

Traumatic Muteness and Psychological Struggles of Woman in *Rudaali*: A Cinematic Exploration of Silence and Suffering

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Abstract

Ruddali is the film based on Mahashewata Devi's (1979) short story of the same name, originally written in Bengali. The term Rudaali refers to a professional weeper in Rajasthan, India. Through this story, Mahashweta Devi has attacked customs and traditions that are part and parcel of Indian culture. Most communities, like Rudaali in India, hired various customs and rituals, like birth, Marriage, baby shower ceremony, etc. Devi highlights the exploitation of lower-class women and gender inequality. The protagonist of this film is Sanichari, Sanichari got this name because she born on Saturday which is unsuspicious day according to the Hinduism. Another reason is that when she was born, her father passed away. and her mother running from home with his lover to join the theater troupe. Since childhood, Sanchari was blamed for her misfortunes and abandoned by her mother for this all over the village. People cursed her and treated her inhumanly. Sanichari's marriage with an alcoholic husband, Ganju, who was the irresponsible husband, brings further hardship in her life, and he dies from cholera. Even her only son, named Budhiya, was the hope of her life, but he also married the prostitute without his mother's permission and ran away with his prostitute wife to leave his mother. Thakur's son, Lakshman Singh, loves her, but she has not accepted his proposal because of social customs. Sanichari is a woman who, over her life, never shed a tear over anyone's death, even though her husband died. She performed various roles in her life as a mother, wife, and daughter-in-law, but all left her alone. Her trauma means her muteness of tears embodies the silent trauma of women in patriarchal society. Traumatic experiences are always a part of the unconscious mind. Her suppression of emotions and how trauma manifests as muteness. Using psychoanalytic theories, the study examines how traumatic experiences shape the unconscious mind and influence behavior. Sometimes human beings can lose their mantle life. But Sanichari is opposite to that; she remains strong but lives her life in exploitation and hunger. The turning point in her life comes when she meets Bhikhani, a professional mourner who is later revealed to be her mother. This revelation finally breaks Sanichari's emotional barriers, allowing her to express her grief. Through *Rudaali*, the film critiques India's feudal system and societal expectations imposed on women who silently endure suffering but ultimately find a purpose in their profession.

Key words: Struggle and Exploitation, False Self, Adaptation Psychology

Mahashweta Devi is one of the prominent post-colonial writers. The author wants to explain how the Indian socioeconomic system is powerfully indicted in Indian society. the narrative itself, the lingering effects of rural India's feudalism are

attacked. She has embraced subalterns' condition, which is depicted through black humour.

Rudaali is a heartwarming story about a woman struggling in her roles as a friend, wife, mother, and grandmother. The black

humour is reflected in the order to have a funeral celebration in a wealthy family where the wealthy landlords wait for their family members to pass away. *Rudaali* is one of the strange and poor professions to mourn on the death of rich people. Mahasweta Devi herself has exposed the hypocritical nature of society here. The film is moving around Sanichari and Bhikhni, two low-caste women who are portrayed as the epitome of the human spirit's invincibility, which never succumbs to an escapist impulse, even under trying circumstances.

In the present paper, I highlighted the struggle and journey of a woman from a lower caste to *Rudaali* in the film *Rudaali*. *Rudaali* is one of the best Indian Hindi National Award-winning films, which was directed by Kalpana Lajmi and written by Lajmi and Gulzar in 1993. This film is based on Mahasweta Devi's short story, which was written in the Bengali language. Dimple Kapadia performed the main role as Sanichari and won Best Actress honours at the 8th Damascus International Film Festival.

This film is depicted about the hardened journey of the woman Sanichari. But all over her life, she faced misfortune and abandonment; she never expressed her grief through tears and never cried. Women's tears are a symbol of her incapability to bear everything. Males and women both are different. In Indian society, males never cry like women. The title itself defines the contradictory situation because the film, based on *Rudaali*, means a group of weeping women, but the protagonist never cries except at the end. Of course, Sanichari is different from the stereotype. Indian women who used tears against the inhumation, pain, and domestic violence.

Sanichari is not exempted from this, but why she is not crying is an important question all over the movie. Psychologically, it is called ego psychology. Human conscious and unconscious minds activate both in his action and understanding. Unconscious part includes all repressed desires, ambitions, fears, and grief. Sanichari consciously follows the rules and customs, restricting everyone and listening mutely, and bears all insults and blame from childhood. Her emotions are burnt under the customs and rituals. Her tears also dried under the trauma. Her silence becomes a defense mechanism, allowing her to survive in an unforgiving society.

Her mute trauma was identified only by Bhikhani, who is her mother. She herself is responsible for her daughter's suffering. Bhikhani thinks since birth her daughter has spent explorations and deprived life. Sanichari answered the truth that Bhikhani is her own mother. Bhikhani listens to her love. She tried all her life for love, respect, and happiness.

Sanichari is the protagonist in the movie. When the story started, Bhikhani asked about Sanichari's life story. Flashback method used in film. Thakur Ram Avatar Singh, landlord and zamindar of the village of Burna, which is in the desert. He is on the deathbed. According to him, any relative is not crying on his death. So ordered the servant to call *Rudaali* for his death. Bhikhani is the *Rudaali* who was appointed as the death mourning weeper for his death. For that purpose, Bhikhani stayed with widow Sanichari. Sanichari told her that she was born on Saturday, and so her name is Sanichari. Saturday is an inauspicious day according to Hindu astrology. When she was born, her father had passed away, and her mother ran away to join the theater. She

has been blaming since her childhood. But Sanichari was never afraid to face the society.

Sanichari's marriage with Ganju, who was a drunkard. She had a son named Budhiya. He alone took the responsibility of the family and her son and mother-in-law. In India, poverty is an issue because of the centralization of money. The landlord is rich; the reason is that because of poverty, he grabbed land from poor people. Poor and lower castes are lower because of the lack of work for hand and lack of education. Their whole class is deprived and exploited because of poverty. Sanichari was cursed by society and lived in miserable conditions before marriage and after marriage.

Her whole struggle is not only on the surface level that everyone can see but also on a psychological level, where she hides her reality under the strongest mind condition. In psychoanalytical conditions, it is a false self where the mother creates the child as they continuously misinterpret. The strange thing is here about the Sanichari's mother not ever being presented to develop her, but her personality is reflected by her parents. Since childhood, the 'true self' had remained hidden under the shield of a 'false self' syndrome, where an individual suppresses their true emotions to conform to societal expectations. Sanichari lost her identity made by the society, which is derived from others.

Her struggles are the symbol that in every stage she followed the rituals. She sacrificed her emotional sense for her struggles and society. She got her ultimate man in the form of Thakur's son, who gave her respect and love, but she denied the life of a prostitute. But her son Budhiya married a prostitute, which is indigestible to her and her principle. She fights for her daughter-in-law in the grocery shop with Lala and

Pandit and tells them my son married the lady whom he loves in spite of the prostitute he married with her and gave her respect in society. But for the result, Budhiya's wife had an abortion, and Budhiya left her alone and ran away from the home. But Sanichari still fights with life for survival. Her home and land were grabbed by Thakur because she could not have paid fifty rupees for a pundit for Hindu rituals after the death call as Pinddaan. For that, Thakur took her home and land, which his son gave her for the ceremony where she sang the song, and as the token of a gift, she got her home and land. The film explored the feudal system in India. The exploitations of the poor on an economic level, caste, and class levels.

Sanichari got the two men in her life, her husband and Thakur Laxman Singh. Both are opposite to each other. Budhiya was a drunkard and irresponsible husband. Thakur was offered her job in his Haveli as appointed maid for his wife. He always said she speaks with him without bowing her head. He expressed his love for her, but she denied it. She has feelings for Thakur. When she got news from his servant that he left the village after the death of his father. Sanichari went to meet him. Thakur also does not pressure her for a relationship. He still cares for her in her old age. She wasn't rebellious about her social norms. She spends her whole life following the tradition of what society thinks about her. She remains alone in spite of all. She accepts loneliness in her life, never blaming her husband and son when they both left her alone. And not being the mistress of Thakur, she accepted widow life and her struggle for survival. Sanichari is shown as a brave and strong woman. People think about her that she is a senseless and emotionless woman. But her trauma was hidden in her unconscious mind, which

never saw society and her own husband and son.

The end of the movie is the turning point of Sanichari's life, where she met with Bhikhani. She didn't know Bhikhani was her mother. Bhikhani's profession is *Rudaali*. She called by Thakur to mourn for his death. Bhikhani stayed with Sanichari. She is the first person in the life of Sanichari who tried to open her mind and listen to her. She expressed everything about her feelings, scars of her heart. Sanichari was surprised why an unknown person cried for my grief. Bhikhani said to cry for her own grief, which she never enclosed, freeing herself from all her agony, repressions, and lifelong suffering, which she controlled every time.

Sanichari is afraid about Bhikhani's departure. The first time she got the loving person in her life. When Bhikhani died, Sanichari was loudly crying for her, and lastly, she knew the truth that Bhikhani was her mother. The end is very meaningful when, at one time, the news of the death of Bhikhani and Thakur Ram Avatar. At last, Sanichari got the purpose of life. Her mother taught her profession. Where at last she mourned on the death of Thakur Ramavatar as the replacement for her mother.

The title is suggestive and critically focused on *Rudaali*. *Rudaali* is one who is mourning the death of rich people, but Sanichari never cries in the film. *Rudaali* reflects two different contrasting meanings: firstly, it means the mute mourning of a woman who never shed her tears, and secondly, the profession that she adopted from her mother. *Rudaali* is a story about a woman weeping for a profession. one who is searching for a reason for her whole life. Finally, when both are connected to each other in the relationship as mother and

daughter. As a mother, Bhikhani understood the hidden grief of Sanichari.

According to the book *Indian Popular Cinema: A Narrative of Cultural Change*, Sanichari is described as "highly vulnerable to all sorts of oppressions. She resists many of them but succumbs to the dominant discourses".

Reetamoni Das and Debarshi Prasad Nath, film scholars, describe Sanichari as one woman who manages to survive through her harsh realities despite the absence of a man through most of her life. They further describe her as a woman who "writes her own history" as she "neither conforms to the societal constructions of the gender nor the hierarchical communal life."

Bhikhani, who is *Rudaali* and a mother of Sanichari, has been appointed for Thakur's death for mourning. When Bhikhani stayed with Sanichari till the Thakur's death. She listened to the whole life story of Sanichari. As a mother, she taught her how to weep artificially. At last when Sanichari knows the truth about her, that she is her mother who gave the purpose and profession of *Rudaali* for her livelihood. She cried madly on her death and cracked her trauma and agony.

India is a country of customs and rituals that carry huge Indian culture according to regions and states. Many communities carry out these rituals. *Rudaali* is one of the communities that are groups of women appointed for the mourns of any rich person. Nidhi Danger Kundalla writes in her novel, *The Lost Generation*, that most women are put on the lowest rung of societal hierarchy and are treated with inferiority because of their widowhood. Some of them work in Thakura's house or dwelling outside the village.

Rudaali is one of the unique communities in Rajasthan, India, which has black-dressed women hired for the mourning of the death of any rich person. From ancient periods, *Rudaali* is part of Rajasthani

funerals. In modern India, these communities are wiped out from India because of their economic and social issues and policies of the government.

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