

**M**MARGINAL **V**OICES IN **M**AHASWETA **D**DEVI'S **R**RUDALI

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**Abstract**

*Literature has been a major voice to propagate and nurture the social, cultural, economic and political ideologies of a society .Writers have been spending their energy for the same in order to light marginal and suppressed voices from the socio-economic peripheries. The social outcastes, marginal and suppressed subjects are getting a platform these days through literary texts. Mahaswata Devi's novella, Rudali brings forth the voices, sufferings, and the agonies of the people from the social margins of a rural trope in Bengal, India. The text explicates the sufferings of Sanichari, the focal female character who suffers for generations together. She is exploited by her senior generation- her mother-in-law, her husband and her son-Budhua and his wife. All these, though belong to her own community- her own family, they push her to the margins to suffer alone. The present paper is an attempt to focus on Mahaswata Devi's Rudali as a cultural record which brings forth the sufferings of the oppressed classes and castes. The neo-feudalism in India has its roots firmly grounded in caste which exploits the marginal and peripheral castes. The patriarchal cryptograph at domestic and communal level on the one hand and the strong grip of feudalism push the women of lower caste to margins. The sufferings of Sanichari are vocalized by Mahasweta Devi in a very poignant and appealing way in her novella, Rudali. In addition to this, the economic and sexual marginality push these characters to further marginality.*

**Key words: Marginality, margin, periphery, patriarchy lower caste.**

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## MARGINAL VOICES IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S RUDALI

- B.K.PAIKRAO

Mahasweta Devi is one of the eminent voices in Bengali Literature. Her writings configure more the social problems in her geographical trope. 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 socio-economic and religious system. The novella presents the static, unchanging pastoral corrupt system of dominant classes and castes and the exploitation of the lower classes and castes. Mahasweta Devi, at the beginning of the novel, places her central character Sanichari in the arena of low-caste with desperate poverty. The problems of Sanichari are also the problems of her caste, class and her gender. Unlike any romantic writer the author is hardly interested to portray the physical appearance of the central characters. The physicality of the female characters – the very vehicle of the author's creative trope-is absent in Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali*. Mahasweta Devi's major concern is the social, political, cultural and economic 'down and out 'ness of a sect which is inseparable from a society. Mahasweta Devi spends very little ink and space in her text to amplify the physical attributes of her protagonist, when she meets her childhood playmate.

“They eyed each other closely, before each relaxed in the realization that the other was no better off than her. Like sanichari, Bikhni's wrists, throat and forehead sport no jewellery other than blue tattoo mark. Both wear pieces of cork in their ears instead of earrings, their hair is rough and ungroomed ”.

Further, the author concentrates more on the pangs of the female protagonist who echoes the agonies of other female characters in the text, as

well. In fact, Sanichari belongs to the social marginality which remains far off from the socio-cultural and economical focus. Her marginality becomes graver as she is a female, and is further dominated by the males of her own caste and community.

Religion further impoverish and enclave causing indebtedness through its web of demand and obligations. The author brings together 'have and have not' on the same path for neglecting their responsibilities of nourishing their old relatives. Poor do not have money to spend for the medicinal treatment of their relatives, where as aristocratic have plenty of money, but unwilling to spend a single paisa for the treatment of their old relatives. There is a competition among the rich fellows to spend huge amount on the death ceremonies of their relatives only for the sake of gaining prestige. Mahaswata Devi sidesteps gender issues, patriarchy and more highlights on the community relations. Dulan becomes a guiding star for Sanichari in every juncture of her life steps. After Bikhni's death Sanichari is under pressure to leave to work as Rudali, Dulan understand the gravity of situation and says to Sanichari,

"Look Budhua's ma, it is wrong to give up one's land and your profession of funeral wailing is like your land you must not give it up".

Community is a medium of offence for the exploiters at the same time it become the form of protection and strength for exploited. The writer stresses on the importance of community for the weaker section of the society, the community bondage between the poor and oppressed is strong enough for survival of the each and all of the community. There are number of examples depicts in the novel by the author about how the poor and oppressed help and cooperate other poor and oppressed in their respective communities. The author portrays with examples that the marginalized men and women help and support each other, on the contrary the upper caste and class people cheat betrays their relatives for gaining wealth, money, land, and property. It is impossible for the marginalized people to survive in the village without the support of each other. The author presents the central character Sanichari work very hard besides with her husband, her son and her grandson to support her family for survival and livelihood. Sanichari and her childhood playmate Bikhni are abandoned by their

family accepted by the bondage of community and friendship.

Mahaswata Devi explores the theme of twice marginalized sector of community blamed as prostitutes. Dulan blames the money lenders are responsible for the increasing number of prostitutes in the villages. The landlords used physically the young women of the low caste and discarded them after their need is over just like use and throw. Some of them beget even children from such women but reject their responsibilities as a parent. Some women run away from their homes and accepted unwillingly the profession of prostitute for better option of livelihood, these women becomes prostitute for the sake of feeding their stomach and save them from starvation. The young women of the village having no clothes, no food and no self respect turns towards the profession of prostitution. The prostitutes don't earn enough to fulfill their stomach nor do they regain their self respect. The text resolves around the issue of prostitute, the daughter in law of Sanichari escapes from poverty ridden existence leaving behind all her duties and responsibilities even her small son, driven by hunger and need in excess of what her daily life can offer. Prostitutes is also a outcome of exploitative system of rich people, prostitutes are the victim of these social, political and economical system which is used by the aristocratic fellow

The text of *Rudali* highlight on the bond aging relation between women, the relation between Sanichari and Bikhni is off course close, sensitive, affectionate and supportive. Sanichari meets Bikhni in the market place, where she is searching her grandson is already lost every member of her family, she is free from all other ties and relations. On the other hand Bikhni is equally abandoned by her son; leave her home with no plan about where to go. She prepares to survive by begging at some railway station if necessary. In every domain of life such as social, financial, caste, gender, age, family these women are tribally equal. Bikhni is delighted with Sanichari's house, she loves a household work, she clean the house, clothes mats and quilts, she fetch water from the river and with little effort start vegetable patch in front of Sanichari's house.

The dreams of the marginalized people are very simple, straight forward



and ordinary, but these dreams are never fulfilled. The central character of the novel, Sanichari has a simple dream to live peacefully in the bosom of her family surrounded by the grand-children ,she desires to buy a wooden comb for her hair ,to wear bangles for a full year , neither of her dreams are materialized. Her aspiration of sharing a bowl of gud and sattu with her grandson in the winter season is unfulfilled .Even another important character in the novel Bikhni has a very simple desire to meet her son in one of her relatives marriage is never fulfilled. The author devotes much of the text to tracing evolution into a professional team; she also insists that this is a story of survival .The major concern of the text is to establish itself, as reality and not fiction.

The harsh realities of poverty, exploitation, the struggle for survival and deaths are exposed in the brutal detail by the writer in the novel .The gender issues are secondary as discourse of class in the text .The patriarchy is also no more dominant factor t in the text, the male characters in the novel specially relatives' to Sanichari fade away from her life one by one. Her husband passed away by drinking sour milk which is used for cleaning the idol of lord Shiva .Her loving and hard working son Budhua passed away due to the dangerous disease tuberculosis .Sanichari's son Budhua is a sensitive thoughtful, gentle carving both to his mother and his wife.Her grandson Haroa also run away from her house leaving behind old , lonely woman .There is only one fellow from her community who help her whenever she need his advice, at the beginning Dulan advices Sanichari "... pick up a nice stone from the banks of Kuruda river. And anoint it with oil and sindor and proclaim that Mahabirji had come to me in my dreams. ....collect offering form the devout." He also give suggestion to Sanichari that " Look here, Budhua's ma, there's no bigger god than one's belly. For the belly sake everything is permissible. Ramji Maharaj said so. Finally he says to them to become Rudali just to wail cry accompany the corpse and you will get food clothes and thus survive yourselves. Mahasweta Devi at the closing of the text comprised the marginalized and the outcaste intervening to the center of the society. The writer throughout the text represented the marginalized voices through central and other various characters. Throughout in Mahasweta Devi's varies fiction

women's subjugation is portrayed as linked to the oppressions of caste and class.

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