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Digital Discourse and the Relevance of Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi in Contemporary Times

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Abstract:

Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi effectively captures the tenacity and defiance of women in the face of social injustice, cruelty, and persecution. The protagonist, Dopdi Mejhen, stands for the bravery of oppressed women who defy governmental and patriarchal authority. She maintains her identity and dignity despite being subjected to cruelty and humiliation. Her courageous defiance turns into a representation of female empowerment and awareness. The issues that women experienced during Draupadi's time still exist now. Gender discrimination, domestic abuse, exploitation, unequal chances, and social constraints continue to plague many women. But thanks to education, literature, journalism, and digital platforms, modern women are becoming more conscious of their rights. Feminist conversations, social movements, and internet campaigns have raised awareness of women's issues and inspired women to speak out against injustice. The development of social consciousness and group accountability is the answer to these issues. One of the most effective strategies for empowering women and altering conventional beliefs is education. Women must be respected, treated equally, and given legal protection in all spheres of society. To guarantee women's safety, freedom, and equal opportunity, governments, families, and educational institutions should collaborate. Digital platforms can also aid in raising awareness and promoting conversations about human rights and gender justice. Draupadi by Mahasweta Devi emphasizes that women are strong, capable of resistance and change rather than helpless victims. Society can advance toward a future in which women live with equality, freedom, and dignity via awareness, education, solidarity, and social reform.

Keywords: Female Resistance, Gender Consciousness, Patriarchal Oppression, O Subaltern Identity, Women's Empowerment.

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INTRODUCTION:

Mahasweta Devi (14 January 1926–28 July 2016) was one of the most extraordinary literary characters in modern Indian literature [1]. She was born in Dhaka, then part of British India (now Bangladesh), and was not only a well-known writer but also a social activist who dedicated her life to the battles of tribal communities, disadvantaged people, and oppressed women. She graduated from Visva-Bharati University and went on to acquire an English degree from the University of Calcutta. Mahasweta Devi's writings highlighted socioeconomic inequality, exploitation, class strife, sexism, and state aggression [2]. Her literary works include *Hajar Churashir Ma* (*Mother of 1084*), *Rudali*, *Agnigarbha*, *Aranyer Adhikar*, and *Draupadi*, all reflecting her strong concern for human rights and social justice.

Her remarkable contributions to literature and society have earned her several esteemed prizes and honors. She received the Padma Shri in 1986, the Padma Vibhushan in 2006, the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1997, and the Jnanpith Award in 1996. Her writings continue to influence social activism, subaltern studies, and feminist discourse worldwide. One of her most potent feminist and political works is the short story *Draupadi*, which was

first written in Bengali as "Dopdi" and included in the collection *Agnigarbha* [3]. The mythological figure Draupadi from the Mahabharata is the source of the title "Draupadi." But she changes the conventional representation of Draupadi into **Dopdi Mejhen**, a contemporary tribal woman who fights against state violence and patriarchal tyranny. The narrative portrays Dopdi as a bold figure of female resistance, subaltern identity, dignity, and revolt in current society while also symbolically tying mythology to modern socioeconomic reality [4].

Female Resistance in *Draupadi*

Female resistance to social injustice and patriarchal oppression is one of the most important themes of *Draupadi* [5]. She portrays a strong picture of a woman who defies male authority, aggression, and humiliation through the figure of Dopdi Mejhen. Women are frequently viewed as inferior to men, weak, and reliant in patriarchal society. Traditionally, women are expected by society to keep quiet, submit to men, prepare meals, serve husbands, raise children, and give up their individuality in order to fulfill family obligations. Equal opportunity, freedom, education, and respect are often denied to women. Instead of appreciating their brilliance, uniqueness, and

abilities, their value is frequently restricted to household chores [6]. Through the figure of Dopdi, Mahasweta Devi vehemently opposes this way of thinking. The narrative poses a crucial question: why are women consistently required to endure quiet suffering while males are granted freedom and power? Why are women not considered human beings with equal rights and dignity, but rather as objects of control? Dopdi totally rejects these restrictive expectations. She has endured severe torture and sexual assault, but she still refuses to submit to patriarchal authority. Rather than be embarrassed, she faces Senanayak head-on and turns her pain into resistance. The narrative also demonstrates that women are not limited to home chores, cooking, or serving spouses. Women are just as strong, brave, intelligent, and unique as males. Mahasweta Devi contends that society restricts women's independence and establishes unfair gender roles [7]. The author dispels the myth that women are defenseless victims by portraying them as brave and rebellious through Dopdi's opposition.

Patriarchal Violence and State Power

Through Dopdi Meihen's anguish, she effectively illustrates the brutality of patriarchal abuse and state control in Draupadi. A patriarchal society is one in which men have

social, political, economic, and cultural dominance over women [8]. In the narrative, Dopdi is subjected to political, psychological, and physical assault. She is subjugated and silenced by the military officials and soldiers through sexual brutality, torture, and authority. Ironically, governmental officials and educated officers are the ones who carry out these cruel crimes. This poses a grave moral dilemma: if strong and educated individuals act so brutally, what can be expected of those who lack social awareness and education? Humanity, ethics, compassion, and justice are meant to be developed through education. But in Draupadi, well-educated leaders abuse their authority and knowledge for violence and dominance. A system that prioritizes authority over human dignity is represented by Senanayak and the troops. According to Mahasweta Devi, education becomes hazardous when it lacks morals and humanity [9]. As a result, the narrative criticizes both sexism and the corruption of state institutions that take advantage of underprivileged groups, particularly women. When the official order is given, it is one of the story's most unsettling scenes:

"Make her. Do the needful".

The savagery concealed behind bureaucratic terminology is symbolized by this oblique

phrase. Dopdi is treated by the cops as an object to be chastised and humiliated rather than as a human being [10]. Women's bodies are frequently used by patriarchal societies as instruments of dominance and control. But Dopdi won't concede. She bravely approaches Senanayak after seeing violence and declares:

“What’s the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man?”

This conversation turns into the story's most powerful instance of resistance. Dopdi defies shame and boldly opposes masculine authority. Her remarks reveal the oppressors' moral frailty. Another strong line says:

“For the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target.”

In front of a defenseless tribal woman, the armed officer is mentally defeated since true strength is found in bravery and resistance rather than in guns or power. Mahasweta Devi reminds society that humanity, equality, and respect are more significant than dominance and power through these potent sequences that denounce patriarchal brutality [1].

Marginalization and Subaltern Identity

To comprehend oppression, marginalisation, and social inequality in Draupadi, the concept

of subaltern identity is crucial. Antonio Gramsci coined the term "subaltern" to refer to socioeconomic groups that lack social advantage or political authority [11]. Later, through the Subaltern Studies Group in the 1980s, Ranajit Guha expanded and popularized the concept in Indian literary and historical studies. According to Ranajit Guha, conventional history ignored the experiences of peasants, tribal communities, laborers, women, and other oppressed groups in favor of concentrating primarily on elites, rulers, and dominating classes. He claims that although subaltern people have their own voice, culture, and history, they are frequently silenced or erased by dominating institutions. Dopdi Mejhen is a representation of this suppressed subaltern identity in Draupadi [4]. She is a member of a tribal Santhal community that lives on the periphery of civilization, where daily existence is shaped by political violence, exploitation, poverty, and displacement. In contrast to rich or upper-class women, Dopdi's fight is linked to economic injustice, tribal identity, and gender. Rather than acknowledging her community's human rights and social hardship, the state apparatus portrays them as dangerous and primitive. Mahasweta Devi reveals how indigenous people are marginalized and deprived of representation and dignity by means of her portrayal [12]. Because many groups are still

socially invisible despite modernity and technological advancements, subaltern studies are extremely important in today's society. Tribal communities, Dalits, migrant laborers, refugees, and economically disadvantaged groups are still denied access to justice, employment, healthcare, and education. These days, literature and digital media are crucial venues for underrepresented groups to share their stories and oppose social dominance.

Hegemony, marginalization, postcolonialism, identity politics, resistance, and intersectionality are related ideas associated with subaltern theory. Mahasweta Devi transforms the subaltern woman from a mute victim into a potent symbol of protest, dignity, and social consciousness through Dopdi's daring resistance [7].

Feminist Consciousness in *Draupadi*

The term "feminist consciousness" describes women's knowledge of social injustice, discrimination, patriarchal dominance, and gender inequity. It inspires women to oppose all forms of exploitation and oppression while acknowledging their uniqueness, dignity, freedom, and rights. Feminist consciousness, which opposes unfair power systems and calls for justice and equality for women, is both a personal and a communal social awareness. Feminist awareness has grown in the modern

era thanks to online feminist movements, cyber activism, and digital discourse, where women use digital platforms to speak out against exploitation, discrimination, and violence [13]. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir states that

"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."

According to this assertion, women are taught to be subservient, reliant, and obedient within patriarchal systems by society, which also creates gender roles. When women challenge these forced identities and affirm their own autonomy and value, feminist consciousness emerges.

In a similar vein, Bell Hooks describes feminism as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression." According to her definition, feminism opposes institutions that foster dominance and inequality rather than males. Elaine Showalter also focuses on feminist literary critique, which looks at how women's perspectives and experiences have been underrepresented in literature that is controlled by men [14]. Dopdi Meihen's resistance in *Draupadi* is a potent reflection of feminist consciousness. She bravely and fearlessly opposes official authority, refusing to accept patriarchal humiliation. Instead of representing powerlessness, her abused body

becomes a symbol of feminist resistance and body politics. Because Dopdi's oppression is linked to poverty, political marginalization, gender, and tribal identity, she also embodies intersectionality.

The narrative has a strong connection to contemporary digital discourse and digital feminism. These days, women use social media campaigns, blogs, online demonstrations, and movements like #MeToo to speak up. In the same way that Dopdi refuses to remain silent, contemporary women use internet channels to confront injustice. Draupadi is therefore extremely important in modern culture since Mahasweta Devi portrays feminist consciousness as awareness, resistance, dignity, and social revolution [15].

Digital Discourse and Digital Feminism

Communication, debate, and idea sharing via digital platforms like social media, websites, blogs, online forums, podcasts, and virtual communities is referred to as "digital discourse." Digital discourse has developed into a potent tool in today's culture for raising voices against injustice, exchanging experiences, and increasing awareness. It has a significant impact on social consciousness, political engagement, and public opinion. Gender equality, human rights, education, identity, and social justice are all topics that

may be discussed globally through internet communication [16].

Michel Foucault's theories, which demonstrated how discourse changes knowledge, power, and social reality, made the term "discourse" extremely influential [17]. According to Foucault, language, institutions, and systems that govern how society thinks and acts are how power functions. Discourse has spread into online forums in the digital age, where individuals question prevailing beliefs and develop alternative narratives. As a result, oppressed populations can use digital discourse as a crucial instrument to communicate their experiences and fight oppression. A subset of feminism known as "digital feminism" uses technology and digital media to advance gender equality, women's rights, and feminist action [18]. The idea gained popularity during the fourth wave of feminism, which emphasizes digital awareness, cyber campaigning, and online activism. Social media has changed feminist movements by fostering global participation and collective resistance, according to academics like Prudence Chamberlain and Jessica Valenti.

Digital feminism challenges patriarchy, sexism, body shaming, harassment, and violence against women through the use of hashtags, online petitions, blogs, and social

networking sites [18]. Campaigns like #MeToo, #TimesUp, and online demonstrations against gender abuse helped digital feminism acquire international attention. These groups broke the taboo around patriarchal oppression by enabling women to openly discuss their own experiences of discrimination and assault. As a result, women are now able to demand justice, solidarity, and equal rights across social and geographic boundaries thanks to digital platforms. The capacity of digital discourse and digital feminism to elevate disadvantaged perspectives makes them crucial. Women, Dalits, LGBTQ+ groups, tribal communities, and other marginalized groups can now actively engage in social and political discourse. Additionally, digital channels raise awareness of human rights, job discrimination, education, mental health, and cyberbullying. Because Dopdi Mejhen represents resistance against institutional and patriarchal oppression, digital feminism becomes extremely pertinent in regard to Draupadi [4]. In the same way that Dopdi rejects humiliation and silence, contemporary women use internet platforms to express their opposition to violence and injustice. The ethos of modern feminist activism, in which women turn sorrow into knowledge and group action, is reflected in her resistance. In order to advance equality, social justice, empowerment, and democratic

engagement in contemporary society, digital discourse and digital feminism remain essential.

Cyber Activism and Women's Voices

Cyber activism is the use of digital technology, social media, websites, blogs, and online platforms to promote movements for justice and equality, plan protests, and raise social and political awareness [19]. Because it enables people and communities to speak out across social and geographic borders, it has grown to be one of the most effective communication tools in the modern world. Marginalized communities can use internet activism to protest oppression, raise awareness, and hold institutions and governments accountable. The development of digital media and internet culture in the twenty-first century is intimately linked to the rise of cyber activism [20]. According to academics like Manuel Castells, digital networks have made communication a worldwide process that allows regular people to take part in social movements and have an impact.

In a similar vein, feminist academics stress that internet forums have developed into crucial venues for women to share their stories, oppose patriarchal dominance, and foster international solidarity.

In patriarchal countries, women's voices have

traditionally been silenced. Women's freedom of expression was frequently curtailed by traditional societal structures, which also prevented them from participating equally in public life, politics, and education [21]. But women now have more ways to confront inequality and tell their stories thanks to cyber activism. Women have been inspired to freely discuss their experiences of abuse and injustice by online movements like #MeToo, #TimesUp, and campaigns against sexual harassment and domestic violence. The combined strength of women's voices in digital environments is exemplified by these movements.

Because it encourages awareness, empowerment, and social change, cyber activism is significant. It facilitates women's access to information on employment possibilities, healthcare, education, and legal rights. Additionally, victims of abuse and discrimination can find emotional support and solidarity on digital channels. Women can inform the public about gender inequity, body shaming, workplace harassment, human trafficking, and cyberbullying using blogs, podcasts, online forums, and social media campaigns [22]. Because Draupadi represents struggle against oppression and silence, the concept of internet activism resonates deeply with Draupadi. In spite of severe abuse and humiliation, Draupadi in the

novel refuses to surrender to state and patriarchal authority. The spirit of contemporary digital feminist movements, where women openly face injustice and recover their identity and dignity, is reflected in her bold confrontation with Senanayak. Women's resistance is now a worldwide movement thanks to digital debate. Online action and collective knowledge can bring women from diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds together. Cyber activism is still a significant force for feminist consciousness, social justice, equality, and the defense of human rights in modern society, despite the possibility of harassment and abuse in cyberspace [23].

Contemporary Relevance of Draupadi

Even though Draupadi was written many years ago, the problems it depicts are still prevalent in modern culture. Themes covered by Mahasweta Devi include sexual abuse, gender discrimination, state brutality, patriarchal oppression, marginalization, and female resistance [24]. which, even in the present era, nevertheless have an impact on women and marginalized people. As a result, the narrative has a strong connection to both feminist discourse and current socioeconomic reality. Draupadi's potent depiction of women's resistance to injustice is one of the main

reasons it was chosen for study. Domestic violence, workplace harassment, rape, cyberbullying, trafficking, honor killings, child marriage, violence related to dowries, unequal pay, and social prejudice are still issues that women must deal with today. Many women are still denied equal freedom, dignity, and opportunities despite advancements in education and legislation. The narrative illustrates the various ways in which patriarchal structures still govern women's identities and bodies.

The text's emphasis on the plight of underprivileged groups, including Dalits, poor laborers, tribal people, and socially excluded groups, makes it pertinent as well.

Indigenous Peoples displacement, land exploitation, poverty, unemployment, lack of education, and political neglect are still major problems in today's society. Dopdi Mejhen stands for the voices of the underprivileged that are frequently disregarded by mainstream society and powerful institutions [4].

Draupadi was chosen in part because of its relationship to 21st-century feminist activism and digital debate. Dopdi's bold resistance is reminiscent of contemporary feminist movements like #MeToo, #TimesUp, and internet campaigns against gender abuse. These days, women utilize social media to demand

justice, share their experiences of abuse, and raise awareness of gender equality and human rights. Individual pain has been transformed into group resistance and social awareness via digital feminism [25]. The narrative also calls into question humanity, morality, and the abuse of authority. Mahasweta Devi challenges educated rulers that employ violence and dominance rather than justice and compassion through Senanayak and the military system. Because corruption, abuse of power, brutality against inmates, and political persecution are still prevalent in many nations, this is still relevant today. Draupadi is also significant in scholarly debates on intersectionality, postcolonialism, feminism, subaltern studies, and resistance literature [26]. The narrative challenges social injustice and promotes equality, justice, and human dignity. Draupadi's ageless message that women and underprivileged populations are brave individuals capable of resistance, awareness, and societal reform rather than helpless victims is what makes it relevant today.

Comparative Study with Other Feminist Texts

Several feminist literary works that emphasize women's identity, resistance, oppression, and empowerment can be connected to Draupadi. These parallels give Mahasweta Devi's

feminist viewpoint and the distinctiveness of Dopdi Mejhen's persona greater significance and meaning. Draupadi is unique in that it blends gender oppression with tribal identity, political brutality, and subaltern resistance, whereas much feminist literature depicts women's suffering inside patriarchal civilizations [27]. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's 'The Palace of Illusions' is a significant comparative text. The mythological character Draupadi from the Mahabharata is reinterpreted in both works. However, Mahasweta Devi turns Draupadi into a tribal rebel who represents political resistance and female defiance, while Divakaruni portrays her as emotionally expressive and psychologically complex. Traditional patriarchal conceptions of women are contested in both writings. rebellion. Traditional patriarchal conceptions of women are contested in both writings. In a similar vein, Pratibha Ray's Yajnaseni examines Draupadi's inner turmoil, emotional suffering, and dignity [26]. Draupadi offers a confrontation against institutional and social cruelty, whereas Yajnaseni concentrates more on individual feelings and spiritual pain. Both pieces challenge masculine dominance and highlight female consciousness. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is another significant analogy. Beauvoir describes how society confines women's identities under patriarchal ideals and creates them as "the

Other." Dopdi Mejhen rejects submission and silence to question this forced identity. Feminist concepts of autonomy, uniqueness, and self-respect are reflected in her opposition [28]. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, which emphasizes women's autonomy and speech, also relates to Draupadi. According to Woolf, women require autonomy, education, and room to express themselves creatively. By depicting a downtrodden indigenous woman who battles for survival and dignity in addition to expression, Mahasweta Devi expands on this concept. Another analogy might be Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Despite exploitation and brutality, women are shown in both books defying oppression and regaining their identities. Over time, the characters change from being victims to resilient and empowered figures. As a result, comparative analysis enables readers to comprehend that issues like patriarchy, identity, violence, and resistance are prevalent in feminist literature across cultural boundaries. But Draupadi by Mahasweta Devi is still distinctive since it incorporates feminism [24]. Nonetheless, Draupadi by Mahasweta Devi is one of the most potent feminist works in Indian literature since it blends feminism with subaltern politics, tribal identity, and revolutionary struggle.

Social Responsibility and Solutions

In addition to exposing patriarchal brutality and societal injustice, Draupadi pushes society to look for ways to give women and underrepresented groups justice, equality, and dignity [29]. The growth of people's ethical duty and social consciousness is one of the most crucial solutions. Society needs to realize that gender equality is a human rights issue that affects all people, not just women. Together, men and women should eradicate social injustice, violence, and discrimination.

In order to transform society, education is essential. People can grow in understanding, humanity, critical thinking, and respect for others with proper education. Equal access to leadership opportunities, healthcare, work, and education should be granted to women [30]. To help students become socially conscious citizens, educational institutions must incorporate gender studies, human rights, and moral principles into their curricula. Books like Draupadi can foster compassion and raise awareness of the hardships faced by oppressed people. Legal organizations and governments have significant responsibilities as well. Strict legislation against child marriage, rape, trafficking, workplace harassment, domestic abuse, and cybercrime must be appropriately enforced. Victims of exploitation and violence should receive prompt and equitable justice. Tribal populations and other marginalized

groups should also be given enough protection, economic opportunities, education, and political representation [31].

By raising awareness of women's rights, equality, and justice, digital platforms can further promote social change. Cyber activism and responsible internet discourse can promote group action against oppression and contest patriarchal beliefs. Traditional attitudes that restrict women to domestic duties must also be altered by families and communities [32]. Women ought to be valued as autonomous people with equal rights to freedom and dignity. In order to create a society founded on equality, humanity, and justice, social responsibility necessitates the cooperation of individuals, families, governments, educational institutions, media, and online communities.

Conclusion

One of the most influential feminist and political works in Indian literature is still Draupadi. She celebrates female bravery, resistance, and dignity while exposing the cruelty of patriarchy, state violence, and social oppression through the character of Dopdi Mejhen. Dopdi becomes a symbol of empowerment, revolt, and feminist consciousness as a result of her bold disobedience.

Important topics, including social injustice, gender inequality, subaltern identity, patriarchal dominance, and marginalization, are highlighted in the narrative. Traditional stereotypes that depict women as helpless, silent, and dependent are contested by Mahasweta Devi. Rather, she portrays women as powerful people who, by being brave and conscious, can fight against injustice and change society. Because problems like domestic abuse, sexual harassment, gender discrimination, exploitation, online harassment, and socioeconomic inequity persist, Draupadi is still relevant today. Dopdi's resistance is extremely relevant today since feminist movements, internet discourse, and cyber activism have given women new platforms to speak out against injustice. Even if a large number of women are now financially independent and educated, awareness and social consciousness still need to spread widely since many women still suffer in silence as a result of societal pressure, fear, lack of support, and a lack of awareness of their rights. Regardless of class, caste, tribe, or geographic region, everyone should have access to information and awareness in the digital age. Thus, media, education, literature, and digital platforms are crucial in educating the public about women's rights, equality, safety, and dignity. The narrative also highlights the significance of education, legal knowledge,

social change, and group accountability in building a society that is more just and compassionate. Mahasweta Devi's message is very clear: women and oppressed groups are active agents of change and resistance rather than helpless victims. In the end, Draupadi encourages readers to challenge repressive structures and advocate for justice, equality, freedom, and dignity for all. Society may progress toward a future in which each person lives with dignity, humanity, and equal rights through awareness, solidarity, education, and responsible digital conversation.

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