



**ARUMUGAM PILLAI SEETHAI AMMAL COLLEGE**

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TIRUPPATTUR, SIVAGANGAI (DT), TAMILNADU.



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**TWO DAYS VIRTUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON**

**Retracing the Narrative of  
Subalternity: Historical  
Evolutions and New  
Applications.  
(RNSHENA-2021)**

Organized by

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# Arumugam Pillai Seethai Ammal College, Tiruppattur

## E-Seminar

Retracing the Narrative of Subalternity: Historical Evolutions and New Applications

28th of July 2021

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# **SUBDUED TONE OF DISSENTS AMONG THE MIDDLE CLASSES IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S RUDALI**

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Mahasweta Devi was born into a middle class Bengali family on 14 January, 1926. She was born into a family of strong literary tradition, writing data. This researching style came to characterize her writing in later times.

Mahasweta Devi's career is a marker of major changes in terms of her creative writing as well as her political activities. Mahasweta Devi's contribution is not seen in literature alone but the major lump of her work is evident in her social work for which she was acknowledged with the prestigious Roman Magsaysay Award. She is a powerful writer who is more concerned with the problems of the social classes which are in the peripheries. Mahasweta amplifies the sufferings of the marginal cases and castes and above all the women in these classes and castes. Her characters are the strong and realistic representatives of their respective castes and communities. The writer makes an attempt to histories the harsh critique of an exploitative and repressive social-economic and religious system.

There are multitudes of human beings both men and women who are left out in the fringes of this society deprived of even their basic rights. This research article elucidates those enclosed visions of such women who are suffering in reality just like Sanichari. Mahasweta Devi the notable writer would not have elaborated the anguish she had on the deplorable religious and cultural norms prevailing amidst the less privileged people without a lucid observation of their traumas.

Globally, there are innumerable fewer beneficiary women who are forced to face countless of hurtful situations owing to poverty, starvation, financial disgrace, cultural statutes and religious conviction. These women who are out thrown from this dignified society are not just blown out but are disturbed venomously to live at peace with what they have. Women from this particular sect are considered to be untouchables but they are made to do the domestic chores

of the upper class community people. Though work is extracted from them irrespective of their class, they are not treated conversely like human kind. Labeled as untouchables, even today, they are asked to enter the house through back yard, not given food in a proper plate, served with stale food and list goes on. Moreover, these women who are regarded as untouchables are raped ruthlessly forgetting the status, pride, decorum and reputation of the high class highly ranked elite class society and it here Mahasweta Devi has very rationally and audaciously brought to the light the sufferings plunge upon the lower caste people by the upper class people who cannot even mourn for the death of their family member.

From the story Rudali, the various nuances carried out by writer Devi to express the custom of Rudali could be analyzed. She has very ingeniously penned the Rudali culture where women of lower caste community are branded as Rudali which stands a synonym for female professional mourners. From the different phases in the life of Sanichari, the tactful way to make a woman the Rudali could be observed. Women of this community both turn up as Rudali or a whore and it is stated by Mahasweta Devi as “It is women who are ruined by Malik Mahajans who turn into whores...”(Rudali 80)

The superiority character of the Malik Mahajans who go the extreme of tormenting the other caste women to a prostitute is highlighted by the writer. Fate of the woman especially belonging to hard-up community is decided by all other caste people except them. Village where Sanichari lived was haunted over by the Rudali custom mainly for the reason that they lacked basic amenities to lead their life. The life style led by them fits aptly to the slaying of Dr. Amdedkar that “ditch of regionalism and the den of ignorance and parochialism.”(Amdedkar).

In Rudali, Devi has represented the unfortunate women both as prey and as potentially dissident agent in the phallogocentric hierarchy of Brahmanicalpatriarchy (chakravarty). Sanichari is introduced as beautiful little girl who lost her father even before she had comprehension power to understand who he was, furthermore, she did not have the bliss to take pleasure in the warmth and love of her mother also. Sanichari from the time of her birth has felt and undergone the pain of missing her family yet; she was firm enough to be without shedding tears. Her life is encompassed of a range of miseries which gave her chances to break down rather than weeping over the spilt milk, she had courage to proceed with the future.

Sanichari with all strong will power married a Ganju from her locality and adding to her fate, his life also ends up in the midway. She lives with her son along with her mother-in-law

who is counting the last seconds of her life and sister-in-law. Adding to her unblessed fate, when her mother-in-law passes away, she had no one except her sister-in-law to look after the further rituals even in this sober panorama of her life, she did not mourn nor blame her fate. She was not emotionally out taken by the most pathetic death of her mother-in-law who yearned and died crying out for food.

On the other hand, her son married a prostitute and ran away after he was bequeathed with a child and Sanichari remained calm as she did not want to shed her tears may be she could have sensed only tears will give her solace and help her livelihood in future. Sanichari in all dimensions were torn as she had no wealth to support a better way of living.

Women who are not in the position to express their visions and achieve it owing to various external factors and those who are let astray in the midst of reaching their visions are termed as Rudalis of reality through this paper. When Mahasweta Devi has brought into light the professional female mourners, here female mourners whose tears are also hid in their messy life is explored and explained. There is a drastic increase in the number of sexual assaults, murders, infanticide and various disgraces to the society globally and in varied parts of India as well which is crafted through the works of many writers. Often, women are the victims of all these stabbing and especially the women from the low caste community who are tagged as untouchables and Dalits.

The life of Dalit women in India along with the different threats of sexual assaults especially from the upper class elite people. A very recent incident that happened on November 26, 2016 was published in CNN news with the head "14 years old dies in second shocking double rape case". This incident is the second incident that happened in Delhi where girl belonging to the Dalit community was for the second time by the same person and was killed.

Sanichari, like the vast majority of women in India is presented as un-emotional, bereft of her intimate emotions and even of tears. Sanichari is aware that it is the daily struggle of injustice and double standards that degrade and dehumanize women.

After the death of her own son, Sanichari has to take care of her grandson. She meets her childhood playmate Bikini, who has the same tale of bad luck to tell. Sanichari and Bikini wailed loudly on the way to the cremation ground. Now with every death in the village the role of Rudalis become more important.

They now work as Rudalis, the professional mourners. They are in great demand because of their skill in wailing and weeping. For them, nothing has ever come easy. Just the daily

struggle for a little maize gruel and salt is exhausting. Through motherhood and widowhood they are tied to the money lender. Both Sanichari and Bikini are now famous Rudalis. One day Bikhni comes with good news that Gambhirsingh is on his death-bed. It may take a day or two for him to die. Bikini goes to visit her nephew in law. After one week Bikini's nephew-in-law comes to Sanichari to tell about the death of Bikini. Sanichari is shocked but no tears come into her eyes.

The death for the people from upper castes is a moment of self-glorification. These people are most interested to have a fanciful funeral and for Rudalis, it is a moment of earning food and clothes. Sanichari visits the redlight area to fetch some prostitutes to work as Rudalis. Her own daughter-in-law is among the whores. They would get five rupees each. Gambhir's nephew is shocked to see one hundred whores coming to play as Rudalis. Sanichari tells him that the funeral should be grand and royal. With this wailing begins and the Rudalis hit their heads on the ground. By doing this they would get more money. Now the Rudalis have learnt the art of extracting money from the rich money lenders who have exploited their master.

Sanichari is the central character who shows the courage to face life. She is transformed, metamorphosed into an active principle. She learns to adapt and manipulate the system according to her needs. She has been a victim of the system but in the last part of the story, she learns the tricks of the trade and reacts accordingly.

“She is not individualized through a description of her appearance, her clothes, mannerism. The author is not interested in sculpting a three-dimensional portrait of a rounded character through psychological and physical description”.

The author tries to link the story of Sanichari to a larger discourse of struggle and exploitation. Death is regarded as an important occasion for her as well as for the relatives of the deceased. Her life story is a sad, sorrowful tale of suffering pain, exploitation and humiliation. Her daughter-in-law and grandson leave her and she has to struggle for survival. In her personal life, she has no time to shed tears because she has to encase her wailing in her role of a Rudali. She mourns for others and this becomes a source of livelihood for her.

The Rudalis, who have nothing to sell but their howls, are exhausted agricultural labourers, some of whom have been seduced, ruined, and thrown into the whores' quarter. Sanichari's display of grief is valuable because it papers over cracks and fissures in the social system, making it appear as if the poor care for the rich as human beings, as though they have a

sense of loyalty and charming old-world feudal obligation which they express in 'spontaneous' grief. It is not so much an exaggerated game as a serious ritual of socialization.

The de-sentimentalized and detached narrative of the novel presents the hopeless predicament of Sanichari and fellow low caste women in a North Indian of Brahmanic Varna and caste patriarchy in the latter half of twentieth century. The nexus between caste, phallogocentric and feudalism is the hegemonic structure in this typical rural North India village; the foundation of some of the nationalist imaginations like the Gandhian Gram Swaraj.

The material misery and historic experience of injustice dehumanizes the subject to mere insensitivity. The caste patriarchy of Brahmanism in India is the typical example and Sanichari and her band of the vast majority of women in India are illustrations, who are even bereft of their intimate emotions and even tears for that matter.

Caste imaging, stereotyping, curses and other symbolic and metaphoric violence and repressive discourses including hate and ethnic slurs are flooding the serene and idyllic village landscape.

One thing is clear it is the caste lords who create whores and wailers out of the low caste woman. Both the body and the mind of the gendered subaltern is his sole property and he is the sovereign of subaltern bodies/mind/spirits. The Rajput Maliks literally forced the tag of "whores" on to the low caste woman and constructed a descent of prostitute wailers, a caste called Rudalis.

The gendered subaltern uses the frameworks and hidden structures of hegemony, that of caste patriarchy, to derail its own operations from within, though in feeble proportions.

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