

Resistance without Weapons: A Study of Psychological Rebellion in “Draupadi”

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines resistance without physical force in Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi", focusing on the concept of psychological rebellion. The narrative follows Dopdi Mejhen, a tribal woman subjected to state violence and systemic oppression. Despite lacking weapons or social status, Dopdi refuses to yield; her resistance is anchored in mental fortitude and an unwavering rejection of fear, shame, and defeat. The paper contends that Dopdi's rebellion is fundamentally psychological, arising from her deep-seated courage and selfhood. Psychological rebellion, in this context, refers to inward resistance manifested through determination, self-mastery, and the refusal to acquiesce to unjust authority. In "Draupadi", the state wields power through brutality and intimidation, rendering Dopdi physically powerless and brutally mistreated. Yet, the story illustrates that while her body is subjugated, her mind remains autonomous. Dopdi's unbroken spirit stands as a profound act of defiance. Additionally, this paper explores how Dopdi subverts the conventional image of a victim; she does not retreat into silence or shame but instead faces her oppressors with boldness. Her evolution from victim to agent of resistance is at the core of her psychological rebellion. From a feminist standpoint, Dopdi's body—intended as a site of subjugation—emerges as a symbol of protest when she refuses to internalize shame. The insights of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are instrumental in reading Dopdi as a subaltern figure whose voice is habitually marginalized. Nevertheless, through her actions, Dopdi asserts her agency and presence. Ultimately, this paper demonstrates that "Draupadi" portrays resistance as an act that transcends physical struggle, emphasizing the formidable capacity of the human mind to confront and undermine oppression.

Keywords: *psychological rebellion, resistance without weapons, feminism, subaltern studies, marginalisation, state violence, body and agency.*

In "Draupadi," Mahasweta Devi masterfully depicts a form of resistance that transcends physical confrontation. The narrative follows Dopdi Mejhen, a Santhal tribal woman singled out by the state during a military crackdown. Captured, interrogated, and subjected to unspeakable brutality, Dopdi endures immense physical suffering. Yet, she refuses to yield to the oppressive forces intent on breaking her spirit. Her rebellion emerges not through violence or retaliation, but through an indomitable psychological strength. This paper contends that Dopdi's rejection of shame, her refusal to accept the role of victim and

her bold defiance of authority exemplify how psychological rebellion can become a profound and transformative mode of resistance - one that challenges domination even when physical power is absent.

Psychological rebellion can be understood as a form of resistance that takes place within the mind. It does not depend on weapons or organized revolt but on inner strength, courage, and the refusal to accept domination. In “Draupadi” the state represents power through violence, surveillance, and fear. The character of Senanayak, the army officer, symbolizes this authority. He believes that through force and discipline, he can control and break Dopdi. However, as the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that while the state can control Dopdi’s body, it cannot control her mind. Her silence during interrogation and her refusal to provide information become the first signs of her psychological resistance.

The transformation of Dopdi from a hunted tribal woman into a powerful symbol of resistance forms the central focus of the story. At the beginning, she is described as the “most notorious female” (Devi 393), a label that reduces her identity to that of a criminal and reflects the state’s oppressive perception of marginalized individuals. Through such descriptions, the authorities attempt to erase her humanity and portray her solely as a threat to social order. However, as the narrative progresses, Dopdi gradually reclaims her identity through her unwavering resistance and defiant actions. Even after her capture, she refuses to cooperate with the authorities. The narrator notes that “DopdiMejhen does not speak,” and this silence becomes a significant act of psychological rebellion rather than a sign of helplessness. By refusing to provide information, she denies the state the power it seeks over her and asserts control over her own voice and identity.

One of the most striking aspects of Dopdi’s psychological resistance is her rejection of fear. The state depends upon fear, violence, and intimidation to maintain authority and force individuals into submission. Yet Dopdi refuses to surrender to this system of oppression. Even after enduring extreme brutality, she does not display fear, shame, or weakness. Instead, she confronts her oppressors with extraordinary courage and self-possession. In the climactic moment of the story, when she is brought before Senanayak, she refuses to clothe herself. The narrator states, “Draupadi stands before him, naked” (Devi 402). Her nakedness, rather than symbolizing vulnerability, becomes a powerful form of resistance. By rejecting the imposed shame associated with her violated body, Dopdi transforms her body into a site of defiance. Her laughter further intensifies this act of rebellion, demonstrating that she is no longer intimidated by the authority that seeks to control and humiliate her.

This moment becomes even more powerful through Dopdi's direct challenge to authority: "What more can you do? Come on, counter me—come on, counter me?" (Devi 402). These words represent not a physical confrontation but a profound psychological challenge to state power. By openly questioning the authority of the state, Dopdi exposes the limitations of institutional violence. Although the state has exercised its full power through brutality and torture, it has failed to destroy her spirit or force her into submission. Her fearless defiance reveals that true power does not merely exist in weapons or physical force, but in the strength of the human mind and the courage to resist oppression. Through Dopdi's transformation, "Draupadi" ultimately presents resistance as an assertion of dignity, identity, and inner strength against systems of domination.

From a feminist perspective, Dopdi's body becomes a powerful site of resistance and political defiance. The state attempts to use her body as an instrument of control, punishment, and humiliation, reducing her to an object subjected to violence. However, Dopdi radically overturns this power dynamic through her refusal to submit to shame. By refusing to clothe herself after the violence inflicted upon her, she rejects the conventional association between female dignity and modesty. In many patriarchal societies, women are expected to internalize shame, particularly after experiencing sexual violence. Dopdi challenges and subverts this expectation. Her nakedness no longer signifies vulnerability or defeat; instead, it becomes a deliberate act of protest and resistance. As the narrator states, "There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed" (Devi 402). This powerful declaration rejects patriarchal notions that define a woman's honour through her body and exposes the inability of male authority to control her spirit or identity.

Theoretical perspectives further deepen the understanding of Dopdi's resistance, particularly the ideas of Spivak and her concept of the subaltern. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak argues that marginalized individuals are often denied the opportunity to speak within dominant systems of power and representation. Dopdi embodies such a subaltern figure. As a tribal woman, she exists outside mainstream social and political structures and is repeatedly silenced by state authority. However, her resistance also complicates Spivak's argument by demonstrating alternative forms of expression beyond conventional speech. Although Dopdi often remains silent, her silence itself becomes meaningful and politically charged. Her laughter, her refusal to obey, and her final act of defiance communicate resistance more powerfully than words. In this sense, Dopdi "speaks" through her body, gestures, and actions, transforming silence into a form of political expression.

In addition to Spivak's theory, Dopdi's resistance can also be examined through feminist ideas of agency and embodiment. Feminist scholars frequently argue that the body functions both as a site of oppression and as a potential site of resistance. This dual role is vividly represented in "Draupadi". While the state attempts to dominate and violate Dopdi's body, she ultimately transforms that very body into a symbol of protest and empowerment. Her refusal to conform to social expectations surrounding femininity, shame, and obedience challenges not only patriarchal norms but also the authority of the state itself. Through this act of resistance, the story highlights the possibility of reclaiming agency even under extreme conditions of oppression and violence. Dopdi's defiance thus becomes a powerful assertion of identity, autonomy, and human dignity against systems of domination.

Another significant aspect of psychological rebellion in the story is its exposure of the limitations of state power. Although the state possesses weapons, authority, and institutional control, it ultimately fails to achieve complete domination over the individual. Dopdi's resistance demonstrates that power is never absolute and that even the most oppressive systems can be challenged through acts of personal defiance. Her rebellion suggests that resistance does not always need to be collective or politically organized; even an individual act of courage can undermine structures of authority and oppression.

Furthermore, the story challenges conventional notions of heroism. In many literary narratives, heroes are often portrayed as figures who physically confront oppression through violence or direct combat. However, Dopdi redefines the meaning of heroism through her psychological resistance. She does not rely on weapons or physical force. Instead, her strength emerges from her ability to endure suffering, reject submission, and confront authority fearlessly. Her rebellion transforms the human body into a site of resistance and asserts the power of inner strength over physical domination. In this way, psychological rebellion becomes an alternative form of heroism rooted in dignity, resilience, and self-awareness.

In conclusion, Draupadi stands as a powerful and uncompromising critique of state violence, patriarchy, and the systematic oppression of marginalized communities. Through the unforgettable character of Dopdi Meihen, Devi demonstrates that resistance does not always emerge through weapons or physical force, but can arise through psychological strength, moral courage, and fearless defiance. Dopdi's refusal to surrender, even after enduring extreme brutality, transforms her from a victim of oppression into a symbol of rebellion and human dignity. By rejecting shame and confronting authority without fear, she

exposes the limitations of institutional power and challenges the structures that seek to silence and dehumanize the subaltern.

More importantly, the story redefines the meaning of resistance itself. Dopdi's body, which the state attempts to violate and control, ultimately becomes a site of protest and empowerment. Her silence speaks louder than words, and her defiance destroys the illusion of absolute authority. In this way, the story not only critiques systems of domination but also celebrates the resilience of those who continue to resist despite oppression. Ultimately, "Draupadi" remains a timeless and deeply relevant literary work that compels readers to confront questions of power, gender, violence, identity, and justice. It leaves behind a lasting message that the human spirit, when driven by dignity and resistance, can never be completely conquered.

Works Cited

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