

Silent Echoes: Interpreting The Unspoken Emotions of Dalit Women Through Sanichari in Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali*

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Abstract

This article delves into the portrayal of Sanichari's stoic nature in Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali* as evidence of the collective unconscious of unspoken emotions within Dalit women. Sanichari's inability to express grief openly amidst anguish and desolation reflects not only her struggles but also the broader societal dynamics of systemic oppression and marginalization. Rooted in centuries-old traditions and reinforced by discriminatory practices, superstitions, and societal norms, it perpetuates a cycle of fear, ignorance, and subjugation among Dalit women. Through Sanichari's character, this play exposes the profound impact of societal constraints on the emotional landscape of marginalized communities. Her stoicism serves as a poignant reminder of the strength inherent within Dalit women. This article acknowledges the collective unconscious of suppressed emotions of Dalit women as the reason for their stoicism.

Keywords: Collective Unconscious, Stoicism, Dalit women, oppression, marginalization

Introduction

Literature is increasingly becoming a platform to amplify the voices of women from various backgrounds, ensuring a more prosperous and more inclusive representation. The emphasis is shifting towards portraying women as complex individuals with their desires, aspirations, and flaws. The portrayal of the female psyche in literature has undergone a significant transformation. While exposing the harsh realities of womanhood, literature apparently throws light on the Dalit women who faced a triple burden: caste, gender, and poverty. It goes beyond mere victimhood. It delves into the psychological impact of living on the margins. Dalit women's literature serves as a powerful testament to their courage and resistance.

It plays a pivotal role in bringing to light the unheard voices of women facing immense social and economic hardship. It serves as a powerful tool for advocacy and awareness, dismantling the structures of oppression and paving the way for a more just and equitable society.

Mahasweta Devi stands as a towering figure in Indian literature. A literary enthusiast and a tireless activist, Devi championed the cause of the marginalized, particularly the Adivasi (tribal) communities of India, throughout her life. Devi's literary brilliance is evident through works like *Hajar Churashir Maa* (Mother of 1084), *Aranyer Adhikar* (The Rights of the Forest), *Jhansi Rani* (biography of Rani Lakshmi Bai), *Agnigarbha* (collection of short stories), *Rudali* (The Weeping Woman). Etc. *Rudali* is not originally a play by Mahasweta Devi but a powerful short fiction exploring the harsh realities faced by Dalit women in rural India. However, it was adapted into a critically acclaimed play by Usha Ganguli in 1992.

Usha Ganguli carved a unique space in the landscape of Indian theatre. A prolific director, actor, and social activist, she spearheaded the introduction and evolution of Hindi theatre in Bengali-dominated Kolkata. Her legacy lies in her unconventional productions that challenged societal norms and ignited conversations on social issues. Both versions of the book were translated by Anjum Katyal and were published along with an introductory essay. Anjum Katyal is the author of *Habib Tanvir: Towards an Inclusive Theatre* and *Badal Sircar: Towards a Theatre of Conscience*. She has translated Habib Tanvir's *Charandas Chor*, *Hirma ki Amar Kahani* (The Living Tale of Hirma), etc. She also writes poetry.

Rudali: A story of survival and social commentary. The story revolves around Sanichari, a poor, low-caste woman forced into the peculiar profession of a "Rudali" - a professional mourner hired by affluent families to dramatically lament the deaths of their kin. Mahasweta Devi exposes the brutal realities of caste oppression, poverty, and the vulnerability of women on the fringes of society. Sanichari's character embodies the struggles against these deeply ingrained social evils.

This article will delve deeper into specific instances from the novel where Sanichari exhibits her stoicism, meticulously examining the nuances employed in each situation. Additionally, the analysis will consider the role of gender and societal pressures in shaping Sanichari's emotional expression through the 'Collective Unconscious' and her unique profession as a Rudali. This provides an understanding of Sanichari's psyche by integrating Jung's concept of the Collective Unconscious along with the social and economic realities that significantly influence her experiences.

Exploring Strictness Of Sanichari Through Collective Unconscious

Women, in general, are perceived and discriminated against as an inferior gender. This scenario of subjugation is deepened for the worst when it comes to Dalit women (termed as untouchable). They have a horrific chronicle because Dalit communities in India themselves are being treated as lower in status by upper caste people. Women, due to the nature of their gender,

confront multiple levels of discrimination, be it caste or gender-based, economic, political, or social. These underprivileged Dalit women are deprived of all kinds of fair and equal treatment.

A renowned Dalit woman activist, Ruth Manorama, entitles Dalit women as 'The Dalits of the Dalits,' 'The least among the Dalit,' and 'Thrice Oppressed - on being a Dalit, women and poor.' From a young age, they are discriminated against for being Dalit by upper-caste men and women and are also oppressed for being a woman by upper-caste and lower-caste men. For the worst, they are held under the clutches of Dalit patriarchy; they tolerate discrimination and bear torture in their household, within family, marriage, and in society.

These types of constraints in Indian society are deeply entrenched in the psyche of Dalit women, and this often manifests in a profound emotional numbness, and they emerge as stoic individuals. This emotional numbness is evident in Sanichari, the Dalit protagonist in the short fiction 'Rudali' penned by Mahasweta Devi.

"Sanichari felt an earthquake within. She exploded. Cry? Me? Don't you know? I can't shed tears? These two eyes of mine are scorched?" (Devi 90). This line in the work, Rudali, baffles the readers about the numb and stoic psyche that Sanichari possesses. Analyzing her psyche through the lens of Carl Jung's concept of 'Collective Unconscious' unveils how the normalization of suffering and suppression had wrought a vicious scheme. The restrictions as a Dalit woman are deeply ingrained within the collective unconscious and passed down to generations, shaping their lives with this collective trauma. A gist of the turmoil that Sanichari underwent is enlisted below.

"My life has been nothing but the stove, the chakki, and outside jobs." Sanichari also says, "My life has been spent working, working" (Devi 154). Sanichari, the protagonist of this heart-wrenching play, becomes entangled in a despicable and corrupt loop where survival is the crucial concern. The focus is shifted to Devi's preoccupation with the suffering of a low-caste woman and her struggle to survive in the face of abject poverty and starvation. In the above-quoted lines, Devi has tried to shed light on the fact that generations of Dalit women work tirelessly to feed themselves. Sanichari's physical exhaustion is evident in these lines. Her life is confined to the burning stove, jarring chakki, and tiring menial jobs. Despite the social evils of caste, gender, and poverty, Devi highlights the survival and empowerment of a downtrodden Dalit woman through the characterization of Sanichari.

"No, I never had the time to weep. They all died one by one. My in laws, my brother-in-law and his wife, my husband, my son. I didn't shed a single tear." (Devi 154). Her life was replete with personal tragedies and miseries. To the readers' astonishment, Sanichari was never able to shed tears whenever her loved ones were deceased. She lost her in-laws, husband, and son; her daughter-in-law ran off, abandoning her son to become a prostitute, but in all these dire circumstances, Sanichari engaged herself in cremating the dead and performing kriyas. She never shed a drop of tears, even during all these traumatic and grief-stricken events.

“They call me a daain- say it’s as if I was born just to devour others.” (Devi 154). The weight of superstitions in the collective unconscious of Dalit women. Dalit girls are inculcated from an early age with superstitions that define every phase of their lives from birth to death. Sanichari was constantly accused by Somri, her mother-in-law, of being born on and named after an inauspicious Saturday. There prevailed a superstition that such a person would be implicitly the reason for his/her loved ones' demise. The accusation from Somri for being an unlucky daughter-in-law frustrated Sanichari.

When society criticizes Sanichari for not shedding tears even in anguish and desolation, her stoic nature is defined in this paper as a result of the collective unconscious comprising the suppressed emotions of a Dalit woman. Renowned analytical psychologist Carl Jung, in his book *The Structure of the Psyche*, propagates that "All the most powerful ideas in history go back to archetypes". The character of Sanichari in *Rudali* contains many archetypal images central to Carl Jung's concept of the collective unconscious. Here are two significant archetypes Sanichari modeled.

The persona archetype is how we showcase ourselves to the outside world. In this archetype, people adapt to the world around them and fit in with the society in which they live.

Sanitary is the archetype of a mother, representing unconditional love. Despite facing tremendous hardships and tragedy, she puts the welfare of her son, Bhudhua, and grandson, Haroa, above and beyond her circumstances and demonstrates a solid maternal feeling. She symbolizes the universal concept of maternal sacrifice and protection. Sanichari’s motherly concern is evident when she chides Parbatia for planning to work for Lachman Singh. She tries to protect her from the whorehouse.

As a marginalized woman in rural India, Sanichari also carries elements of shadow archetype with her. She represents the oppressed and marginalized sections of society and confronts systemic injustice and social inequality.

“Wailing, rolling on the ground and beating one's head, five rupees two sikkas.” (Devi 97). Rudali’s role, which is expected to act out sadness and mourning for strangers while suppressing her grief, reinforces Sanichari’s emotional detachment. Playing this social role, she symbolizes the collective trauma that is prevalent in Dalit communities, where grief is commodified.

Summing Up

The act of wailing becomes a source of income for Sanichari but also highlights the hypocrisy of the upper class, who prioritize elaborate displays of grief over genuine emotions. Her inability to cry genuinely, even in her moments of grief, becomes a further source of societal scorn. Through her role as Rudali, a professional mourner, Sanichari symbolizes the unseen and overlooked parts of society tasked with doing emotional labor for the privileged. Her experiences shed light on the collective shadows – the dark, unconscious aspects of human nature and society that are often suppressed or denied. The portrayal of Sanichari’s stoic nature in *Rudali* is a

touching illustration of the collective unconscious of repressed emotions among Dalit women. Sanichari's inability to openly express her grief is a reflection not only of her struggle but of a broader social dynamic that normalizes grief and suppresses emotions among Dalit women.

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