

Rudali



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## ISSUE Gynocritical Ethnography of the Dalit Women: Usha Ganguli's Rudali

The paper aims to study Ganguli's Hindi play Rudali<sup>1</sup> as a sociological discourse of Dalit woman's experiences in the post colonial India. In his introduction to *Poisoned Bread: Translation from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*, Arjun Dangle gave a genesis of Dalit literature and discussed how it became popular among academic personages.

He noted that Dalit Literature is marked by revolt and negativism, since it is marked by revolt, since it is closely associated with the hopes for freedom of a group of people who, as untouchables, are victims of social, economic, and cultural inequality. (Dangle: ix) He said that Dalit is not caste but: "... a realization and is related to the experiences, joys, and sorrows, and struggles of those in the lowest stratum of society.

It matures with the sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion, and loyalty to science, thus finally ending as revolution...Caste is at the root of most Dalit literature, as its literary manifestation is based on its experiences, the horizons of Dalit literature are expanding. The reason for this, I feel, is that the world ' Dalit' traditionally connotes wretchedness, poverty and humiliation... Dalit means masses exploited and opposed economically, socially, culturally, in the names of religion and other factors.

Dalit writer hopes that this exploited group of people (Gramsci's subalterns) will bring about a revolution in this country... Dalit literature revolts against oppression and exploitation and demands social and economic justice. "

([parenthesis mine] 164- 265) Usha Ganguli's Rudali, a play, was performed on 29 December 1992 at her theatre in Calcutta. It was translated from Hindi

to English by Anjum Katyal. Basically it belongs to the women's theatre movement in India. Usha Ganguli believes that the stage is a place from which women can voice their indigenous. Mee: 2) The chief objective of Ganguli's theatre Rangakamee is to perform Hindi plays attempting to provide " a space in some corner of his (Dalit or Subaltern) over exploited mind, to question. " Ganguli was influenced by Ibsen, Premchand and Mahadevi Verma. For her theatre must concern with social concerns specially with those who have never been occasioned to speak their rights and died of crying help for care and food. By staging such characters Ganguli facilitates dubious questions against constitutional law for social, political and national security.

For her experiencing Dalitness and becoming Dalit are two different things. The first might be revolutionary and recuperating whereas the other a biological curse which can never be improvised until one determines. Ganguli's Rudali is, therefore, different from Mahasweta Devi's novel Rudali. Mahasweta Devi's Rudali declenches factors and ways imitated by oppressive class people to oppress the poor, weak, and subordinated women. Devi concerns herself with class consciousness in Indian society while Ganguli manifested that oppressive class (whatever kind) cannot be exploited until the oppressed accepts the politics of exploitations.

Ganguli's Rudali stages a plot of a woman's struggle for survival and myriad experiences of some other women ruined by exploitative group. Thus Ganguli represented two faces of Dalit women: a. challenging and struggling; and b. submissive and reluctant. Sanichari and Bikhni follow the first face whereas Parbatia and others who practised prostitution as business for

livelihood followed the second face. It dramatizes a story of an oppressed woman due less to her class than her poverty and unsupportive members of her family. Sanichari is the central character of the play.

She is active, responsible and self-dominating woman, though belonging to the poorest background. Throughout the play Ganguli dramatizes two things: a. Man cannot secure women. b. Women whether they belong to the poor or rich are only subject of sexual relationship. Therefore, Mee while analyzing the play in comparison to Mahasweta Devi's novel says that Ganguli's play shifts the emphasis slightly from class to gender; Sanichari represents not an oppressed class, but an oppressed woman. Ganguli says her play is about "all" of us and that Sanichari represents "women in general. She adds, "I believe that the Indian woman, whether it's Sanichari or someone from the middle or upper class, is highly exploited in our society. Somehow I see Sanichari protesting against society [on the] whole." (Mee: 9-10) Anjum Katyul notes that in Mahasweta Devi's novel the upper classes, whereas in Ganguli's play men exploit women. Nonetheless, Ganguli's play retains Mahasweta Devi's economic critique. (Mee 9-10) We can trace a third possibility of dramatic aspect of action performed by Sanichari in Ganguli's Rudali. It is that Sanichari's suffering is only due to her poverty not to class or gender.

Her self dependency represents a challenge to male/class dominated society. But part of the play shows women's suffering partly due to poverty and partly to their submissiveness and reluctance to be self-dependent. They let their characters be ruined like Parbatia. The message that Ganguli wants to render is "Women! Be aware and self-dependent." The play begins,

showing Sanichari's home " a small hut with a courtyard, surrounded by a low boundary wall". Sanichari is shown first grinding wheat in the chakki. Sanichari's mother-in-law, Someri is lying on the charpoy " wrapped in a tattered blanket. Her only son Budhua is suffering from severe cough of an infection disease. The play represents poor condition of a starving family in Indian society. It touches pathetic condition of Dalit women in our rural society. The play starts with a starving cry of Someri: " I want food. Give me a roti. " (93) Sanichari's daughter-in-law, Parbatia, returns from market selling vegetables. She fetched Sanichari two rupees for sold vegetables. Sanichari seems not satisfied getting money less than her expectation and asked reason for it. She doubted at her character.

On asking she revealed that she spent money at bangles, alta, and all that. She does not want to live like poor, though her background was too fatal to improve. She does not have sympathetic touch with her poor and diseased husband and her innocent son, Haroa. She is indifferent and disinterested in domestic responsibility. She, being a woman, has no sense of domestic responsibility. Her culprit femininity embarrassed Sanichari and her expectations of emollient domesticity. She always feels herself emancipated from her duty to serve her husband, son, and other members of the family.

She, often, abuses and emasculates her husband. One evening Budhua dies of coughing, lying on his bed (scene two), but she does not even go to see and ask about his condition. Instead of becoming sorrowful and sharing agony with members of the family, she left home without saying anything to anyone. Ganguli's dialogue sketches a pathetic condition on stage that reveals existence of human being, bracketed with a question mark—is man

(human being), really a man? Sanichari: My son is dying, Parbatia. Parbatia: What can I do about it? I can't go anywhere. Sanichari: Are you human being or an animal?

Is this how your father brought you up? Parbatia: My father taught me well. He taught me to stay far away from the dying. (101) She fled away. Sanichari brought her child, Haroa up. Parbatia re-appears finally among prostitutes in the scene eleven. This is what Ganguli's main concern is. Simone de Beauvoir (1901-86) writes in *The Second Sex* " One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. " But how does she " rather become(s)"? Who does let her feel " her becoming"? These are the questions answered in *Rudali*. The answer is - woman herself. Sanichari, after the death of her relatives, remained alone to suffer.

She, nevertheless, thought to raise her position to survive in the society she belonged to. She was disheartened first by destiny then by her relatives. In such condition, when her grandson also left, she found her old friend, Bikhni (who had also been disappointed of life and her social and personal relatives. ) in a mela. Both were harassed by mahajan. Sanichari and Bikhni started a new life and recovered their condition. They realised their fate and shared all that which made them disheartened. Sanichari painfully told: " I have no one else in my life but him (her grandson), Bikhni. They've all left me one by one. He was my only hope, my only comfort. Even he quarreled with me one day and ran away. I came here hoping to find him. " Bikhni: Arre Sanichari, What can one do, it's all written in one's fate. " (117-118) Sanichari has been cumulatively habituated for carrying every unfortunate event occurred in her life. She bears everything thinking as fatal gift and responsibility. Her silent

pain had no time to let her weep in isolation or crowd. Ganguli dramatises a Dalit Mahila's experience: " 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. They call me a daain - to devour others. " (121) Somewhere else she said: " No one has even thought of me as a human being. " (122-123) Thus Usha Ganguli represented Sanichari as an image of Dalit woman in Indian village. She touches the spirit of Dalit woman's hopeless conditions. Ganguli's staging the subalterns or marginals challenges constitutional laws (so called) made for Dalits. What Ganguli did in her play Rudali has been done by so many Marathi Dalit poets and writers like Sharatchand Muktibodh, Baburao Bagul, R. G. Jadhav, Arjun Dangle. Datta Bhagat etc. and Hindi writers like Premchand etc. In his essay " Dalit Literature is but Human Literature", Baburao Bangul notes that " the cast ridden society and its literature have viewed the Dalit as someone who is mean, disposable, contemptible, and sinful due to his deeds in his past life; he is seen as sorrowful in this life, poor humiliated and without history, one whose ancestors could never hope to acquire respectability in either temples or scriptures. This, in fact, is the suffering, misery, servitude, humiliation, neglect and contempt of Indian society as a whole, and Dalit literature carries the burden upon its heads. " ( Qtd.

By Dangle: 289) This is what we feel after watching/reading Rudali. We can recall harsh words of Vaid (doctor in scene two) for Dalits after declaring Budhua dead: " Hurry up and give me my money. It's getting late. And I will have to cleanse myself in the river before going home. " Sanichari: What kind of man are you, Vaidji? My son is lying dead and all you can think of is

your fee. Vaid: .....All you low caste people are the same - no knowledge of religion, no faith, no education! " (102) Besides tragic life of Sanichari and Bikhni, Ganguli also depicts other women ruined by Rajpoots of that village. They use them as prostitute.

Sanichari made them Rudalis to mourn on the death of Zamindar, Bhairav Singh whom his own son had murdered. Here after she started to do that job professionally. Out of this job she gets clothes, food, bowels, blankets etc. Ganguli shows the whore's quarter in the scene eleven. All were busy in playing game and other works. Sanichari went there to help her bahu, Parbatia and other prostitutes. She gave them option to live with feminine dignity. However, at last, they followed, her and became ready to work as Rudali (mourning on death). Sanichari wanted to see them independent and free from Zamindar's exploitation.

Sanichari instructed them about how to express false mourning on the death of father of many of prostitutes: " When you start, weep as if you have lost someone close to you, someone dear to your heart. Beat your breast and cry out with such feeling that their blood runs cold! " (151) The play turns to its end when Sanichari remains on the stage. Keeping bundle of food in her hands (which she got after mourning at the death), making her way out, smiling sadly at her fate. She goes to the dark space of the stage. Her smile seems question - was she a woman or Dalit or something else except human being?