



## **Race, Gender And Marginality In Mahasweta Devi's Rudali**

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### **Abstract**

Using Robert Young's concept of subalternity, which is better suited to justify the claim that subalterns can speak if provided with an environment that enables them to flourish socially and economically, this paper aims to critically investigate Mahasweta Devi's short story Rudali, which deconstructs Spivak's notion of subalternity. These ladies, Sanichari and Bikhni, are a crystal-clear illustration of the invincibility of the spirit that never succumbs to apathy, even in the most difficult situation. When Sanichari and Bikhni take up the practice of wailers for the funeral ceremony, their lives undergo a dramatic upheaval. Here, we'll look into the text to see how the gendered underclass copes with a hopeless socioeconomic situation.

### **Introduction**

According to this theory, a Dalit writer's ability to grasp the plight of their people is unsurpassed. Even though she is not a member of the Dalit community, Mahasweta Devi can convey the core of the Dalit narrative. In other words, this writer's humanitarian approach has disproved the presumption that Dalits are helpless. It's clear from her short tales and novels that she is the authentic voice of the subordinates. All of her key characters show a fragile and cursed image of the female Dalit characters, such as Jashoda, Draupadi, Dhowli, Doulati, Gangor etc. in all her literary works depicting the human experience. As one of her short tales, "Douloti the Bountiful," puts it, "Doulati is throughout India": "all subaltern women who are physically and financially abused." (Imaginary Maps: Three Stories: 1995, 160).

"Can the Subaltern Speak?" asks Spivak in her article. "... the subaltern as a female is much more profoundly in darkness than subaltern males" is a reasonable observation. (193). Because Spivak uses the word "subaltern" in a restrictive manner. Robert Young's more inclusive definition of the term, which includes "subordinated classes and peoples," appear more appropriate. (Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction 6).

Rudali, a short story by Mahasweta Devi, depicts the economic, social, and religious persecution of Dalit women. Three forms of oppression are at work here: caste, class, and gender. The text praises the feudal lords' deaths to secure their caste superiority, which is a major theme. The

dominant group mourned Upper-caste individuals who died in the past because their death was seen as a huge blow to their power over lower-castes: “Greetings from Chacha, of course! The lower classes were afraid to speak out when they were still around. The sons of dushads and ganjus stayed away from government schools out of dread of you. Who will be responsible for all of this now?” (88). In some of the country’s most rural regions, the custom is still practiced. The ‘chacha’, Bhairav Singh, was a nuisance to the hamlet’s lower-caste ganjus and dushads in the book being studied. To demonstrate his caste supremacy, his nephew Lachman Singh went to great lengths to make his uncle’s funeral memorable. Because of this, the Brahmanic patriarchy robs women and minorities of their dignity, by making them weep over the bodies of upper-caste rulers. Wailing, which is humiliating for Sanichari and Bikhni and profitable for the whole Dalit female community, is now a part of their daily lives.

For the sake of emphasizing how their struggles are shared by people of all social classes, castes, and genders, Sanichari and Bikhni tell their stories. Together, Sanichari and Bikhni stand for the whole Dalit community. As stated by Anjum Katyal, “The person is historicized, not accentuated to the exclusion of context.”(3). The socio-religious system and Sanichari’s poverty are exacerbating her challenges, making any notion of empowerment absurd, if not utopian. The religious establishment uses subtle, unreligious tactics to control these ladies, while the pot-bellied priests are comforted by hollow rituals, and the destitutes are left to their own devices. After her mother-in-law’s death, Sanichari cannot weep since she was preoccupied with meaningless rituals. A cholera-infected Shiva idol milk provided by the affluent kills her husband. In the fields of Lachman Singh, the son of Ramavatar, her son Budhua is succumbed to disease and dies. Later, her daughter-in-law Parbatia and her grandson Haroa abandon her since they can’t handle the difficult circumstances.

A second Dalit female character, Bikhni, has the same destiny as Sanichari and begins living in Tahad hamlet with her. When Dulan, a man in their village, inspires them to become rudalis, their lives take a change for the better. When things are tough, Dulan serves as a reminder of the need for community solidarity. He teaches them that there is always a glimmer of hope even in the direst of situations. The author’s major point is that survival is a matter of strategy. Sanichari and Bikhni, two destitute Dalit women who have no other means of surviving, seek their social and economic resurrection under the wise leadership of Dulan. For Sanichari and Bikhni, two angry but brave elderly women, this ‘commodification of sadness’ turns out to be a godsend in disguise. They have given new life to this otherwise cruel profession of weeping. They could show off their wealth and status after Bhairav Singh passed away.

Sanichari and Bikhni’s initial appearance as wailors established a household name in the neighborhood. They didn’t skimp on anything in their quest to beat the randis. They wept and sang Bhairav Singh’s praises. So powerful was their weeping that even the randis were forced to confess defeat. Because of the heightened demand after the death of Bhairav Singh, wealthy residents in the region began to seek inviting Sanichari and Bikhni to serve as wailors as a kind of prestige war.

Sanichari displays her wailing prowess with considerably greater vigor after the demise of her devoted mate Bikhni. She and the other rudalis surrounded Gambhir Singh’s corpse and began weeping and pounding their heads on the ground. “The Sanichari we see towards the conclusion of the novel –out-going, cunning, manipulative-is considerably different from the stoic, long-suffering but restrained lady we saw earlier.”(22).

Gendered subalterns are particularly marginalized in this short narrative, suggesting that resistance has little effect on their lives. Characters like Sanichari and Bikhni reflect the Dalit women whose daily routines have remained mostly unchanged for a long time now. Human existence is a mockery if there are any changes. As a result, their evolutionary trajectory does not point to radical changes in their daily routines. In contrast to stereotypes of ‘pure subaltern women,’ those shown in Rudali are the ladies of vision. However, they cannot make rapid progress due to the numerous types

of tyranny that surround them. Despite India, being the world's fourth largest economy, resources are not dispersed fairly throughout the country. Dalit women compete for top positions in the executive and political arenas, while others fight for their lives. This is paradoxical.

In twenty-first-century India, women have emerged out of their conventional pictures, but for the Dalit women in backward regions, the dominant forces of caste and gender have always been stifling their advancement because of the prevailing aspects of caste and gender. When Sanichari and Bikhni go to such lengths to do Rudali's duties to ensure their own life, it's a farce of human nature. Compared to Jashoda, who appears in the short tale "The Breast Giver," both of these characters might be grouped as someone who, although being from a Brahmin household, goes to extraordinary measures to feed the children of the Halder family. To nurse the children of the Halder family, she conceives every year. For these women, "the stomach is more significant than anything else." (116).

Much of the book is devoted to trace their development as professional wailers' squad. Bikhni, on the other hand, has no reservations about embracing this profitable career after much mental deliberation. Dulan helps them to become rudalis, but Sanichari has reservations about the profession's flexibility and acceptability. "Won't there be discussion in the village?" she asks. (92). Because she is the one who sends word of the death of a wealthy landlord or Mahajan, Bikhni seems to have taken this job more seriously and religiously. They're not afraid to make a deal, though, and their influence may be felt at all times. Even after Bikhni's death, Dulan remained Sanichari's genuine tutor. He argued like a lawyer and urged her not to abandon her career at any cost. He states, "...Your profession of funeral wailing is like your land." (114). Despite his pleas, Sanichari refuses to send her daughter-in-law to the crying business back to the Tohri hamlet, where she works as a prostitute. He is certain that the tragic plight of Sanichari and Bikhni has nothing to do with abstract concepts like "fate." (114)

That Sanichari and Bikhni, two real matriarchs in a patriarchal society, strive to break stereotypes is not news. As a result, they serve as role models for other women by demonstrating a greater degree of self-determination and autonomy. Having no control over their lives would have been like a conflict without a goal. As a result, regardless of the situation, they take control of their destinies, even though they know that their living standard will never improve. Nevertheless, they are committed to pursuing the ever-widening path of struggle and perseverance, even though they know that their living standard will never improve.

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