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# Research maGma

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### **GENDER BIGOTRY IN ITS PEAK: A STUDY OF MAHESWETA DEVI'S RUDALI**

**Nasreen M.**

PG Student, Sathyabama university, Chennai.

#### **ABSTRACT**

Mahesweta Devi is one of the prominent female writers in Bengali literature. Her writing explores the voice against the social injustice provoked towards the tribal and women. She used her writings as a weapon to revolt against the problems faced by the subaltern people. Mahesweta is the only Indian fiction writer who won Shahitya Academy Award in Bengali literature. She also deserved India's popular awards which are generally known as Padma Shri and Padma Vibhushan. In *Rudali* she penned the sufferings and struggles of a woman for survival in the patriarchal society. She was totally frustrated in depending on the male characters around her. The central idea of this paper is to focus on the obstacles faced by the women from the childhood till her womanhood, further the study concludes by proving to the world that the oppression done to women will not totally demolish her life, besides it provides a strength to search a new way of life which leads her to survive in this male dominated society.

#### **KEYWORDS:**

Struggle, Plight, Women, *Rudali*, Patriarchy, Subaltern.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Gender is the basic obstacle for the people in developing their career. Cornering is the major turmoil of every woman. Strict rules and regulations are followed in the lifestyle of a woman rather than men. Always men are considered superior to women in every situation. According to the Indian tradition, if a normal woman raised her voice against the male chauvinist society, then she will be considered as a woman who lost her social values. Mahesweta Devi as a writer boldly depicts the sufferings of a subaltern woman through her works. Her work *Rudali* embraced the concept of independent life through the character Sanichari, who strives for her life when every person in her family left her alone. Though as a woman she faced many hurdles, she never let her hope for her survival.

Sanichari is poor 'Ganju' women, living in a village called Tahad in Chhotanagpur near West

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Bengal. Sanichari is a name of a woman who was born on the day of Saturday, which resembles the abnormal (evil) sign in their tradition. The story begins with the Bhikni's sudden visit to Sanichari, who is Sanichari's lost childhood friend. Sanichari lost her father in her childhood after his death, her mother Peewali eloped with the drama company owner. After Sanichari attained her puberty she was married to a man called Ganju who is breathing with his diseased mother. Soon after her mother-in-law died due to her feeble nature. Then she attained motherhood by giving birth to her son, Budhwa, who lost his father during British rule, when he was only six. Sanichari cannot even shed tears for her husband's death. Sanichari suffered a lot to rear her only son, by bearing her muliebrous hazards. Sanichari was encountered by a Lakshmansingh, a son of landlord. He offered her to be with him as his mistress, but she must leave her son. Sanichari as a mother refused this proposal. She worked in Rajput Malik's house and she managed to breathe on inadequate food. Budhwa got married to a prostitute and he died earlier like his father. Budhwa's wife went back to her old job who loves to survive in red light area. While the instant thought is directed to the alleviation of hunger, other thoughts-however righteous they might seem- are constrained to be ignored. Sanichari as usually focused on her laborers work to make her survive, when everyone of her family left her alone. After hearing her tragic background, her friend suggests her job as a Rudali, who must mourn and lament for the death of rich people. Sanichari's belief on her fate made her to be strong to face all her problems in her life.

### DISCUSSION

*Rudali* is a novel written in Bengali. This novel explained the concept of how the subaltern women are marginalized and suffered in this patriarchal society. Here Sanichari as a subaltern woman not only faced the social problems and also she underwent many sexual problems by the landlords. Mahesweta Devi sketched the character of woman who has to suffer according to their destiny. Here destiny is designed according to their caste. Even destiny does not leave a lower caste people to live luxurious life. Sanichari, as a female protagonist boldly faced the storm of discrimination and injustice against her, she boldly sailed in the sea of life by crossing more hurdles. This novel portrays the outrageous problem of Sanichari who represents the midpoint between Phallocentrism, Feudalism, caste and tradition of village area in North India. Dr. Ambedkar's site on Tahad makes him to say, that "ditch of regionalism and the den of ignorance and parochialism" (34).

Ganjus and Dushads were the two caste people who occupied a major area in Tahad village. Sanichari is a ganju woman who lived a poverty life like other Ganjus. Superstitious belief is also literally believed by the ganju people. Her mother-in-law's description on Sanichari makes us to taste the superstitious belief she continuously comment on her she says, it was because "Sanichari was born on inauspicious Saturday that her destiny was full of suffering[...] to herself she would say-huh! Because I was born on and named after Saturday that made me an unlucky daughter-in-law" (*Rudali* 54). Mostly Indian society follows their own tradition, caste and culture according to these they will make the rules and these rules are the main cause for the problems against the genders. Always certain rules are ordered for women who should not cross their line.

*Rudali* not only expresses a suffering of a single woman. It is the representation of every woman in India who is really discriminated by their gender in every situation. Mahasweta Devi not only depicted the life of Sanichari, but through her character Devi brings out the real battle of every woman who undergoes several jobs to move their poverty line. Her works always revolves around single theme,

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which is 'a voice against injustice and inhumanity provoked to human beings'. This novel explicit the royal life of upper caste people, who does not want to shed their tears even for the death of their close relationship. They used to pay money for the mourners to make a cry and lament over their death. This shows the superior life of the prosperous people.

Sanichari, from her childhood till her woman she has faced many deaths, but she never cried for any death. Soon after, her situation changed rapidly when she turned as a *Rudali* who must shout and cry for unknown death. Even Sanichari's house doesn't fill with a cupful of grains, when her mother-in-law shouts in her dead bed for food. "Her mother-in-law died in great pain, of dropsy, lying in her own excrement, crying out, over and over, 'food, give me food!' (55). And there wasn't even a cupful of grain in the house! So Sanichari was forced to go from neighbour to neighbour in the pouring rain. Such a kind of poverty bounded the subaltern woman. Even cremation arrangements are left to be taken over by Sanichari under, a woman. Such a pathetic situation of Sanichari proves the uncaring attitude of men in a society.

The novel *Rudali* clearly pictured the concept of discrimination provoked to low caste people. Sanichari as *Rudali* women finds her real identity was lost. This shows even poverty can change the real identity of a person. They are ready to work under any circumstances where they could earn money to run their poor life. Mahesweta Devi depicted that gender bias shows its power through the character of Dulan. Dulan, a male character plays an important role as a leader to the group of *Rudali* women. Mahesweta Devi proves that 'men can hold a leadership position whereas women cannot'. In another aspect we can clearly notice that '*Rudali* is a name who makes their job to lament for a death of rich people and this can done only by the subaltern women and we cannot find a men in this group'. Crying and losing our energy for the sake of living is an agony for a human being. Low class people live in a danger line of poverty where they lack self respect and self freedom.

There were also various conflicts in this novel like caste cruelty, callous afflictions, hostility and overarching hegemony. The Vaid (physician) in the Tahad village condemns that "the lower castes have no patience, no ability to bear up" (61). Actually the main conflict arises due to the caste discrimination rather than personal problems among the villagers. The activities of an upper caste people make us to feel that they are literally beast wrongly born as humans. They spent lot of money for a death to enhance their prestige before their relatives' shows their luxurious life. Actually it is a competition among the rich people that who is spending lot of money for their death proves their dignity and richness in the village.

The author has given various examples about the gender discrimination, caste cruelty, inequality and oppression of the subaltern people in the novel. She centered the character Sanichari to deliver these injustices which happens in the day to day life of poor subaltern women in India. Sanichari's pathetic condition made her to join hand with her childhood friend Bikini and they become a famous *Rudalis* in their rural areas. At last they both enjoyed their work without seeing any shame because "through motherhood and widowhood they were tied to the moneylenders, while those people spent huge sums of money on death ceremonies, just to gain prestige. Let some of that money come into Sanichari's home" (27).

Sanichari, who cannot shed her tears for her own relationship's death becomes an expert as a *Rudali*. Now she is well developed in her work and she demands various charges and she makes a list for different categories of mourning.

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Just for wailing, one kind of rate.

Wailing and rolling on the ground, five rupees, one sikka.

Wailing, rolling on the ground and beating one's head, five rupees, two sikka.

Wailing and beating one's breast, accompanying the corpse to the cremation ground, rolling around on the ground there for that the charge of six rupees.

At the kirya ceremony, we want a cloth, preferably a length of plain black cloth. (p.28)

The story *Rudali* reveals the upper caste people (Rajputs) as dehumanize people who in needs of lower caste women as a *Rudalis* to mourn over the corpse. *Rudalis* weeps for the dead and they receive clothes, money and food for it. Dulan offers job and he says that, "The two of you go, wail, cry, accompany the corpse. You will get money, rice. On the day of the kriya ceremony you will get clothes and food (70). At first Sanichari refused to indulge herself in this job. Later her utter poverty compels her to work as a *Rudali*.

### CONCLUSION

In *Rudali* Maheswata Devi not only reveals the painful life of subaltern women but also she expressed the life of women in upper caste who lacks their power to express their point of view and feelings before their men. The patriarchy society dominates the women in every situation. The gender issues played a prominent role in the novel *Rudali* which is clearly portrayed in the life of Sanichari. The male people in the story like Sanichari's relatives disappeared from her life one by one. Her husband expired by consuming sour milk. Her lovable son died due to heavy tuberculosis. Her grandson Haroa left her house, likewise continuously the male character's in the life of Sanichari faded away and left her alone in order to face her own fate lonely. The only male character who helps her in critical situation is Dulan. He provides some suggestion he says that "Look here Budhua's ma, there's no bigger God than one's belly"(45). Finally he advices her for the sake of hunger everything is permissible. Mahesweta Devi in the end of the novel portrayed the real life of every subaltern woman who throws the gender discrimination and injustice provoked to them and arises like a phoenix bird to satisfy their daily hunger. Poverty made them to work as a *Rudali* though it is a painful job. *Rudalis* has to cry for a longtime which would affect their physical body. Sanichari challenged this job and she formed a group and she becomes a famous *Rudali*. Maheswetadevi's novel ends with a good message 'women who are all subjugated and oppressed will not remain same, one day they will wake up and they will expose their power which could not be even imagine by this patriarchal mind.

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