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WOMEN: THE EPITOME OF STRENGTH IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S *DRAUPADI*

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Women according to different regions of the world are observed or viewed in different perspective. A woman can be mother, sister, wife or grandmother but most importantly she is also considered as God. India is a place where Gods have the forms of woman. But it is also the place where women are considered as a weaker sex and inferior to men. This leads to the innate thought in a woman's mind that she is always inferior to man. Through this paper I would like to present how a woman overcomes her fear of being exploited and how she takes revenge through the same means.

Mahasweta Devi was an Indian fiction writer and socio-political activist. She has written over 100 and over 20 collections of short stories written in Bengali and often translated in other languages. She has voiced for the upliftment of the downtrodden especially Lodha and Sabar tribes of West Bengal. Through her literary works she portrays the hardships faced by the people of these communities. She has also received many notable awards such as Padma Vibhushan, Padma Shri, Sahitya Akademi Award, Ramon Magsaysay Award, Jnanpith Award.

The breast stories is a collection of three short stories which centres on the woman's breasts. Here, the breast stands as the symbol for violence and subjugation of women by abusing her breasts. The three short stories "Draupadi", "Behind the Bodice", "The Breast-Giver" stands as a medium to exhibit the strength of women and how a women's breast is viewed in varied aspects by the social and cultural system.

One among the three stories is the short fiction *Draupadi* which describes the hardships faced by the tribes of west Bengal during the war between Bangladesh and Pakistan in 1971. When the tribal community encounters the threats from the officials of the army, the women of that community befalls the prey for them. The officials are under the pursuit of the so-called "notorious couple", Dopdi Mejhen and her husband Dulna Majhi. Later Dulna was shot to death by the soldiers and waited for Dopdi to claim his dead body, who loved Dulna more than her blood. Dopdi was followed by the soldiers so that she might take them to the hiding place of other people and sacrificed her own self to safe guard her tribe. She was brought to the camp at 6.53 pm and the questioning session took place for an hour exactly. At 8.57 pm the elderly Bengali specialist in combat, Senanayak's dinner hour approached and he ordered the guards "Make her. Do the needful" (Devi 34). The guards had ripped her clothes off and had exploited her. After this takes the major turn in the main plot where Dopdi gathers her courage to face the man, Senanayak who ordered the guards to abuse her. Through the climax the author has proved the courage and strength of the women in front of the male patriarchy.

The main protagonist of this short story, Dopdi, is compared to the Indian mythical character, Draupadi. In the final part of the short story, where Dopdi was ripped off her clothes and was sexually abused. Later, when Senanayak asked her to put on her blood stained clothes, she refused in the sense of protest and rage. This courageous act made Senanayak filled with terror, the terror which he had not felt even in a battlefield in front of the rifles. This scene is compared to the epic scene of Dushasan forcefully unwrapping the saree of Draupadi. Draupadi courageously lets loose of her saree having faith on Lord Krishna. Her courage

when she asks for the justice in the court is same as how Dopdi stands naked with dry blood stains all over her body in front of Senanayak. From this we can understand that when a women's body is being exploited, the same body is being used for replying the sinners that the bodies can speak.

The theory used is feminist gender theory. Indian which is said to be a combination of diverse culture and custom, has one thing in common that is the fact of considering women as a weaker sex. The male patriarchal custom is followed for ages until now in some parts of our country. So this short stories by Mahasweta Devi has proved to be the ice breaker for such stereotypes. Here the theory of feminism can be applied when Dopdi tries to break her fear of male and stands courageously in front of the people who had abused her. She has stood for herself knowingly and unknowingly for the other women who undergo the same treatment elsewhere. The psychology of a woman also can be observed, when a woman is being mistreated the sorrow and fear turns into rage and courage. When she stands equally in front of the man who had abused her proves the gender equality and the main point of feminism is courage.

This short story does not only portray the hardships of the tribal people but also how a woman is exploited by the lustful beasts who are meant to be the protectors of women. As cited from the short story "her breasts are bitten raw, the nipples torn" (Devi 35), this line shows how the breasts were abused. The breast is a symbol for motherhood and livelihood but they have become a mere object of pleasure. Mahasweta Devi tries to exhibit the exploitation of women.

Works cited

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