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**Silence No More: A Study of Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi*****Anju Bala**PhD Research Scholar  
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The history of tribal oppression in India is an older one. "The Sanyasi Revolt", "The Wahabi Movement", and "The Naxalbari Rebellion", are evidence of the tribal outcry that appropriately foregrounds their requirement for fundamental rights as citizens of the country. Even after sixty six years of independence, India's rural poor and tribals are lamenting under the curbing effects of destitution, unemployment, undernourishment, illiteracy and human trafficking. For these people, the notions of liberty, equality and democracy have no meaning at all. Though the country is free from the bondage of foreign rule, their repression and prejudices still continue leaving them dependent on their new masters.

However, partly due to their biological sexual difference and the socio-cultural surroundings to which they belong, the consequences of these above mentioned social evils are much more on women, especially subaltern women. Giving voice to such oppressed subalterns, the gendered subaltern (women of the deprived sections) and Indian women in general, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak says: "For if, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow." During her analysis of Sati she concludes her essay "can the subaltern" with her declaration that "the subaltern cannot speak" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffins 218-219).

Mahasweta Devi, always writes for deprived section of people. She is a loving daughter, a clerk, a lecturer, a journalist, an editor, a novelist, a dramatist and above all an ardent social activist. Her stories bring to the surface not only the misery of the completely ignored tribal people, but also articulate the oppression of women in the society. Her short fiction "Draupadi", is primarily, the story of a Santhal tribal woman raped by men in power, that is, her sexual torture in police custody. Rape is considered as a bolt on the forehead of an innocent woman. As it is given:

Rape is worse than death

Rape is always spoken through the lips of dead women

For a live woman rape means dishonor

Silence is the only choice for a victim

Rarely do families give victims the space to speak about their condition

Rape would not have happened without to it approval of the state

(qtd. in Hameed 312)

In the present paper, an attempt has been made to show how Dopdi, a tribal woman, brutally raped, resists the typical silence adopted by many women in our country. It is worth mentioning that various other Indian women writers forayed into the realm of writing essays, novels, poetry etc. to give voice to the silent screaming of a woman's soul that is common all round the world wherever women exist in a patriarchal system of society. The misery of a tribal woman as compared to aristocratic woman is far more dreadful. Rape, is the worst recognition of sexual violence against women. Giving all the vital information about the famous criminal Draupadi right at the beginning of the story, Mahasweta Devi states:

Name DOPDI MEJHEN, age twenty-seven, husband Dulna Majhi (deceased), domicile cherakhan, Bankrajarh, information whether dead or alive and / or assistance in arrest, one hundred rupees..(19)

The female protagonist, Draupadi, who is a tribal insurgent, gets captured during her outrageous tribal uprisings against the government. After her capture, she is beguiled for giving information about her companions. Because of her dedication, she is subjected to third degree in police custody; till the government officer “Senanayak” gives orders to “Make her. Do the needful,” (34). She is brutally subjected to gang-rape through the endless silent suffering night. After this barbaric act of violating the female honour Draupadi proceeds daringly towards “Senanayak” and, she confronts her exploiters naked and bleeding, thereby making the rapists shameful of how to face this unexpected situation, and the reader distressed and sorry for their cruelty.

Dopdi and Dulna Majhi are representatives of her native community, who are forced to serve their masters and get petty wages. Forced by circumstances, they decide to rise against this oppression imposed on them by men in power. Therefore, through Draupadi’s story, Devi reveals the cold-heartedness of upper-class feudal lords. Draupadi recollects the episode of “Operation Bakuli”, she remembers: “Surja Sahu arranged with Biddibabu to dig two tubewells and three wells within the compound of his two houses. No water anywhere, draught in Birbhum. Unlimited water at Surja Sahu’s house, as clear as crow’s eye” (29). These tribal poor people, even have no right to drink water, to satisfy their thirst. So, against these cruelties, that Draupadi and her group take law in their hands:

Surja Sahu’s house was surrounded at night. Surja was tied up with cow rope. His whitish eyeballs turned and turned, he was incontinent again and again. Dulma had said, I’ll have the first blow, brothers. My great-grandfather took a bit of paddy from him, and I still give him free labor to repay that debt. Dopdi had said, his mouth watered when he looked at me. I’ll put out his eyes. (30)

The above mentioned incident is thought-provoking. It shows the embodiment of woman’s body as a victim of male gaze, particularly, the tribal woman’s body, who is, very easily believed as an easy prey by the non tribal men. Though the story is about the exploitation of the tribes, but it predominantly focuses on the oppression of woman through the flouting of their bodies, especially tribal women who repay the price of raising their voice (5). “Your sex is a terrible wound,” says Draupadi (28). The most important question that this text poses is not only why Dopdi was raped, but it also analyses why women fall as an easy prey to be raped? Through this story, the author challenge the “commodification” and “subsequent victimization” of a woman’s body.

Devi’s Draupadi challenges the prevalent ideas regarding rape that is, she in her nudity destroys the connivance of silence surrounding rape, and in doing so, she reverses the notions of the kind whereby the victim and not the victimizer should be afraid and guilt ridden. Realistically, “unlike diku women, Santhali women are not ashamed of being women nor they afraid of their sexuality ” so, the writer through her Santhal female protagonist, Draupadi hammers home the point that it is not the woman, who is wronged, should be ashamed (Kumar 140). With this awareness, Draupadi redirects the disgrace and dismay towards Senanayak and his officers. When Senanayak sees wounded Draupadi, he loses his calm temper and asks instantly, “What is this. He is about to cry, but stops”. Draupadi comes near to him and says “The object of your search, Dopdi Mejhen. You asked them to make me up, don’t you want to see how they made me?” He becomes dumb-founded in both body and brain, he asks again “where are her clothes? Won’t put them on, sir. Tearing them”. Draupadi, now, has nothing to

loose, so she “shakes with an indomitable laughter” making the situation more baffling for all those, who are left speechless by her bold action. Growling and threatening, she challenged the Senanayak’s theory and addresses the army chief, “What’s the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you cloth me again? Are you a man?” She spits on his shirt and says, “There isn’t a man here that I should be ashamed. I will not let you put my cloth on me” (36)

With her unconquerable will power, she gives a challenge to Senanayak to counter her, “Come on, Kounter me-come on kounter me-” (37). Turning the dreadful wounds of her breasts into defensive attack, she “pushes the Senanayak with her two mangled breasts, and for the first time he is afraid to stand before an unarmed target, terribly afraid”, he is (37). Unlike other passive rape victims, Devi doesn’t let her heroine “Draupadi” suffer in silence. With unconquerable spirit, the naked and bleeding Draupadi faces all her rapists defiantly, out resisting the sexual flouting of her body. Mahasweta Devi gives voice to the voiceless unfortunate of the earth, her literary output is an attempt to shake the conscience of the citizens, to make them notice, identify, and analyze what goes unnoticed, unheard by the naked eye.

The present paper concentrates on that woman is considered as an epitome of strength in our society. She is treated as an inferior being in comparison to her male counterpart. But the heroine of Devi’s short story “Draupadi” is not a meek and passive one. She confronts her predators in a defiant manner and nowhere shows herself as weak in her comparison with men. In her story, Mahasweta Devi shows how Draupadi resists and inverts this fear and disgrace of Rape towards her exploiters. She prefers the way of resisting instead of remain silent. She shows no trace of shame on her face, instead, her oppressors felt ashamed.

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