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Dismantling Theory? Agency and the Subaltern Woman in Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi

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Abstract

This article examines Mahasweta Devi's revisionary feminist short story 'Draupadi' and argues that subaltern women can be accorded [voice/ agency] in imaginative writing. Through a reading of 'Draupadi', the essay proposes that a text such as this challenges and dismantles Gayatri Spivak's contention in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' that the subaltern can be represented only as a blank or empty space, for, in 'Draupadi' we have a subaltern woman who is not only re-presented imaginatively but also emerges as an agent at the very moment of vicious, personal, oppression.

The subaltern as female cannot be heard or read.

The Subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with 'woman' as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish.

Gayatri Spivak.¹

Notes

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