Rudali: Subversion through Resistance

Chapter V

*Rudali*: Subversion through Resistance

One of the most acclaimed among the stories of Mahasweta Devi, *Rudali* offers a powerful indictment against the socio-economic and religious establishments in India. The text demonstrates how these three domains reinforce each other in the social oppression and economic exploitation of the subalterns in various ways. The subversive potential of *Rudali* as a politically intervening work lies in its consistent demonstration of the counter initiatives of the exploited people to resist the domination of the hegemonic classes. The authentic documentation of the incessant struggles of the subalterns to meet the both ends of their life, coupled with an unswerving effort to resist the domination, testifies the political agenda of the text — the agenda of empowering the subalterns by highlighting the alternative possibilities behind the oppressive system. Written in the middle phase of her literary career, *Rudali* testifies Mahasweta’s thematic engagement with the less privileged constituencies of Indian society. The text traces the metamorphosis of Sanichari, the untouchable protagonist, by exhibiting how her initial vulnerability and defenselessness gradually gave way to an unremitting attitude and a successful manipulation of the system to her end.

The issue of survival is nowhere dealt with such deep insight from the perspective of subaltern as in *Rudali*. The text, in a sense, offers a survival manual for the subalterns to follow in an unreceptive world, where they experience continuous ostracization and subjugation at the hands of the
dominant classes. Questions of survival, implying as it does, an intersection of an adamant mindset and cognizing efforts, has become the focal point of the text. "A preoccupation with one's survival", observes Margaret Atwood, "is necessarily also a preoccupation with the obstacles to that survival." (Survival 33) Concerns of survival and the ensuing hardships are littered across the fabric of the text. Sanichari is placed at the center of the text, and it is through her experiences the issues of the exploitation and marginalization of the subaltern communities are examined. The taking up of the profession of rudali (funeral wailing) charts the subsiding of Sanichari's submissiveness to the victimizing forces in her milieu and marks a guarded step towards her empowerment.

Rudali narrates the story of a Dalit woman who boldly builds up her means of subsistence in an antagonistic system. Sanichari encounters a series of predicaments after the death of her close relatives, including her husband. But, by refusing to view her abject condition as the outcome of destiny, she treads bold steps and makes many efforts, amidst many odds, to ensure her survival. As the story progresses, she is seen to be forging fresh strategies for survival, both at individual and community level. The subalterns who are historically on the defensive, according to Antonio Gramsci, "can only achieve self-awareness via a series of negations, via their consciousness of the identity and class limits of their enemy." (Prison Notebooks 273) In the story, admittedly, Sanichari gets empowered by means of the negation of the resilient role ascribed to her as well as her community by the establishment.
In the process, she learns to manipulate the very system that seeks to ostracize her. By refusing to be subservient, she comes to enjoy a relative independence from the stranglehold of the system. *Rudali* offers a powerful critique of the contemporary Indian social reality by exhibiting the dire poverty of the subalterns, their persistent struggle to eke out a living in an oppressive milieu, their occasional gestures of self-assertion and their resistance to the encroachments by the dominant castes/classes.

The locale of the story, Thahad, is a typical Indian village where different forces are at work to browbeat the underprivileged communities in various ways. Like any other Indian village, Thahad is also characterized by the presence of caste system and feudalism. Caste becomes a determining factor of the life of the people of Thahad. Sanichari, the central character of the story, is an untouchable by caste. The very opening of the story introduces Sanichari along with her socio-economic environment: "[I]n Thahad village, ganjus and dushads were in the majority. Sanichari was ganju by caste. Like the other villagers, her life too was lived in desperate poverty." (54) By locating Sanichari in a well-defined socio-economic context, Mahasweta brings home the idea that her abject condition is consequent upon her bottom status in the caste ladder. Sanichari's subalternity is inextricably entangled with her caste identity. By contextualizing the locale and characters at the very outset of the story Mahasweta concedes no space for any other assumptions attributed to their desperate condition. The socio-economic context in which the characters are situated unmistakably reveals the
symptoms of India social system with all its discrepancies.

Every death in the village is mediated by certain rituals, which bring with them many financial burdens for the subalterns who are already impoverished. The ritual demands are often too much for them to afford. In one occasion Sanichari exclaims: "[W]as one to weep or worry about how to burn the corpses and feed the neighbours cheaply at the shradh?" (55) It is in an ironic vein that the author pictures the pathetic predicament of the underdogs, who do not have the time to mourn the death of their family members owing to their busy efforts to meet the religious demands attendant upon each death. Throughout the story Sanichari is shown to have no time to grieve the death of her family members due to her extreme socio-economic constraints. The death of her husband exacerbated the dismal situation already present in her life. There is no indication in the text to suggest that her life was happier before. Like the other members of her community her life was also beset with scarcity and destitution: "[I]n this village everyone is unhappy. They understand suffering. So they are content with being fed just sour curd, sugar and coarse parched rice." (55) Ironically enough, this stark picture strikes a sharp contrast to the idealized portrayals of Indian villages – so ardently delineated in the stories of the mainstream writers like Rabindranath Tagore and Premchand. Since Sanichari had to shoulder the responsibility of pooling up the expense of the funeral of her husband, she didn’t get any time for mourning. This has to be read along with the vocation of "funeral wailing" she took up later due to the compulsion of survival. This
is the sharp irony that underlies the life of the subaltern communities in the country. Mahasweta sarcastically points out how the underprivileged people are forced to put off not only their domestic pleasures but also their personal sorrows due to their socio-economic constraints.

The entrapping and petrifying of the untouchables by the police at the behest of Ramavator reveals the nexus between the feudal landlords and local administration. When Sanichari’s mother-in-law died there were no male members in the house to make the necessary arrangements for cremation. Ramavator Sigh, the Rajput landlord in the village, who suspected the dushad and ganju males to have stolen some of his wheat, had got them arrested. With the money power, the upper caste landlords could bring the subalterns punishment for a mere whim of suspicion. Here, Mahasweta digs at the system of justice prevailing in the India villages by demonstrating how it gets contaminated by the influence of caste system. Examining how the casteism interferes in the practice of rural justice, making it discriminatory D.R.Nagaraj observes:

In the case of Dalits even petty thieving becomes a matter of grave offence. The caste Hindu society loses the sense of proportion and discrimination, and the judicial society of the village transforms itself into the state with all its judicial and policing powers. In the modern context the proper way is to initiate processes of law and order. The official legal machinery is there to take care of these violations. It assesses the magnitude
of crime through its own well established procedures and the rule of the law should take its course (32).

Even some slightest faults on the part of the untouchables, real or imaginary, enrage the landlords. Due to the detention of her husband in the police station Sanichari, together with her sister-in-law, had to do all the crematory works herself. Otherwise, they feared, it would bring them the additional burden of paying the expense of the repentance rites, if the cremation was delayed.

What is more scandalous about the prevalent system is the way in which the religion, which is exceedingly institutionalized, in tandem with feudalism, incapacitates the weaker people through its various ritual and ceremonious demands. In India, the theological knowledge is, by and large, monopolized by the uppers castes, particularly Brahmins. The dominant castes enjoy domination not only on the means of production but also on scriptural knowledge. Dispossessed of the knowledge entitled by the scriptures, the lower castes have become vulnerable to religious exploitations in many ways. Not surprisingly, the caste Hindus take advantage of the situation and utilize their command over scriptural knowledge to perpetuate their domination over the subalterns. The monopoly of the upper castes over knowledge is a major topic dealt in the subaltern stories of Mahasweta. Rudali shows how the institutionalized religion disempowers the subalterns by its coercive means.

Sanichari's husband died of cholera after consuming the milk offered
at the Baisakhi mela, a religious festival held to celebrate the New Year by the Hindus. The idol of Siva was bathed in milk offered by the rich. Lower castes, out of their desire to consume the milk approached the priest, who readily offered it by demanding money. It was this “sanctified” milk given by the local priest that caused the death of Sanichari’s husband. The priest unjustifiably demanded money for the contaminated milk, knowing that consuming it may be detrimental to their health. He offered the unhygienic milk to the lower castes, little respecting their life. To the upper castes/classes, the life of subaltern is not worthy to be cared. Examining how the ethos of caste legitimizes the mechanics of power in Indian society, Tapan Basu observes in his introduction to Translating Caste (2002): “[W]ith its justification in Hindu religio-legal mandates, caste power is useful in concealing the concentration of class power in the possession of elite, and in the perpetuation of that possession through compulsion and coercion.” (xxiii) The institutionalized religion, with its coercive power upon the subalterns, reinforces the exploitation taking place at social and economic levels.

Mahasweta shows, in a unique fashion, how the interests of institutionalized religion and feudalism reinforce each other in subjugating the subalterns in the contemporary India social scenario. The priest at Tohri is shown to be demanding ritual offering which, he insists, is inevitable since her husband died there. Sanichari had no other option but to concede to this ritual demand, violation of which, she was made to believe, would be highly ominous. Sanichari was accustomed to spend “a precious rupee and a quarter
on a Spartan offering of sand and sattu which Budhua offered as panda."(57)

She didn’t know that the same ambush of religious exploitation was awaiting her at her own village too. She was made to do the ritual offerings two times which consequently pushed her to the shackle of bonded labour. In the story, religion is presented not as a source of solace and redemption but as a source of trauma and suffering. This monopoly on scriptural knowledge enjoyed by upper castes is presented analogous to the marginalization of the lower castes in matters of education and learning. The deprivation of knowledge, largely concerning rituals, inevitably leads the lower caste communities to the mercy of upper caste priests. Tapan Basu observes:

The coercive aspect of caste power is apparent also in the denial of knowledge to those considered outside the pale of caste power. The monopoly overlay as much as theological knowledge enjoyed by Brahmin men and then, with the passage of centuries, by the upper castes as a whole, has been matched by lower caste marginalization in matters of education and learning, inevitably giving the so-called caste Hindus an advantage insofar as they utilized this to capture and continue to hold on to the instruments of cultural as well as economic production and emerge as the so-called class Hindus (xxiii).

It is this coercive nature of caste system that is exemplified in the way the priests at Tohri and Thahad intimidated Sanichari by demanding money for ritual. Back at Thahad, Sanichari found another burden awaiting her.
Mohanlal, the local priest, insisted that she should do the ritual offerings once again, since what was done at Tohri was inadequate. He taunted her by shouting that she tried to belittle scriptural demands: "[W]hat! A mere offering of sand, that too in river water! Is Budhua Lord Ramachandra, repeating his act of offering a pinda of sand for His father, King Dasaratha!"

(57) This time Sanichari had no money with her to do the money required for the ritual offerings. Consequently, she gets herself mortgaged to Ramavtar Singh, through a bond, after borrowing twenty rupees from him for doing her husband's funeral rites. As per the bond, she has to reimburse fifty rupees through a bonded labour extending over five years. This episode shows how the feudal system, in connivance with the religious establishment, weakens the downtrodden people in various ways. Religion, rather than a source of soothing presence, is shown to be debilitating the hardly earned income of the subalterns.

The bondage to which Sanichari has been forced is juxtaposed with the spendthrift way the upper castes spend money for their funeral ceremonies. It is significant that it is the ritual demands followed by the death of her husband that forced Sanichari to indebtedness to Ramavtar Singh. The irony apparent in the situation is that the subalterns are forced to the stranglehold of bonded labour for years for a flimsy amount of money, while the elite classes lavishly spend huge amounts on their funerals. In the story, the funeral extravaganzas are narrated along with the dire poverty of the subalterns for whom even the nominal indulgence like bangles and combs remain a distant dream. This
narrative strategy of juxtaposing the two ends of Indian social hierarchy endows the text a powerful subversive quality.

However, Sanichari managed to free herself from the bondage. After one year's of bonded labour, driven by a slight hope, Sanichari approached Ramavatār with the request of relieving her of the enforced contract. Ramavatār, who was in a happy mood then, readily agreed to her request. It was certainly an uncommon sign of bounteousness from the part of a landlord. But Ramavatār's act of generosity did not go uncriticized. The other landholders accused him of exhibiting unnecessary liberality towards the untouchable field hands, whom, they insist, must be always kept under yoke. Bonded labour, according to them "was of less value than the dust off their shoes", and what mattered was "the yoke, the burden of debt that kept them labouring like cattle." (58) The practice of the extremely exploitative and dehumanizing system of bonded labour in rural India and its throttlehold effect upon the subalterns are dealt with in detail in Mahasweta's collection of activist writings Dust on the Road (1997).

The text also explicates the community kinship and caste association among the subaltern people. In the story, the lower castes are shown to be very caring and co-operative, notwithstanding occasional wrangles and quarrels. When Budhua died, leaving his baby child with Sanichari, the lower castes in the village came forward to look after their needs. Dhatua's wife came forward to breastfeed Haroa, Budhua's baby. The author narrates that "[W]hile Sanichari worked on the job, she didn't need to cook. Dulan's wife
would send her meal of roti and achar along with Dhatua's. Sanichari repaid the debt of wheat flower. But, there are some debts that can never be repaid."

(62) Prabhu ganju offered Sanichari his yard for erecting her hut there. It is significant that all of them — Dhatua, Dualn and Prabhu — are ganjus, the untouchables. The caste members, particularly those who belong to the lower stair of the hierarchy, who are more exposed to exploitations, have certain shared experience of victimization. According to Sanichari, "[I]n order to survive, the poor and oppressed need the support of the other poor and oppressed." (63) In another occasion, Sanichari herself offered shelter to Bikhni, when she found her dispossessed in the market. When the landlord had laid claim over her house for her failure of the repayment of a loan and her son left for his in-law's house, Bikhni was left with no option but to leave her village. Sanichari readily invited her to her hut: "[M]y two-roomed hut is empty. Each room has a platform to sleep on." (66) The corresponding pattern of subjugation that they experience, being lower castes, has developed a strong sense of kinship among them. In the story, the sense of solidarity and amity among the underdogs is often juxtaposed with the internal feuds and treacheries among the elite classes.

Sanichari was obviously affected by the running away of Haroa, who was doing the menial works in Lachman Singh's shop at the market. She went in search of him from one market place to another. Haroa's running away becomes relevant to the fabric of the story in another way too. It is during her incessant search for him that she happened to meet Bikhni, her childhood
mate. The condition of Bikhni was equally pathetic. She was also accustomed to roam around in search of job, due to her extreme economic insecurity. She was forced to leave her house when the landlord of her village laid claim over her house as a repayment of the loan. Dispossessed and distressed, she had been wandering from place to place when Sanichari met her accidentally in the market.

The resistant spirit and watchful mind of the subaltern is well exemplified in the character of Dulan. It was Dulan who became instrumental of Sanichari's empowerment by guiding her out of the mazes of enforced deprivation and penury and reconnecting her with the community. He is an accredited member of his community. Nothing in the village escapes from his watchful mind and observant eyes. When encountered with the issue of livelihood Sanichari urges Bikhni: "[C]ome, let's go see Dulan. He's a crafty old rogue, but he has a sharp mind. He is sure to show us way." (68) An indomitable will coupled with a vigilant spirit differ Dulan from the rest of the members of his community. He prompted them to action: "[A]s long as there's a way of earning, why should anyone die of starvation?" (68) He was implying the elaborate ceremonies to be conducted in connection with Bhairab Singh's funeral. They had news that it was going to be performed with pomp and splendour. Sanichari and Bikhni actively listened to everything Dulan told them. They looked attentive and motivated. Dulan not only made a sound diagnosis of the problems at hand but also offered a course of action. And nearly everything he said and did was calculated for
effect. He could enliven the dull spirit of Sanichari and directed her to the path of resistance and survival through these stirring words. He prompted Sanichari: “Budhua’s mother! Do readymade ways of earning exist? They may exist for malik-mahajans, but do they exist for dushads and ganjus? We have to make our own opportunities.” (68) He keeps himself informed of what is happening in the village. To him, information means power since it opens up fresh opportunities. In one occasion, Sanichari compliments him: “[N]o one keeps close track of everyone’s affairs the way you do.” (76) The enthusiasm and spirit that he demonstrates, even at worse times, denote his adamant consciousness, which is unmistakably subaltern. The regenerative potentials of his words effected desired change in the mind of Sanichari and Bikhni. He whole-heartedly endorsed their joint efforts to find fresh opportunities of subsistence. He often spells out spiky criticism against the upper caste masters. In one occasion, while talking about the need of arranging more rudalis by including the sex workers at Tohri he remarks: “[It]’s these Rajput malik-mahajans who have created so many randis.” (72) At the same time, the author seems to have taken special care not to attach a redeemer image to Dulan. Such an aura of redeemer, once bestowed upon the character of Dulan, would certainly hinder the subversive quality of the text. He is only an instrument in their empowerment, and not a precondition.

It is not difficult to see that Dulan’s craftiness is not alienated from the community wisdom. He is a true repository of community wisdom. It is this community wisdom that enabled Dulan to perk up the spirit of Sanichari and
Bikhni, and later through them the other members of the community. He prompts Sanichari saying “[L]ook here Buddha’s ma, there is no bigger god than one’s belly. For the belly’s sake everything is permissible.” (69) He is of the opinion that one needs certain tricks and strategies to live in an unfriendly system. There are no readymade solutions available for subalterns. It is his firm conviction that what one does to feed one’s belly is justifiable. It is by re-establishing the connectivity with the community that Dulan facilitated the empowerment of Sanichari and Bikhni. They, in turn, invigorated the other members of their community, thereby expanding the network of empowerment among the downtrodden people in the village. This new spirit enabled them to transcend the strictures of their environment and to exploit the circumstances to their benefit.

The practice of funeral wailing is an enumerative act which accumulates momentum as the text progresses. The practice of mourning the death was a staple activity among the upper classes and is considered as religious obligatory. The landlords normally allot a huge sum for arranging the rudalis, because they think the size of the amount being spent would enhance their prestige. The landlords, Dulan tells Sanichari, “need rudalis to prop up their honour. Now I have shown you the way, fight on.” (74) Here, Mahasweta is obviously digging at the spurious pride of the upper caste people. The first occasion that Sanichari and Bikhni went to do the job of rudalis was for the funeral of Bhairab Singh. Dulan was the first to know the death of Bhairab Singh in the village. He passed the information to Sanichari
and Bikhni. It was when Sanichari and Bikhni were left with no money and job that he triggered them off to the opening made available by the death of Bhairab Singh: “[T]hey need rudalis to wail over the corpse. They have got hold of two whores. In the household of the masters, whores weep for the dead.” (70) This project betokened new aspirations as well as anxieties in Sanichari and Bikhni. Obviously, there were promises of improvements encoded in the new vocation.

The narration of the oral history by Dulan to the other members of his community has to be seen as a part of the narrative strategy deployed by the author. It, besides historicizing of the text in a wider context, testifies subalterns’ resistance to the encroachments of the dominant castes/classes in the past. The story of the incursion of the Rajaputs into the tribal areas is relevant in many ways. First of all, the story, with its emphasis on the bold resistance of the tribals against the onslaught of the outsiders, gives the text a thematic connectivity with her other stories like *Aranyer Adhikar* and *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, where the issues of domination and subaltern resistance are dealt with in a wider canvas. Secondly, it shows the direct authorial intervention in the text at its best. The author narrates that “[T]he tale Dulan told them was very significant. It explains clearly how the ruthless Rajaputs infiltrated this remote area of tribals, and gradually built themselves up to the status of moneylenders and established themselves as the masters of the area.” (73) History is constantly reactivated not only as the thread of the narrative texture but as its source too. Mahasweta, by means of such direct
statements, spells out her sturdy dissent, which could not be expressed otherwise, with the discrepancies of the system. This authorial intervention effectively reveals the political agenda of her writing.

The narration of oral history by one subaltern to the other subalterns is, however, pertinent since it traces the reprehensible channels through which feudalism in India expanded its exploitative network throughout the country. It narrates how the Rajaputs fell into the favour of the king after helping him to suppress the tribal uprisings. The king, in turn, gave them the land, which they expanded by means of oppression and marauding during the course of time: "...now they take possession of land, not by throwing swords in the air but by shooting bullets at people and flinging flaming torches at settlements."(73) Here, like elsewhere, Dulan becomes a powerful spokesman of the author, who uses him as an effective narrative tool throughout the story. The statements made by Dulan unmistakably betray the social critique inherent in the text:

There may be litigations and ill will between mailks, but they have certain things in common. Except for salt, kerosene and postcards, they don't need to buy anything. They have elephants, horses, livestock, and illegitimate children, kept women, venereal disease and a philosophy that he who owns the gun owns the land. They all worship household deities, who repay them amply—after all, in the name of the deities they hold acres, which are exempt from taxes and reforms (74).
His words offer a powerful indictment against the horrendous manner with which feudalism functions in Indian society. The history of India is also the history of continuous exploitation and oppression of the lower castes and tribals at the hand of the upper castes. The real causes of the deprivation of the marginalized communities are to be attributed to the presence of feudalism and caste system. Independence has not helped to eradicate the dehumanizing practices of feudalism and caste system in the country. The subalterns, who belong to the bottom of the caste hierarchy, are the direct and immediate victims of the socio-political and religious exploitation.

The profession of funeral wailing had multiple effects upon the life of Sanichari and Bikhni. First of all, it generated the income for subsistence and alleviated their poverty thereby bringing a refreshed vibrancy in their life. They found the practice of funeral wailing not only adaptive but also potentially dissident for altering their subject position. This new vocation, they hope, would enable them to escape the domination of the privileged classes/castes who use the coercive means by which they could pull out labour as well as impose an inconsiderate working condition and low wages on their own exploitative terms. At the same time, Sanichari was aware of the irony involved in her taking up of the vocation of funeral wailing. The author narrates in an ironic vein: "Sanichari thought that perhaps her tears had been reserved for the time when she would have to feed herself by selling them."

(72) Dulan asked Sanichari and Bikhni to arrange more rudalis by including the sex workers at the randi street into their group. This is a great stride
forward in their struggle to confront the challenges they encountered in their immediate environment. They have begun to see things in their own terms. They discarded their resilient mindset and decided to fight. They also understood the need for a concerted effort at community level. As Karlene Faith aptly points out: "[R]esistance may also be a choreographed demonstration of cooperation. The 'willing victim' may be operating from the vantage of strategic resistance, watching for openings and coalescing the fragmentary forms of resistance which, in combination, articulate a potential challenge to the status quo." (39) Here, the text marks the beginning of the subalterns' collective empowerment. This new perception, which enabled Sanichari to view the possibilities in her antagonistic physical environment, illustrates the distance she has trodden in the process of empowerment.

As the story progresses, Sanichari and Bikhni become more assertive and succeed in surmounting the hurdles in the path to empowerment. They took their cue from the very system which perpetually exploited them. Emerging from the confines of her persecuting milieu Sanichari exhibits remarkable power of adaptation. The initial performance of Sanichari and Bikhni as rudalis is significant since it was a litmus test for them. Their outstanding performance at the funeral of Bhairab Singh exhibits how diligent and determined they are when encountered with the question of survival. They wailed loudly and sang well-chosen phrases in praise of Bhairab Singh, thereby outshining the whores who had come from the randi street. So in the very first performance itself they got noticed as professional rudalis. Later,
everyone began to demand them for wailing the death. The politics of subaltern resistance always involves a deep-seated repudiation of the codes and norms prescribed by the dominant castes/classes. As Sartre aptly observes "[W]e will become what we are by the radical and deep-seated refusal of that which others have made of us." (15) The text marks Sanichari as a clever manipulator of the discreditable system and therefore links her to other wider locales of subaltern resistance. Her psychological empowerment is well illustrated in her words: "Everything in this life is a battle." (74)

The second half of the text presents Sanichari as an empowered subaltern who is determined to manipulate the unfriendly system to her end. Sanichari is seen to haggle with the account keepers for better payment for their job: "[T]he way we’ll weep and wail, huzoor, we’ll drown out even the chant of Ram’s name! For five rupees and rice. On the day of the kriya ceremony we’ll take cloth and food. Nothing more, nothing less. And if you need more rudalis, we’ll arrange it." (74) The haggling shows that she is unwavering in matters concerning her subsistence. She began to demand different tariff for performing her labour such as "wailing and rolling on the ground, five rupees one sikka, wailing, rolling on the ground and beating one’s head, five rupees two sikkas." (75) She knew that as long as the masters needed the rudalis to show off their pomp and snob, she, being a professional, was in demand.

_Rudali_ presents an obnoxious picture of the domestic life of the elite classes. The greedy sons don’t hesitate to murder their fathers for property,
whereas some others are shown to be waiting impatiently for the death of their mothers. When Nathuni Singh's mother fell ill, he didn't bother to give her treatment. Instead, he made all arrangements for a pompous funeral and "stocking up on sandalwood and sal wood for a sensational funeral pyre. Bales of cloth are arriving, for distribution at the kriya ceremony. He is preparing to feed Brahmins and purchasing loads of ghee, sugar, dal, flour."(77) It, besides revealing the pettiness of the upper class life, exhibits the extravagant manner they waste money on funerals. It has to be read along with Sanichari's mortgaging to Ramavtar Singh for five years for having borrowed fifty rupees. The unrelenting endeavours of the subalterns for survival are documented along with the licentious and profligate ways of the elite life. By juxtaposing the two extremes of Indian social Mahasweta debunks the acute contradictions in Indian society.

The spurious pride and snob among the elite classes opened up more opportunities for the underdogs. The practice of wailing was viewed as a matter of prestige among the upper castes. The furore it generated among the privileged people is well exemplified in the words of Nathuni Singh's second wife. Out of a sense of pride she says in a snobbish manner: "[W]hat's thirty thousands rupees for a kriya ceremony-- less than nothing. May my father live long -- but when he dies, then I'll show everyone how a kriya should be held!"(78) The merchants and traders, who belong to the middle stair of caste hierarchy, also began to ask for rudalis to show off their prestige. Occasionally, Sanichari spells out her pointed denigration against the pseudo
manners of the rich class: "[T]hese people can't summon up tears even at the
death of their own brothers and fathers, won't they count their kriya costs?
Do you know that Gangadhar Singh, a rich man like him, was stingy enough
to use dalda instead of pure ghee on the funeral pyre of his uncle?"(76). As
the story progresses, the subalterns are shown to be translating this derision
into actions by the timely manipulation of the situations where their
oppressors are involved.

Bikhni's joining of Sanichari led to a viable union of two victims of the
system, competently fitted to counter any amount of odds. Later, their
activities are effectively synchronized by accommodating the sex workers in
the village within their fold. It developed a sense of solidarity among the
exploited women in Thahad village. Gradually, more of them began to think
in similar terms and the subsequent campaigning and collective initiatives
had finally borne crop. Dulan suggested that they should make a union of
rudalis. He understands the importance of unity and organized work. When
her profession came in full swing, Sanichari organized the whores in the randi
street. It demonstrates a growing sense of shared feeling on issues involving
their social survival. The issue of survival is constantly reiterated throughout
the thread of the whole text. Here, the act of wailing becomes a labour for the
working class women. Dulan tells Sanichari: "it's wrong to give up one's land,
and your profession of funeral wailing is like your land, you mustn't give it
up."(89) According to him, wailing has to be viewed like any other profession.
By becoming labourers the rudalis could organize, conduct strike or even
bargain for better payment. In one occasion he tells Sanichari in a vein of humour: “[T]he coalminers have a union. Why don’t you form a union of rudalis and randis? You can be the pishien.” (80) He understands that the rudalis need to organize to get the best out of the masters.

The story charts the slow but discernible metamorphosis of Sanichari and Bikhni from the docile victims of the system to its manipulators. Later, Sanichari tries to boost up the other subalternal women in the village economically by organizing and absorbing them to the network of rudalis. Sanichari gathers all the sex workers from the randi street and ensures them reasonable payment. Most of them, including her own daughter-in-law, had been forced to become sex workers by their utterly impoverished condition. At another level, it reveals the disconcerting picture of the sexual exploitations to which the subalternal women are subjected. Their economic vulnerability and social depravity occasionally forced them to the feet of the tyrannous landlords and moneylenders. Mahasweta demonstrates how the economic vulnerability and insecurity force the subalternal women to the ensnarement of the feudal landlords, who exploit them sexually. The women who are sexually exploited and harassed gradually turn into sex workers. This is illustrated in the conversation between Budhua and his wife. When Budhua’s wife insisted on going to work in the house of the landlord, he warns her: “.... I won’t let you work in the maliks’ fields. Young women who work for him never return home”

Why, where do they go?
First to a nice house, then to the randipatti — the whores’ quarters (60).

Budhua’s words reflect the threat on the security of the subaltern women in the feudal order. The sex workers in the randi street were formerly the maidservant of the landlords. They are the victims of feudalism and caste system. The concept of purity and pollution doesn’t prevent the upper caste men from sexually utilizing the subaltern women, with or without their consent. Ironically enough, they are not concerned about caste defilement in having sexual relation with the subaltern women. By weaving these episodes -- Dulan’s narration of the oral history as to how the Rajputs usurped the land by dispossessing the tribals and how the subaltern women are forced to become the sex workers -- into the fabric of the text, Mahasweta demonstrates how unjustifiably the subaltern communities are victimized ad infinitum by the dominant castes/classes in one way or other. The relationship of the subalterns including Sanicahri and Bikhni with their physical environment they inhabit is not characterized by profusion but by exploitation caused by various unreceptive forces like caste system and feudalism.

Sanichari felt alone when Bikhni died after contracting asthma at her village. However, her grief is soon replaced by a fear of survival. She tried to soothe herself: “[A]fter the worst disasters people gradually bathe, eat, chase away the goat nibbling the chillies in the yard.” (88) She didn’t let the sorrow subdue her mind for long. She feels that “people can do anything but if they can’t eat, they die.” (88) Dualn told her, as usual, in a comforting tone:
“Bhudua’s ma. It’s wrong to give up one’s land, and your profession of funeral wailing is like your land, you mustn’t give up.” (89) Dulan’s words have always stepped up her weak spirit.

The empowerment of Sanichari is illustrated in the manner she gathers the sex workers in randi street, without any sense of shame or embarrassment, to wail the death of Gambhir Singh, a self-made intimidator of the lower castes, particularly the lower caste women. At the end of the story, Sanichari, equipped with an invigorated concern of livelihood, leads the whores to wail Gambhir Singh’s death. Gambhir Singh’s corpse is surrounded by the wailing rudalis, most of them are sex workers in the randi street. It gives the story an ironical ending. There are among them who have been exploited and driven out by him when he was alive. It was he who ruined and consequently reduced them to prostitutes. Now, the sex workers have come to wail on his death on “contract basis”, to fill their stomach. To them, the consideration of stomach remains to be a primary motivating factor. The way the story ends is significant as it suggests the organized efforts of the subalterns to eke out their livelihood, despite numerous obstacles. They exhibit consistent spirit to hold on their life on slender terms, notwithstanding many restraints. This is best illustrated the manner they manipulate the occasion of the funeral of Gambhir Singh, their former persecutor.

Gambhir’s corpse stank of rooting flesh. The randi rudalis surrendered his swollen corpse and started wailing, hitting their head on the ground. The gomastha began to weep tears of
sorrow. Nothing will be left! Cunning Sanichari! Hitting their heads meant they had to be paid double! He and the nephew were reduced to helpless onlookers. While hitting her head on the ground and wailing loudly, Gulbadan turned her dry eyes in the direction of the nephew, cast him a leering wink and grinned. Then, listening to Sanichari’s cry, she rejoined the chorus (91).

It reveals the subversion involved in the act of wailing. Moreover, this gesture of collective manipulation marks a transition from the survival at individual level to community level. The mobilization of the rudalis disconcerts the designs of the landlords. Mahasweta obviously wants to demonstrate how the resisting initiatives of the subalterns serve to upset the apple carts of the dominant groups. Furthermore, this episode also testifies the spontaneity and resourcefulness of village womenfolk. However, it is important to note that though these organized movements have helped them to achieve some increase in the payment, it seldom brought in any sustainable upward mobility in their life.

Critique on Socio-political Scenario

*Rudali* demonstrates the survival strategies adapted by the subalterns both at individual and community level. At the end of the story Sanichari surfaces as one who is capable of maneuvering the situation. Throughout the story, she is presented as one who is equipped with some survival strategies. The text traces her transformation from a submissive and resilient victim of
the system into its indomitable manipulator. She is shown to be more empowered than she is at the beginning. However, it is not the story of individual success. Many factors go into the empowerment of Sanichari in the story. Her empowerment hasn't taken place apart from her community. It is inextricably entangled with the empowerment of the whole community. Most primarily, it is the subaltern consciousness accelerated by Dulan which ultimately led her to confront the challenges posed by the system. Dualn has been instrumental in her empowerment. She, in turn, empowered the hapless sex workers in the randi street, by opening up fresh means of survival for them. She achieves empowerment through a variety of community tactics.

*Rudali* exemplifies Mahasweta's purposeful deployment of certain textual tactics which characterize her subaltern stories. It is through a series of narrative strategies like non-individualization of the characters, contextualization, historicization, de-fictionalization, authorial interventions, to name a few, Mahasweta reinforces the social content of her stories. Admittedly, *Rudali* testifies the skillful deployment of the narrative strategy at its best. In the text, documenting the struggles of the subaltern, like her other stories, she has jettisoned the prevalent standards of fiction with a purpose to de-fictionalize the cruel social realities which she seeks to depict.

The individuals are unambiguously historicized throughout the story. None of the characters in the story are individualized to the exclusion of their social or communal identity. This narrative strategy of contextualizing the characters by placing them in their socio-economic and cultural milieu has
been a characterizing feature of Mahasweta’s subaltern stories. In *Rudali*, the author never details her characters’ personal traits to the extent of isolating them from their socio-economic moorings. This narrative tactic allows a variety of perspectives to be juxtaposed and explored. By refusing to individualize Sanichari or Bikhni, Mahasweta stresses on the similarity they bear with the condition of the other members of their community. All the untouchable people in Thahad village, whether the ganjus or dushads, share a common legacy of victimization for having born in a lower caste. The condition of Bikhni is not better than Sanichari. So is the condition of all other members of their community. They are the products of their socio-economic conditions. Their subalternity is woven into the fabric of their words and deeds. They act and behave according to the compulsion of their physical environment.

The non-individualization of the characters is a narrative strategy effectively employed by Mahasweta in *Rudali*. As in her other stories like *Aranyer Adhikar*, *Chotti Munda and his Arrow* and *The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh*, which are taken for analysis in the present study, the characters in *Rudali* never speak or act apart from their socio-economic contexts. The subaltern characters in the story, particularly Sanichari and Bikhni, stand in sharp contrast to the stereotype sketches of subaltern women in subsidiary social roles recurrently presented in the stories of the mainstream writers. Though a character like Sanichari concedes much space for psychological description, Mahasweta has intentionally dispensed with this aesthetic enticement, as it
would eclipse the social substance and political mission of the text. The dress she wears, the words she speaks, and the mannerism she wears is identical and is not separable from the other members of her community. When Sanichari happens to meet her companion in the market after a long time, their appearance is described: "Like Sanichari, Bikhni's wrists, throat and forehead sport no jewelry other than blue tattoo marks, both wear pieces of cork in their ears instead of earrings, their hair is rough and ungroomed." (65) The physical descriptions of the Sanichari and Bikhni are given with the identical signs of their subalternity. The writer hasn't attempted to delineate them in psychological terms, to the extent of excluding them from their socio-economic and cultural contexts. But at the same time, it is worth mentioning that the characters in the story retain certain peculiarities that they are not reduced into mere clones of their community. The ambience of realism is kept till the end of the story. In other way, this narrative tactic of contextualization implies that the tragic condition of the subalterns can be altered since it is the result of an asymmetrical system. The text persuasively suggests the alternative possibilities inherent in the system with which the subalterns could alter their subjective condition. The whole story, in a sense, is an attempt to forge various strategies for changing this condition.

The textual strategy of historicization of the characters is apparent at the very outset of the text. The way the story starts is significant that it situates the protagonist in a well-defined socio-economic context. Sanichari's mother-in-law would often opine that "Sanichari was born on inauspicious
Saturday that her destiny was full of suffering." (54) But Sanichari was not ready to accept this view of fatalism. She understands that destiny has no role in the sufferings of her community. It is neither a question of auspiciousness or inauspiciousness of one’s birth. She asks: “[H]uh! Because I was born on and named after a Saturday, that made me an unlucky daughter-in-law! You were born on a Monday -- was your life any happier? Somri, Budhua, Moongi, Bishri -- do any of them have happier lives?” (54) She means that her condition is socially constructed and therefore can be changed. This realization helps her to rise from the position of a docile victim of the system to its clever manipulator. She developed, though gradually, an indomitable will that enabled her to manipulate the antagonistic social environment to her end. It is worth mentioning that even at the outset of the story Sanichari exhibits a clear perception about her marginalized position in the society. Her statement denotes that she is not going to be an easy resilient victim. She observes that it is not a matter of being born in a particular day, but the socio-economic condition that is responsible for their utter penury. Nowhere in the story are the subalterns shown to be content with their material condition. Occasionally, they are seen to be spelling out their resentment and discontent against the inferior and wretched status ascribed to them by the system. The ideological implication inherent in the revealing remark of Sanichari at the outset of the story is another instance of the narrative strategy effectively deployed by the author. Interestingly, Sanichari’s acute consciousness about her own subordinated position in the system resonates Margaret Atwood’s
elucidation of the basic victim positions, which she makes in connection with
the subjectivities in postcolonial Canada in her influential work *Survival: A
Atwood describes is relevant in this context. The victims of this type refuse to
accept their subjected position as an outcome of destiny. She observes that
"[T]o acknowledge the fact that you are a victim but to refuse to accept the
assumption that the role is inevitable", and the subaltern subjects of this
category distinguish between the role of a victim and the objective experience
that is making them victims (37). The victims of this position, according to
Atwood, can change these objective conditions and seek alternatives. Though
Atwood has made this analysis on the basis of Canada’s postcolonial
experience, it is equally pertinent to the subject position of the marginalized
people in India. Victim position, she argues, can be altered by the conscious
efforts from the part of the victims (37). This hypothesis is well illustrated in
the manner Sanichari achieves her empowerment through a series of
premeditated efforts.

On the contrary, there are yet another category of victims, which
Atwood puts in the second victim position, who are characterized by a pliant
and submissive attitude. Here, the subject position, she observes, tends to
"acknowledge the fact that you are a victim, but to explain this as an act of
Fate, the Will of God, the dictates of Biology (in the case of women, for
instance), the necessity decreed by History, or Economics, or the Unconscious,
or any other large general powerful idea." (37) It implies a flexible attitude of
the subordinated – well exemplified in the subaltern characterization of writers like Kamala Markandaya, Premchand and Bhabani Battacharya – and doesn’t designate any counter politics. In *Rudali*, the subaltern protagonist repudiates the victim position at the very outset of the story itself by refusing to accept her depraved condition as the outcome of destiny.

Mahasweta brings out the question of social discrepancies at the very outset of the story. *Rudali* offers a powerful critique on the caste. It debunks the idea of birth as being the sole determining factor of the suffering and depravity of the lower castes. The text shows, in an unequivocal manner, how the people who remain in the bottom stair of caste hierarchy are continuously being ostracized and subjected to various types of exploitation by the upper caste people. The struggles of the subaltern in *Rudali* are characterized by a deep-seated repudiation of the inferior role accorded to them by the caste system. Tracing the underlying principle of Hinduism which legitimizes and justifies the subjective positions of the Dalit communities in the country Alok Mukherjee observes:

> However, the fact is that it is precisely the experiences that flow from the centuries-old hierarchical and hereditary system, unalterable because sanctioned by religion, with the concomitant notion of people as polluted and untouchable, which make the Dalit unique and distinct. All other experiences of exclusion, subjugation, dispossession and oppression, experiences that resemble those of other groups, result from this
fundamental reality. Dalits may attain educational, economic, social and political success, but their unique dalitness remains (11).

The idea of the role of destiny in the pathetic condition of the subalterns is outrightly scoffed at the very beginning of the story. The ideology that ascribes poverty and penury to an individual's bad luck, besides conveniently concealing the real causes of the inequalities in the system, reduces the possibility of counter initiatives from the part of the oppressed people to alter the system. As a socially committed writer, Mahasweta knows that describing the problems generated by the oppressive system in terms of destiny would help only to sustain, not to alter, the status quo. By rejecting the role of providence in the scheme of things the author stresses the importance of transformative politics.

Another major characterizing feature of the narrative tactic of the text is its discernible progress from a specific milieu, mostly an individual one, to a common one. As the story progresses, the narrative shifts from a contained and particular account to a sequence of sociological equivalents. This includes the expansion of the network of the rudalis by including the sex-workers and Sanichari's joint venture with Bikhni etc. It testifies how the text grows from the level individual experience to the community experience. The community thread of the story is strong enough to sidestep its individual sketchings, with whatever uniqueness they are drawn. The juxtaposition of the utter penury of the subalterns and the wasteful luxuries of the upper class/caste people is
another textual strategy that Mahasweta employs in *Rudali*. The pomp and splendour in the burial of the masters are delineated along with the hard struggles of the subalterns to meet their both ends. The text shows the continuous struggling of the underdogs to eke out a living, albeit numerous obstacles. The constraints imposed by the system make even the simplest pleasures like bangle or comb a distant dream for them. They play all possible roles, well exemplified on in Sanichari’s taking up of the profession of rudali, to fill their empty stomach. On the other hand, the upper caste landowners and moneylenders are shown to be spending money lavishly for snobbish pageantry and hypocrisy. The inequity of the system is best explicated through this juxtaposition. Furthermore, it provides a powerful critique of the post-independent socio-economic scenario of the country. Mahasweta’s own acute perception of the cruel social reality prevailing in the country figures out in the texture of the story.

In *Rudali*, the issue of economic exploitation and social marginalization is described thriftily, yet evocatively, suggesting the ideological implications in every act of domination and its resistance. These textual strategies, carefully deployed by the auteur, have given the work the authenticity of social documentation. Concerns of subsistence and struggles for survival are spread across the thread of the text. This manner of documentation, besides giving an unromanticized picture of a typical Indian village replete with caste system and feudalism, implicates the possibilities to alter the status quo. It can be seen that the social substance of the text is well synchronized with the
textual strategies. By embedding the characters in a wider context of dominance and subordination, Mahasweta strikes a functional linkage with the anti-hegemonic movements taking place in the country.

*Rudali* bears the best example for Mahasweta’s powerful narrative, which reflects her deep insight into the grass root realities of contemporary India. Through this narrative form, strategically maintained in the later stories, the novel demonstrates the phenomena of oppression in a broader light. The narrative is littered with authorial statements, which suggests meanings which are not communicated otherwise. This authorial intervention, besides steering the unstable meanings to a thematic coherence, serves the debunking of the discrepancies of the system. In many occasion, the author is seen to interfere often by coming out with sharp pronouncements against the dominant class or by giving third person narratives of the hapless condition of the subalterns. At the outset of the text, for instance, we are given a clear picture of the locale of the story: “[I]n this village everyone is unhappy. They understand suffering. So they are content with being fed just sour curd, sugar and coarse parched rice.” (55) Mahasweta effectively demonstrates the impact of the system upon the subalterns without burdening the scene with external conflicts or violence. The plot construction of *Rudali* is drawn with remarkable economy. The opening scene itself switches the action of the story on. Sanichari’s remark at the beginning of story, repudiating her mother-in-law’s view of pre-destination, becomes the opening statement of the story.
Occasionally, Mahasweta is shown to be using dark humour and irony to bring out the utterly pathetic condition of the subalterns. For instance, Sanichari, out of her utter sense of helplessness and penury, spontaneously lets out a sigh of relief a couple of days after the death of her brother-in-law and his wife: “[I]s it possible to feed so many mouths on the meager scrapings they bring home after labouring on the malik’s field? Two dead, just as well. At least their own stomachs would be full.” (55) By means of the deployment of such ruthless irony and dark humour, Mahasweta digs at the system which imposes numerous constraints upon the subaltern making their survival increasingly difficult. She shows a remarkable economy of words throughout the story. A condensed style coupled with a well-defined narrative strategy differs Rudali from her other works. In Chotti Munda and His Arrow and The Glory of Sri Sri Ganeh, these issues are dealt with in a wider canvas and in a stretched manner. The entire text is replete with highly pointed denunciations of the socio-political and religious establishments of post-independent India and the mutual nexus between them.

There are many premature deaths delineated in the story. Deprivation of the minimal levels of food and health service often exposes the subaltern people to various types of epidemic diseases. In the absence of sufficient resources to maintain the health, in the sense of survival, the life of the subalterns is easily susceptible to diseases and death. It is well exemplified by the subaltern deaths delineated in the story. Their socio-economic condition, though indirectly, is accountable for their tragic death. The author
unmistakably seems to suggest that it is the system, which is responsible for the sufferings as well as the premature death of the underdogs. In this sense, *Rudali* offers a picture of the multidimensional consequences of inequality and the poverty it fosters. A close analysis of the death of the subalterns in the story reveals the dire poverty behind them. For instance, Sanichari’s husband died of cholera. He contracted the mortal disease by consuming the contaminated milk donated to the temple by the rich upper caste people. It was the dire poverty that made him, like other lower castes, to drink the petrified milk. Her son Budhua met with similar fate. He caught tuberculosis due to his over exposure to work at Lachman Singh’s shop and consequently died. Later Bikhni dies of asthma after consuming *sarbath*, a cheap drink. To them, contracting diseases means death. Because, that they cannot afford medical care or better health service within their financial parameters. It can be seen that, every loss in the life of Sanichari, as of the other subaltern characters in the story, is mediated by utter poverty and indigence. The death of Bikhni nevertheless shattered her. But she was not ready to submit: “[I]f Sanichari has survived so much grief, she’ll survive the loss of Bikhni. She’s devastated, but she won’t cry. Money, rice, new clothes -- without getting these in return tears are a useless luxury.” (88-89) It is worth noting that the lower caste members meet with their premature death after contracting some diseases as a result of their socio-economic insecurities. Being lower castes, they have less command over the resources. The dominant class, on the other hand, is shown to be enjoying good material successes and steady income.
The inadequacy of income brings many discords to the life of subalterns. Often, amidst the penuries, they cannot materialize even the basic domestic requirements. The family chord is often affected by the social and economic insecurities. The reasons for the untimely death of Sanichari's dear ones, her own doomed predicament, and the running away of her daughter-in-law and Haroa can be traced to the social subordination and financial insecurities they are exposed to.

**Subversion through Resistance**

The text traces the metamorphosis of Sanichari from a resilient victim of the establishment to its obdurate manipulator. The wisdom of resistance and survival are spread across the fabric of the text. The subversive potential of *Rudali* as a subaltern work lies in its consistent demonstration of the resisting initiatives of the victims of the system. Javeed Alam observes: "[I]t still needs to be demonstrated that any section of the exploited and toiling people had developed, at that time, the ability to consistently take the initiative to further their material and other interests, temporary defeats notwithstanding." (48) By documenting Sanichari's successful manipulation of the unreceptive milieu Mahasweta highlights the counter possibilities lying behind the oppressive system. However, it is also noteworthy that in *Rudali* the subalterns' resistance doesn't take place in a militant way, which characterizes the subaltern struggles in *Aranyer Adhikar, The Arrows of Chotti Munda* or *The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh*. Here, the resistance takes place in the form of a clever manipulation of the system. From a sociological perspective
Sanichari breaks her ground by opening up the potential of collective resistance of working class in the informal sector. The text explicates the potential of organized struggle. The discriminating and dehumanizing effect of the society impels Sanichari to invent alternatives so as to be able to escape the austerity of her socio-economic environment. Examining the dialectical relationship between power and resistance Karlene Faith observes:

Resistance cannot simply defeat, overturn or suddenly transform disciplinary power. Such powers circulate independently of particular authorities who institutionalize and claim them for themselves (and who, theoretically, as mere carriers, can themselves be turned around). Resistance can, however, resituate the problematic of power abuse. That is, resistance weakens processes of victimization, and generates personal and political empowerment through the acts of naming violations and refusing to collaborate with oppression (39).

The resistant will that Sanichari demonstrates after taking up the vocation of rudali at the behest of Dulan is apparent in the manner she organizes the sex workers of the randi street at the end of the story. In the socio-economic context of the story the very practice of rudali and the act of wailing become a gesture of symbolic resistance to the constraints imposed by the elite system. By capsizing the traditional role of mourning to an effective means of survival, Mahasweta demonstrates the possibilities inherent in an unreceptive environment. In this sense, Rudali implies an inversion of
traditionally held job ascribed to the subalterns with regard to their caste role. Like her other subaltern stories *Rudali* too has an open end, often implying the continuity of the struggles documented in the texts.

The text also offers a powerful critique of Independence. The period of the story span over the decades that immediately preceded and followed Indian Independence. India was still under the British rule when Sanichari’s husband died of cholera after consuming the milk in a religious fair. By the time of the death of Haroa India had got freedom. However, the transition of power hasn’t brought in any change neither in the life of the protagonist, nor the other members of her community. The pathetic condition of the subaltern communities continued unabated in Independent India also. The measure taken by the Indian government to uplift the underprivileged people in the country could not be materialized due to numerous reasons. The absence of a strong political will coupled with the failure in effectively implementing the rural development programmes explain the persistence of adverse forces like cast and feudalism in India. The ongoing exploitation and silencing of Dalits and tribals in different parts of the country betrays the inadequacy of the Independence. Vijay Prashad observes,

The political direction offered by the state is not in consonance with the visions of freedom enunciated by the people for whom the ‘freedom movement’ which led to political independence provides a charter far in excess of the type of bourgeois – landlordism which characterizes the Indian state. The popular
critiques of the state do not challenge it as a form for the creation of people's power, but they challenge the monopolistic power exerted by the dominant classes upon the state-form (170).

Neither the colonial administration nor the native administrations that followed it cared to bring any radical change in the system. The old feudal structure was allowed to stay in postcolonial India. The socio-economic premises of Rudali, like elsewhere in India, are immersed in many unresolved disparities—social, economic and political. Thahad is a microcosm of all Indian villages, where the scenes of oppression and marginalization are common. By documenting their abject condition Mahasweta suggests that no improvement in the status quo is possible without freeing the subalterns from the stranglehold of caste and feudalism. It is obvious that Mahasweta was not creating a myth of subaltern resistance but was documenting the struggles which she has seen as an activist among them for more than three decades. There are numerous instances in the history of India where the subalterns are found resisting the encroachments and oppression of the dominant classes. Rudali textualizes not only the discrepancies of the system but also the counter actions and struggles of its victims.
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