitting voice she questions his maturity. She is not ashamed of her position; rather she makes him ashamed of his maleness. She seems to communicate to him that a woman may be ill-treated physically but cannot be beaten mentally. Draupadi is a story about Dopdi Mehjen, a woman who belongs to the Santhal tribe of West Bengal. She is a Robin Hood-like figure who with her companion, murders rich landlords and usurp their wells, which is the main source of water for the village. The government attempts to conquer these tribal rebel groups through many means: kidnapping, kill, rape. Dopdi is captured by Officer who instructs the army officers to rape her to remove information about the rebel uprising:

**"Kali- karala badanang ghorang muktakeshi chaturbhujam**

**Kalikang dakhinang divayng mundamala bibhusitam".**

Paradoxically, the same officers who dishonoured her body, insist that she covers up once she is 'done with'. Unbendingly, Dopdi rips off her clothes and walks towards officer, "...naked. Thigh and pubic hair matted with dry blood. Two breasts. Two wounds". Is shocked by her defiance as she stands before him "with her hand on her hip" as "the object of [his] search" and exclaims, "There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed."

**Similarity of cheelharan of Draupadi & Dopdi Majhen:** The story is exposed away from the Mahabharata's grand narrative and royal attributes and located in Champabhumi, a village in West Bengal. The 'cheelharan' of Draupadi is reconstructed in Devi's narrative, subverting the account where Draupadi is rescued by a man, Lord Krishna. Instead, in Devi's narrative, Dopdi is not rescued, yet she continues to implement her agency by refusing to be a victim, leaving the armed men "terribly afraid". Dopdi is a woman of burly mind and will as she defied the shame associated with rape and sexual maltreatment, which is extremely relevant to India nowadays.

**Myth related with realism:** The Hindu myths of the subaltern woman body which is never questioned and only ever browbeaten is rejected by Devi. For Goddess Durga in her form of Sati, 'a good wife,' self-immolates her carcass in pain over her father's mistreatment of her husband, Lord Shiva. Incensed, Lord Shiva dances over the cosmos with Sati's body on his shoulder. Lord Vishnu then dismembers her corpse, and her body parts are scattered over the universe. Each artefact of Sati's body becomes a place for worship and pilgrimage. Also in the Mahabharata, Draupadi's wedding to all the Pandavas and her re- is another way in which the female body is subjugated. Devi shifts the gaze to that of Dopdi's, as she surveys the site of violence – her own body. No language can come close to communicating the shock of what Dopdi has been subjected to. And so, Devi forces us to stay on with the figure of that violence, describing in throbbing detail, the body of Dopdi after she has been 'countered'- 'her breasts are bitten raw, the nipples torn', 'her vagina is bleeding', and her 'thigh and pubic hair matted with

dry blood'. Here, Mahasweta Devi invests Dopdi's body with the record, the narrative that is being denied by the look of the officers. Dopdi's act of refusing to react or react to the violence being inflicted on her body is an act of rebellion. Through a language that is intuitive, Devi captures the violence the State inflicts on Dopdi's body in its efforts to turn her from a defiant body to a pliant and compliant one. And, it is through the same verbal communication that Devi captures Dopdi's defiance and rebellion as a woman, specially, a tribal woman who is part of the Naxalite group.

After her rape, the officers ask Dopdi to get wearing clothes before they can take her to the Senanayak. She walks out, naked, black-and-blue and wounded, refusing to hide the confirmation of brutality and unwilling to be mortified. This disturbs the officers and the Senanayak who are unconfident of what to do with this woman who forces them to confront their own decadence. Her disrobing stands in stark disparity to that of her namesake in the Mahabharata. She stands, without a redeemer, disrobed and brutalised, but indisposed to bear the shame for a infringement committed upon her. In both, the case of Durga and Draupadi, what happens to their body is an result of patriarchal voices which denies them agency:

**"namo ugrochanda prachanda cha chandaga  
chandanayika,chandachando botichoiba chanda rupati chandika".**

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