



The Voiceless Others in Mahasweta Devi's "Rudali" and "Draupadi": A Comparative Study

Seema Parveen, Research Scholar and Prof. Tanveer Khadija

Department of English & M.E.A.L.
Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti Language University, Lucknow.

Date of Submission: 01-06-2023

Date of Acceptance: 10-06-2023

Abstract- In Indian patriarchal society women are subjugated and marginalized on the edges of exploitation. Mahasweta Devi has been the supreme exponent of subaltern rights her major concern is to uplift the subalterns. Her literary contributions are the reflection of her social activism. Her literary texts have stern conscious about atrocities forcefully imposed on the subalterns. Draupadi is the short story by Mahasweta Devi, the protagonist Draupadi becomes so courageous that her strength shakes the soul of brutal Senanayak. "Rudali" is the novella which unfolds the transition of Sanichari from timid, cowards to courageous, practical and bread-winner. Sanichari and Draupadi suggest the painful of plethora of Indian women. This paper brings out the comparative analysis of two voiceless others Draupadi and Sanichari who suffer the prolong trials and tribulations to assert their quest for identity. This paper depicts the unfolding journey of Sanichari and Draupadi their double suppression firstly being a lower caste, subaltern secondly being a woman.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Sexual exploitation, Subaltern, The other, Identity and Feminism

Subaltern "Rudali" and "Draupadi" can speak, can fight for themselves. This topic reveals that how the ignored, underprivileged women are rising higher and higher to make their dreams of dignified life to be true; the women of lower strata are the real performers. They realized that the life is not a race but a journey full of ups and down, happiness and grief, success and failures. Their realization of self-worth makes them to conquer and completes their quest for identity. Mahasweta Devi's "Rudali" and "Draupadi" are well explored literary texts which unfold the journey of tribals, uneducated, unaware women Sanichari and Dopdi who shed off their conventional norms of being a woman to live the life of dignity. They want to rise higher than their defined living social pedestal. Their journey of courage, survival, loneliness and struggle. "Rudali" was adopted into a form of play

by the city of joy based leading director Usha Ganguli. Both the literary texts can be approached with feminist and subaltern theoretical approaches. Kalpana Lajmi's multiple award-winning film Rudali. "Draupadi" and "Rudali" unfold the vivid portrayals about rural, lower-class, uneducated, unaware underprivileged class. Her female characters are even robust in difficult times, performing in adverse conditions and their resistance towards patriarchy is worth to appreciate.

In the preceding decades of the twentieth century the genre subaltern studies has emerged one of the concerned topics of research scholars to talk about subaltern studies has gained momentum under the umbrella term of post-colonial theory and criticism. If post colonialism is considered as an offshoot of post-modernism, then subaltern studies is considered as the branch of Marxism. Subaltern stands for "inferior" adopted by Antonio Gramsci is referred to those people of Soviet Union who are the subject of hegemony of the ruling class. Subaltern is weaker class- workers, peasants, and other people who are denied of hegemonic power. In other words, subaltern studies reflect itself as an attempt to permit people to voice out within the pages of elitist historiography and in doing so is to provide the voice to spell-bounded and oppressed class. The concept of "subaltern" gained currency with *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1985). By Spivak who approaches subaltern text with deconstructive technique to point out different forms of subject formation and "others". Most of her ideas are the result of her interaction with "the Subaltern Studies Group" including Ranjit Guha and Dipesh Chakravorty, Gayatri Chakravorty states that "the reasonable and rarefied definition of the word subaltern that interests me is to be removed from all the lines of social mobility". The Subaltern refers to any person who is subordinated due to their caste, creed, color, physiology, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and many more. The term Subaltern stands for the "oppressed". In her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Unfolds the struggling journey of



subalterns who have awakened to the consciousness about their rights by voicing out against the centuries prolonged discrimination which they had been suffering. She unfolds how the harm had been done the women especially third world women.

Mahasweta Devi was born in January 1926 was not only a writer but a socio-political economic activist she was an Indian writer writing in Bengali. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is the voice of tribal people she has been vocal for them through her literary texts. Popularly Mahasweta Devi is called "Mother of Sabar" because of her extensive work in support of the Sabar Tribe. Mahasweta Devi's feministic approach reveals that how she focuses on the millions trials which are faced by tribal women. Her literary contributions are the agency for social activism. The literary pieces of Mahasweta Devi exposes all sort of exploitation and oppressions which prevails she targets all exploiting agencies who are found to be responsible for neo-colonial situation in the third world. Through her literary contributions she addresses several burnings and ignored issues of subaltern. Mahasweta Devi shows "I think a creative writers should have social conscience I have a duty towards society. I ask myself this question a thousand times; Have I done what I could have done?" (Interview of Mahasweta Devi by Spivak)

Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" illustrates about the tragic story of subaltern woman. Dopdi Mehjen who is an epitome of courage, a revolutionary who went underground to save herself from police custody and influenced other tribal to fight against odds. The short story "Draupadi" was anthologized in the collection *Breast Stories* translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who herself writes an introduction in her translated work. *Draupadi* first appeared in *Agnigarbhha (womb of fire)* a collection of loosely connected short stories political narratives. As Mahasweta Devi points out in her introduction to the collection "Life is not mathematics, and the human being is not made for the sake of politics. I want a change in the present social system and do not believe in mere party politics."

Mahasweta Devi's "Rudali" is considered as one of the most approved feminists, subaltern literary text depicting the pain consuming journey of a subaltern women. "Rudali" brings out the personal transition of a professional moaner Sanichari who earns money after crying at the funeral of the maliks, the upper caste. Sanichari cries for those people who she does not know them even, how circumstances modifies the face of a human being to perform either voluntary or

involuntarily. Tears are a commodity to be sold in the funeral market, a monetary asset to win twice meals of a day. Anjun Katyal in *The Metamorphosis of Rudali* states that "Grief is turned into a commodity and mourning is labor. If sorrow is controlled by the imprisoned, tears can be used as a produce, a source of earning for professional mourners." "Rudali" unfolds the poor plight of a subaltern Sanichari an old Ganju woman native of Tahad village in Chotanagpur, a woman who faces utter poverty, as the name Sanichari suggests Hindu mythological reference for misfortune. Both the stories of Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" and "Rudali" depict the sufferings of women how these underprivileged women face millions of trials in their cursed lives. But now the scenarios are changing women know their identity can shape their new future. Draupadi is the performing protagonist she is introduced to the reader with the dual versions of herself; Dopdi and Draupadi may be being a tribal she cannot pronounce herself as Draupadi. The story of Draupadi is found to be set in Champabhumi a village in West Bengal. The cheerharan of Draupadi is found to be reconstructed by Mahasweta Devi in her literary work "Draupadi" where Dopdi is raped by several cops but instead of surrendering to men like ancient Draupadi did she becomes a rebel her bare body is more than enough to shake the conscious of Senanayak an assaulter. Draupadi or Dopdi is a Santhal tribal girl who is at the verge of social injustice but she bears the brunt of social injustice with courage even she tries to distort the age-old framework of living pattern- the cloth for women who uses her bare body as the weapon. Sanichari represents Indian women, who are voiceless born to submit, be obedient, woman of no choice. She is continuously cursed by her mother-in-law for her misfortune which her name brings. Her age, marriage, being a woman does not allow her to answer back the harsh words of old woman rings in her ears she pacifies herself considering that she is not the only one who undergoes this unsolved puzzle but there are millions of voiceless, unknown females who suffer the same fate silently. "Huh! Because I was born on and named after a Saturday, that made me an unlucky daughter -in-law? I you were born on Monday was your life any happier? Somri, Budhua, Moongri, Bishri- do any of them have happier lives?" (71)

Sanichari a Rudali woman by profession becomes so hard hearted even the death cannot bring tears into her eyes she does not shed off her tears on her mother-in law, brother-in-law and his wife's death oppression has distorted her psyche she



the reason behind her inability to cry. Grief a poem written by Elizabeth Barrett Browning who talks about the inability to cry:

. . . a silence like death—
Most like a monumental statue set
In everlasting watch and moveless woe
Till itself crumble to the dust beneath.
Touch it; the marble eyelids are not wet:
If it could weep, it could arise and go.

The journey of a single woman is always painful and traumatic; she has to face the oppression from her home, then from the patriarchal society. Some become rebel, some become silent. In the grief, she remains alone at the time of the death of her mother-in-law her husband and brother-in-law were imprisoned by Ramavatar who had imprisoned all Ganju males. She has performed the cremation no matter how scared she is, society has zero concern for her sufferings. Both the female characters of Mahasweta Devi Sanichari and Draupadi are all alone at the demise of their loved ones. Dopdi a rebel is also all alone psychologically ironically surrounded by many male cops in jail at the death of her husband who was shot dead during an operation Bakuli.

The journey of Draupadi to be a rebel is not an easy she becomes rebellious after facing many hardships of life. Draupadi is termed as “the most notorious female.” Draupadi and her husband face many trials and tribulations every day from the brutal hands of the ruling class, the relation between Draupadi her husband and Senanayak appears to be of colonizer and colonized, the inferiority complex to feel being a subaltern is found to be ingrained in childhood lower caste is associated with wrongness something below the benchmarks. Draupadi and her husband managed to escape after killing Surja Sahu and his sons but they fell prey under the attack special task forces. Senanayak who becomes victorious in capturing Draupadi pays zero heed on the coded ethics of Army Handbook which preaches for the eradication of guerilla fighters. Draupadi and Dulna are the guerilla fighters. Draupadi takes her first step being a rebel when she changes her name from Dopdi Mejhen to Upi Mejhen while the search operation is going on to curb her. The racial hatred is evident from the fact that Senanayak and his team are searching every corner for Draupadi to be traced they are blood thirsty for the subaltern. The continued oppression of subaltern makes them so cruel and violent that they want to give back the same pain to the dominating class who slaved subaltern mentally and physically for centuries. Draupadi remembers about the corrupt Surja Sahu

how corrupt and brutal he was? Dulna wanted to give the first blow on him because his “great- grand father took the paddy from his field and Dulna still pays the debt of it.” The oppression of subaltern is going on their plight is lamentable their oppression is for centuries prolonged one. Dopdi affirms that she will give the next blow and she will pull out his eyes because “his mouth watered when he looked at her”. Army hits harder on both of them. Draupadi could not escaped longer and she was trapped down by the Senanayak who hides himself behind the lump of rocks. Draupadi of Mahasweta Devi is objectified as the object of sex who was apprehended at 5:53 pm taken to the camp. She raped brutally manifolds by many men. She is incredibly thirsty. She feels she has been abandoned for foxes to devour she hears more men to come. All her distinct and defined norms of being a woman no more exists with her one tragic incident changes Dopdi from a silent, submissive, obedient, oppressed subaltern to rebel, fearless, shameless, courageous and outspoken. Her stern behavior is more than enough to shake the soul of Senanayak, how she gets blessed from her shattered plight she gathered all her courage to revolt against brutal cops. She spits a bloody gob on his shirt 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 on counter me –come on, counter me, -?”

Tribal women are doubly exploited first being as a woman second being as a lower caste trauma is heavier to accommodate additionally financial crisis makes it heavier to carry it forward in life. “Rudali” unfolds the journey of a woman Sanichari from a mere widow to a well-equipped who is fearless to manipulate the system. “Rudali” shows how the voiceless subaltern evolve to a voiced empowered female who struggle to survive to live in a socially exploited set up. Sanichari an overloaded responsible female who could not afford to cry at death but how contrary the situation is when the society raises question on her for not being sad in the time of grief. The problems of Sanichari represents communal blunder and gender stereotype. Devi hardly spent ink on the physical beauty of Sanichari her only focus is to make a change in the society by affecting the mindset of reader. She wants to expose that sill in modern times there is the class of people who are suffering under socio-economic pedestal. Mahasweta devi states that:

Ramavtar’s oppression is a constant presence. He embodies a system which dehumanizes, brutalizes, invades the most private space of an individual, the emotions, so that even



grief is distorted in the desperate struggle for survival. grief is turned into a commodity, and mourning is labour. If sorrow is controlled by the Malik-Mahajan, tears can be used as a produce, a source of earning professional mourners. (Devi 2015)

Maybe the face of the man changes but the trauma for a tribal female is same but sometimes it is with more intensity. The upper class does not spare a chance to torment a woman and it can be used to extract money from the suffering class. When Sanichari returned from the neighboring village after performing the rituals of her deceased mother-in-law Mohanlal the priest asks her if a Tohri Brahmin would know how a Tahad villager's kriya is conducted. In order to appease him Sanichari drags herself into debt to Ramavtar. Dulan plays an important role in transforming Sanichari's life from a voiceless to an empowered female. He teaches her how to make the adverse conditions favorable. He succeeds in deviating the mindset of Sanichari from the state of helplessness to a realization of the inequality that is faced by lower strata. Sanichari starts to value herself as the human being, she uplifts her own image in her own eyes.

Conclusion

Mahasweta Devi was successful in expressing the pain felt by a subordinate woman. "Rudali" and "Draupadi" are the proof that Mahasweta Devi's text are dreadful weapon that she uses to uplift the marginalized, downtrodden people especially women. Her writings highlight the trauma of being poor and dominated physically and mentally both. When the two subaltern women Draupadi and Sanichari are compared there is certain similarity and certain dissimilarity between them. Sanichari lives a poor life devoid of basic necessities she suffers from poverty, starvation, gender disparity, dominance her name itself means 'inauspicious' while Draupadi faces sexual exploitation and violence. Dopdi assesses her own inner strength to challenge Senanayak for which she needs to consider psychological martyrdom. Dopdi Mehjen is neither an invention nor a discovery but she is the true essence. Dopdi repeats the history of Mahabharata's Draupadi with different attitude and end up. Dopdi Mehjen sets her own canon and silently re-canonizes ancient Draupadi.

Bibliography

[1]. Baskar, Suresh Ranjan. "Canonizing the Draupadi in Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi". OJED Open Journal in Education, vol.9, no.2, 2020, pp.223-232.

- [2]. Devi, Mahasweta. "Draupadi" Breast Stories. Transl. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Seagull Books 2002
- [3]. Devi, Mahasweta and Usha Ganguli." Rudali: From Fiction to Performance". Trans. by. Anjum Katyal: Seagull Books,1997.
- [4]. Dulta, Bhaskar Chandra. "Questioning Subalternity: Re reading Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi".
- [5]. Quest Journals: Journals of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences, vol.7, no.2, 2019, pp.41-43.
- [6]. H. M, Nam Lavanya, "Women in Mahasweta Devi's Novel Rudali". International Journal of Research Culture Society, vol.4, no.3, March 2020, pp.85-87.
- [7]. Singh, Dr. Archana. "Draupadi, the Unsung Heroine of Classical Epoch." GJRA-Global Journal For Research Analysis, vol.3, no.12, Dec 2014, pp.53-54.
- [8]. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. Can the Subaltern speak?. Edited by. Amber Husain. Afterall Books, 2020.