

## Cast, Phallogocentrism and Feudalism in Mahaswetha Devi's "Rudali"

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*Gayathri chakravarthy spivak in her essay 'A literary representation of the subaltern' writes "In the case of class- manipulation, 'poverty' is]the fault of the individuals,not an intrinsic part of a class society";in the case of caste manipulation,the implicit assumption is the reverse:the Brahmin is systemically excellent not necessarily so as an individual".(p.352).*

Mahaswetha Devi was born in 1926 in Dhaka, in a privileged middle-class Bengali family. She is an extraordinary woman who has written and fought for the marginalized tirelessly for the past six decades. She is a culmination of an activist and a writer working for the betterment of subaltern in her own way of protesting against the atrocities on down trodden by the main stream society. Mahaswetha Devi's literary oeuvre comprises stories around contemporary social and political realities, a majority of which span a reasonably free time range in independent India, and are located in fictitious or real settings. Before going to trace the theme of subalternity which is prevailing in Mahaswetha Devi's literary composition, let me explain what subalternity is? What subaltern is? Literally subaltern refers to any person or group of inferior rank and station, whether because of race,class,gender,sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion. Subalternity is subordination,inferiority,exploitation,hegemony by the superior on the inferior which became inevitable in the present capitalist society. Rudali by Mahaswetha Devi is a powerful indictment of the socio-economic system in India. It also comes as an attack on vestiges of feudalism in rural India.

It is ironical that in India, woman is regarded as a representation of Goddess yet she is exploited and marginalized by the upper classes. Rudali records the transformation of Sanichari and her empowerment. Sanichari, the principal character on whom the story concords around is a ganju woman. She is the representative of the gendered subaltern, the subject who is both low caste and woman at the same time. The life of sanichari is used by the writer as metonymy to represent the life of community altogether which at the same time the reality in Indian villages. Economical and social status of an individual depends on the caste and family they are born in. They have their own limitations and are forced to abide by the rules and regulation of the village. In Rudali she portrays the low cast women as victim and as a potentially subversive agent in the phallogocentric brahmanical patriarchy and its values sphere and epistemology. The de-sentimentalized and detached narrative of the novel presents the hopeless predicament of sanichari and fellow low caste women in a north Indian village of brahmanic verna and caste patriarchy in the later half of the twentieth century the news between caste, phallogocentrism and feudalism is the hegemonic structure in this typical rural north Indian village, that shockingly breaks the stereotypes and the romanticized images of the village. Sanichari was a ganju by caste like the other villagers her life too was lived in desperate poverty.

Mahaswetha Devi with the help of the life of sanichari makes the reader to get an idea of the picture of the whole community. How the upper class Brahmins dominate the life of lower class people of the community. The desperate poverty suffered by them makes sanichari as well as the subalterns who are dominated by the ruling elite in every every aspect of their life. Even her psychological aspect of grief is dominated by the upper class in the modes of religion and rituals. Sanichari didn't cry when her mother-in-law died, as her husband and brother-in-law were away in jail; the most important thing to her at that night is to cremate her mother-in-law before dawn keeps her away of wailing. Ramavatar Singh's callous nature is revealed in the very beginning of the short story, as he locks up all the ganjus and dhushads for a meager loss of wheat. It was a threat to the community altogether that they will be thrown out of the village.

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The same psychological subalternity keeps recurring in her life with the death of her brother-in-law and his wife. Sanichari is afraid of religious rituals and ceremonials to be under taken after their cremation. This resists her to control her grief. Death becomes relief to sanichari as at least their own stomachs would be full. Subaltern view of survival is prevailing in every scene of the story. The most disastrous thing happens after this which is the death of her own husband, her responsibility to bring up her son and the religious rituals to be offer persists her stone heart to remain calm after her husband's death. In order to appease Mohanlal, she was forced in to debt to Ramavatar ; she received Rs.20 and put her thumb print on a paper stating that she would repay Rs50 through bonded labour on his fields over the next five years.(Rudali p.74,75) Capitalist ideology of dominating the lower class people with debts is shown when Mahaswetha Devi writes that Ramavatar singh faced a lot of criticism when he wipes out the debt of sanichari at his uncle's death. Dominant class in the society want the subaltern to work like a cattle. Through out the story her mind is occupied in finding a way to feed their stomachs which dominates the sensitive feelings she has. Burning stomach makes her to find means of feeding it not to find emotional satisfaction by weeping before the corpse of her family. While hauling sacks of wheat for Ramavatar's son Lachman,Budhua,sanichari's son contracted the wasting fever and hacking cough of tuberculosis.

Though they are aware of the impending danger by working in Lachman singhs godown,there is no other means of employment to survive for the subaltern.Sanichari's dream of building a life around Budhua are harshly thrashed by the death of her son Budhua and her daughter in law's dispersal from her house makes her to take the responsibility of bringing up her grandson Horoa.With the child in her arms,she busied herself cremating Budhua and tending off queries about her daughter-in-law. Nor could she cry,she would sit ,stunned;then fell in to exhausted slumber.(Rudali p.80) With the co-operation given by Dulan's wife in bringing up Horoa by letting him drink milk from Dhatua's wife and sharing means shows the way subaltern shares the owes of other subaltern.The bondage and relationship between subalterns in this community is shown better than the ruling elite. "Inorder to survive,the poor and oppressed need the support of the other poor and oppressed".(Rudali p.82) Horoa when grown up is taken to Lachman singh to work. Exploitation is hereditary to both the subaltern and the exploiter. Though corporal punishment is banned,Horoa is kicked and beat by Lachman singh with his slipper. Brutality and callous nature of ruling elite on subaltern who work for their meager wages and food is unbearable to Horoa's young blood and he flees away with a music band. While searching for her grandson in a marketplace she meets her childhood friend Bikhni, who becomes a companion to sanichari.

From then on the story undergoes a transformation where both the friends become professional Rudalis.Though sanichari was against Rudali's profession in the beginning, she is forced to become a Rudali because of material constraints. Subalterns body, mind ,spirit are dominated by the ruling elite. Her tears which must be used for her emotional satisfaction turn to a commodity to fill her stomach. Here we need to discuss an interesting character Dulan,a knowledged subaltern and his perception towards the social system of the village and his capacity to guide his co-villagers to find a means of livelihood makes him important in this story.

He empowers and enlightens Sanichari and Bikhni to find an easy means of employment to feed them using the hypocritical social rituals of elite class, Sanichari who was resisted to express her grief through out her life for her family's collapse finally wails ,laments, roars before the corpses of rich man in the society for her own survival. Subalterns forced grief is used by the ruling elite to increase the reputation of their own family. slowly they prosper with Rudali work. As she filled her stomach on chivda and gur,sanichari thought that perhaps her tears had been reserved for the time when she would have to feed herself by selling them.(Rudali p.No-93) The death of feudal lord is the for establishing caste honor and supremacy. They couldn't get time to lament for their own family members and appoint Rudali's for wailing before them but they worry about their supremacy on lower castes. Subaltern perception towards their relationship is, they are busy in finding the keys of dead man instead of lamenting for his death. Amongst us, when someone dies, we all mourn. Amongst rich, family members are too busy trying to find the keys to the safe. they forget all about tears.(Rudali P.No.91) This system is used by Sanichari and her friend Bikhni to survive. Her fate secludes her once again with the death of Bikhni.Subaltern is not only dominated by the dominant class but also the nature and fate deceives her.

With the death of Bikhni she is forced to go to the Tohri market to find co-rudalis where she accepts her daughter-in-law who became a whore after leaving home. The author narrating the story of sanichari reveals the life of other women

who succumb to the temptation of becoming whores to malik mahajans to enjoy the comforts of life when they are young like her daughter-in-law. These subalterns and their children are thrown away to the whore market when they become old. Gayathri chakravarthy spivak in her essay 'A literary representation of the subaltern' writes "In the case of class-manipulation, 'poverty[ is]the fault of the individuals,not an intrinsic part of a class society";in the case of caste manipulation,the implicit assumption is the reverse:the Brahmin is systemically excellent not necessarily so as an individual".(p.352) Subalterns in Rudali silently bares the brutality of elite class in no way they think of a better world for themselves.They lead life according to the wish of elite class and struggle for their survival. It's the malik-mahajans who've turned them into whores,ruined them, then kicked them out,isn't that so?( Rudali P.no-115) It's the malik-mahajans who've turned them into whores,ruined them, then kicked them out,isn't that so?( Rudali P.no-115) By the end of the story sanichari leads the team of Rudalis to wail before the corpse of Gambir singh turning more empowered in sustaining in a dominant society.

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