

POVERTY EXPLICATES THE AGONY OF THE POOR AND THEIR STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE IN MAHASWETA DEVIS SELECTED NOVELS

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Abstract: Poverty is one of the major social evils prevailing in our society. It results in people's deprivation of social, economic and political status. According to Bernstein Henry, the dimensions of poverty are: Lack of livelihood strategies, Inaccessibility to resources (money, land, credit). Feeling of insecurity and frustrations, Inability to maintain and develop social relations with others as consequences of lack of resources. Poverty is also defined as the inability to gratify the physiological needs, that is, need of survival, safety and security. The minimum requirements of the physiological needs are food, cloth and shelter. The poor lack all these, as they are deprived of their economic status. In all these works, the feudal lords and rich people exploit the poor for their selfish motives. The poor, who are already weak by the dire poverty, become more submissive for their livelihood and undergo humiliation and affliction in their masters' hands. They are relieved and freed from their suffering and poverty only when they die.

Key words: poverty, agony, struggle, existence, needs.

Introduction:

Poverty is one of the major social evils prevailing in our society. It results in people's deprivation of social, economic and political status. According to Bernstein Henry, the dimensions of poverty are: Lack of livelihood strategies, Inaccessibility to resources (money, land, credit). Feeling of insecurity and frustrations, Inability to maintain and develop social relations with others as consequences of lack of resources.¹

Poverty is also defined as the inability to gratify the physiological needs, that is, need of survival, safety and security. The minimum requirements of the physiological needs are food, cloth and shelter. The poor lack all these, as they are deprived of their economic status.

Hunger is the result of poverty. When the people are deprived of the economic status, they lack food. This leads them to hunger, starvation and death. Hunger and starvation prepares them to any kind of servitude and subjugation. As they are considered as lethargic, inefficient and burden of the society, they are harassed, humiliated and discriminated.

Though, they are harassed and humiliated, they bear it with patience just for their survival. They struggle for their livelihood and existence. They take up any kind of job they come across for their survival.

A few of Mahaswetha Devi's works deal with poverty, hunger and starvation. She depicts the conditions of dire poverty and the plight of the people under those circumstances. She shows how the people undergo torture and subjugation as a result of poverty. She reveals different straits of livelihood people take up to relieve themselves from the pangs of hunger and starvation. She also harbours the exploitative attitude of the rich, who encash the conditions of the poor and degrade them to further inferior level. Her works which deal with the conditions and effects of poverty and hunger are **Rudali, Breast-Giver, Aajir and Dhouli**. **Rudali** deals with poverty and explicates the various strategies of survival. Sanichari, the protagonist, born as a ganju by caste undergoes torment as a poor woman. She loses her husband, her son and everyone who is related to her. She suffers life in isolation and without support of any one. She toils hard to get food and survive. In the ran of the story, she becomes a rudali to support her life and mourns the corpses of the rich. The novel reveals how the tears are commodified and how the poor people survive through the tears they shed.

Breast-Giver is about a poor Brahmin woman who shoulders the burden of her family. As her husband loses his feet in an accident, she searches the ways to feed her family. She takes up the profession of a breast feeder in a rich family. This story depicts the effects of poverty and straits of livelihood. It tells us that it 's not the caste or community that degrades a person, but, the hunger and poverty. Jashoda, the brahmin woman, because of her dire poverty, is looked down upon and is made an employee in the Haldars family as a breast giver. By her over breast-feeding, she develops a breast cancer, suffers and dies lonely, uncared either by her breast bred-rich sons or by her own husband and children.

Aajir portrays the bad conditions of poor people during famine, which drives them to humiliation and subjugation under social forces and reduces them to further low level. Golak Kura, the victim under famine conditions, loses hope of survival and begs the rich to buy him and his family for servitude. He sells himself, his family and all his descendants to Maatang for just three rupees and makes himself and his descendants life long bonded slaves. He feels that famine would occur every year and so binds his descendants also to slavery. This story depicts the cruelty of the master, who humiliates the bonded slaves who submit themselves to him out of starvation. Dhouli speaks of the predicament of the poor in the hands of the rich. Dhouli, a poor widow and her mother depend on Misras for their food and shelter. Dhouli who is beautiful, is deceived by one of the Misras in the name of love and is made pregnant. When she claims him to be the cause of the pregnancy, she and her mother are punished and are denied of food. Unable to bear starvation,

Dhouli takes up prostitution and feeds her family. The Misras grow intolerable, when they see their kept woman practicing prostitution. They abandon her, saying that such practices of prostitution must be expelled from the village, where the Brahmins still live and practice prayers everyday. By the plot of Misras she becomes an outcast. This story reveals how the poor are deceived tormented by the rich.

All these works give a clear picture of poverty and suffering of the poor. Mahaswetha Devi in these works portrays all the protagonists as low caste poor, except in *Breast-Giver* where the protagonist is a Brahmin by caste, but, poor. Though all differ in caste, they belong to one section, that is, the poor section.

In **Rudali**, Sanichari lives in desperate poverty. She and her husband toil hard, days and nights to fill their stomachs. Her mother-in-law dies of hunger, crying out over and over, "food, give me food!"² When her mother-in-law dies, she does not have even a cupful of rice to do the death rites. In the pouring rain, she runs from house to house begging for rice. If the rites are not carried before night is over, they have to bear the cost of repentance rites for keeping the corpse in the house overnight. So, Sanichari rushes from door to door, begging, to finish the death rites before night is over. At this busy juncture of handling all the arrangements, she does not have even time to cry. Even, when her brother-in-law and her cousin die, she does not cry, as she is much worried and thoughtful of the expenditure of their funeral ceremony. She runs begging for a loan for their death ceremony. The narration says: Was one to weep or to worry about how to burn the corpses and feed the neighbours cheaply at the ^{*}Shradh.³ The death of three people in their family, that is, her mother-in-law, brother-in-law and her cousin, of course, sighs Sanichari with relief. The meagre strappings they bring home after labouring, is not enough for all the people in the house. Sometimes, they starve for food. After their death, she feels relieved as "at least their stomachs would be full."⁴ In the meantime, her husband also dies of cholera. To perform his funeral ceremony, she takes a loan of twenty rupees from Ramavatar Singh and becomes a bonded labourer.

Breast-Giver unveils the plight of a brahmin family which is afflicted by poverty. Kangalicharan, the head of the family, works in Haldar's sweet shop. As he is poor, he steals sweets and samosas and feeds his children. His wife and he cook less food and eat. Daily he lifts a bit of flour and other things and makes his life easy. One day Haldar's son rides his car over Kangali's feet and makes him crippled. Feeling it as an obligation, Haldar takes care of Kangalicharan and his family. He bears his hospital expenses and sends food to his family every day. As long as Haldar is alive, their family runs smoothly. One day, Haldar dies and Kangali's family runs into trouble. He, his wife, and children starve for food. The children whine interminably for food and abuse their father and mother. Jashoda, Kangali's wife, searches the ways to relieve her family from starvation. She goes to Haldar's wife and begs for a cook's job in their vegetarian kitchen. The mistress is not as sold on Brahmins as the master was. So, she

says, "Let me see dear! Let me think and see."⁵ During their conversation, mistress's six months grandson cries. Then mistress says, "You come like a god! Give her some milk, dear, I beg you. His mother's sick-Such a brat, he won't touch a bottle."⁶ Jashoda immediately suckles the boy and pacifies him. She stays in their house till nine p.m. and suckles the boy often. While returning home, at the order of mistress, the cook fills a big bowl with rice and curry for Jashoda and her family and gives it to her. For that day their hunger is pacified. And later, again Jashoda and her family struggle in hunger for food. Aajir speaks of the effects of a famine, which dooms the poor to undergo further degradation. The poor run for their lives. They struggle for existence. They accept any kind of subjugation and humiliation for food and survival. Golak Kura who experiences the turmoil^begs the rich people, asking:

Is there anybody here ready to buy me? Husband and wife,
we're here to sell ourselves.⁷

He says that he would sell himself, his wife, his children and all his descendants also. Raavan Sunri, a landlord comes forward to buy them. Golak Kura feels very much relieved. In his happiness he says:

You're so kind, so kind, master, you've taken away from me the greatest care of all, we'll never have to worry about our food again, But, master, what's the price?⁸

So, he sells himself, his wife, his children and all his descendants for a paltry sum of three rupees. With pride and joy, he addresses the audience: Did you hear that.....cooked rice. (Addressing Raavan) Bring your aajir's bond, master!⁹

He signs the bond and binds himself and all his descendants to slavery. He is afraid of the poverty and the famine that will quash them to death. So, he reduces himself to a low-level as a slave to relieve himself and his descendants from starvation and death. He feels that:

There'll be drought every year,
there'll be famine every year.¹⁰

So, he binds all his descendants also to slavery, because they can at least have food for their stomachs and survive.

Dhouli pictures the life of a poor widow girl, Dhouli, who is a dushad by caste. She and her mother live in dire poverty. As long as her father is alive, he tills the land of maliks and works as a bonded labour. He feeds her and her mother. After his death, they face a hurdle of life in starvation. The Misras do not give her mother the land to till as she is a woman and can not bear the burden of cultivation. Her mother pleads with Kundan Misra, "Sarkar, I'll pay the rent; the other dushads will help me till the land. I'll pay whatever rent

you ask but give me the land. Otherwise we'll starve to death."¹¹ He does not heed her words. She goes to Kundan's mother and prostrates herself before her and says:

Help us, Mataji. Or my daughter and I will die of starvation.¹²

The mistress shows some sympathy towards her and gives her the work of grazing the goats and sweeping the orchard for a small pay and some grains to ^{eat}- So, Dhoul takes up the job of sweeping the orchard and cleaning the house and the utensils. Her mother goes to graze the goats in the forest. They depend on the Misras for their meagre daily bowl of *maroa, the grains.

All these conditions of poverty drive them to subjugation and degradation of their lives. There is no way out for them than to submit themselves to such reduction. They are forced to build up new strategies of livelihood to survive. All these stories present the straits of survival.

The question always arises in them, how to live the next moment. So, they are driven to bizarre professions to overcome their hunger and starvation.

In **Rudali**, Sanichari is always in trouble. Her son, Budhua, who helps her in everything, suffers from tuberculosis. His wife is like a witch, who is always hungry and has an extra appetite. She never does any work. She goes on eating whatever Sanichari and her son earn and bring home. Even after begetting a child, her attitude does not change. When Budhua is at a dying stage, neglecting him and her son, she leaves home. Sanichari knows that, "she would never be content with an ailing husband, and poverty-stricken existence."¹³ She does not feel ill of her escape, as she knows about her mental status. After her son's death, she is in upto her neck looking after Haroa, her grandson. She always carries him while slaving in Malik Mahajan's fields. Her grandson grows and becomes an adult. Like his mother, he is fed up with his poor life and leaves home. This is another blow to Sanichari.

"Every loss she suffers is because of dire poverty, the constricted life, the total lack of hope of any change or improvement - Her daughter-in-law, Parbatia and her grandson, Haroa both leave because they refuse to submit to the harsh conditions, even though their options are prostitution and the insecurities of a wandering life."¹⁴ Sanichari loses everybody who is related to her. While she is in search of her grandson, she gets confronted with her childhood friend Bikhni, who has a different sad story unlike hers. She gets separated from her son. The suffering of both Sanichari and Bikhni draws them closer to each other. They plan to live together. One day, all the money Bikhni has got, exhausts. The problem and fear of survival troubles them. During this time, comes Dulan, an intelligent man with new ideas and strategies of livelihood. He starts giving the ideas to Sanichari. Keeping them in mind, he presents them as himself and says: Before money ran out I would pick up a nice stone from the banks of Kuruda river. I'd anoint it with oil and sindoor and proclaim that Mahabirji had come to me in my

dreams . . . Then you could present yourself and Mahabirji at Tohri Market place. Collect offerings from the devout.¹⁵

* Mahabirji – God hanuman.

A similar instance can be drawn from Breast Giver. When Kangalicharan loses his feet, Nabin gives him similar strategy of livelihood. He says:

I've thought of a plan.get devoted to Gopal.¹⁶

Both Sanichari and Bikhni reject their friend's ideas. They warn him not to joke about gods and that would bring calamity to their lives. Besides this, Dulan tells his own story how he bluffed Lachman's mother, when she gave him ten rupees to bring her some holy oil from Chas. He says, "I didn't even go to Chas, just took her some oil from home after a few days . . . She massaged herself with the oil yesterday and today she walked on her own two feet to the fields."¹⁷ He further says:

If your mind is pure, permissible.¹⁸

Here, we are reminded of Kalo, a low caste in Bhabani Bhattacharya's He Who rides a Tiger, who disguises himself as a brahmin priest and serves the devotees' needs to relieve himself from the pangs of hunger and starvation. Sanichari and Bikhni reject Dulan's strategies dealing with God and request him to give some other good ideas. Then, Dulan suggests them to take up rudali profession. He tells them that Bhairab Singh has died and his son needs rudalis to cry over his father's corpse. Here, Dulan gives the picture of corrupt mind of the rich people. He says:

Amongst us,They need rudalis to wail over the corpse.¹⁹

When Dulan prepares Sanichari and Bikhni to take up the rudali profession, Sanichari sighs and her feelings are exploded within. She has not cried or let her tears drop either for her husband's death or for her son's death. She says that her eyes "are scorched." Then, Dulan tells her in a cold and expressionless tone:

Budhua's ma,tears.²⁰

She gets convinced by his words and agrees for his proposal. Dulan arranges them the job. Sanichari and Bikhni wail so loudly and impressively that everyone gets attracted by their mourning. The impression they create makes them the best rudalis and they become the first preferred. For Bhairab Singh's funeral and Kriya ceremonies they get five rupees each, two and half

*sers of rice, clothes and feasted to their hearts' content. Thus, their tears have been reserved for the time when they have to feed themselves by selling the tears. Vasantha Surya writes about Sanichari and Bikhni that, "the rudalis have nothing to sell but their howls."²¹ Sanichari's display of grief is valuable because it papers over cracks and

fissures in the social system, making it appear as if the poor care for the rich as human beings, as though they have a sense of loyalty and feudal obligation which they express in their spontaneous grief.

* sers – Unit of weight

*Having become rudalis, Sanichari and Bikhni, now know something about money and they bargain in the market place, over their settlements. They enquire about the deaths of the rich, approach them and make their lives easy.

*After the death of Bikhni, Sanichari becomes lonely. Having lost the companion, she feels delicate to present herself as a rudali, but, her conditions of hunger and poverty force her to the profession.

*When she resents to go, Dulan tells her, "Look, Budhua's ma... In the same way you have to take over from Bikhni."²²

Dulan's encouragement gives a boost to Sanichari's mind. She moves ahead to take up the duties. Without any embarrassment, she goes to the red light area to collect some whores for the funeral ceremony. She invites her daughter-in-law, Parbatia to come and participate in the funeral ceremony of the rich corpse, as a rudali. She invites other whores and initiates them to take up the profession early, as they would have to do it anyway, when they grow old. Thus, she establishes a group and mourns the corpse of Gambhir Singh. Here, tears become the path of their livelihood. The tears which would have been a meaningful rite of socialization appear in a saleable form. They become commodified and give the wretched poor an opportunity to earn their livelihood. Thus, poverty drives Sanichari and others to a bizarre profession of mourning.

Parbatia, Sanichari's daughter-in-law, craves for food as she has got an extra appetite. Unable to bear the conditions of poverty and pangs of hunger, she runs away with a medicine man who promises her puri and kachauri everyday. When he deceives her, she joins prostitution to relieve herself from starvation.

Speaking of Rudali, Vasantha Surya tells: "Using eerie custom of the rudali as a metaphor, Mahaswetha Devi has created a story of a heart-rendering 'survival strategy' or 'coping mechanism'. "²³

In Breast-Giver, after Jashoda suckles Haldar's grandson, Mistress of Haldar looks in charmed envy at Jashoda's mammal projections and says, "The good lord sent you down as the legendary cow of Fulfilment. Pull the teat and milk flows! The ones I've brought to my house, haven't a quarter of this milk in their nipples!"²⁴ Jashoda feels happy and replies her that though, "one hadn't come to my belly yet. Still it was like a flood of milk. Where does it come from, Mother? I have no food, no pampering!"²⁵ So, the large production of lactation in Jashoda becomes news of the house.

The second son of Haldar, whose wife is sick and whose son drinks Jashoda's milk, is particularly uxorious. He likes his wife remain beautiful though, she is often

pregnant. He thinks a lot about how to combine multiple pregnancies and beauty. When he hears of Jashoda's surplus milk, in all enthusiasm he cries out, "Way found." He goes to his mother, convinces her that the progressive suckling will ruin the shapes of wives of the Haldars family and if Jashoda is employed to feed their children, their family would be benefited.

At first, the Mistress hems and haws and later, thinks and realizes that, "If the sons look outside, or harass the maid servants, she won't have a voice to object. Going out because they can't get it at home."²⁶ She further thinks that, if Jashoda becomes the infants' suckling mother, her daily meals, clothes on feast days and some monthly pay will be enough. And also the sin, her son has committed by driving car on Kangali's feet would be lightened.

Jashoda and Kangali, though, they feel odd for this proposal, later, they agree as they cannot die of starvation. In order to keep her breasts always heavy with milk, she has to carry a child in her belly, time to time. So, Kangalicharan becomes a professional father and Jasfi'oda becomes a professional mother and breast feeder. With this acceptance, Kangali's family runs smoothly with adequate food for all the people. In fact, Haldars feed Jashoda well, as she has to feed their children with nutritious milk in return. About the production of milk, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak states that:

The milk she 'surplus labour'.²⁷

Jashoda takes extra burden to feed the children of Haldars family. She accepts to bear the pain of producing the off spring and pain of suckling her children as well as Haldars' children at the same time, because she has no other way to shoulder the burden of her family in its wretched conditions. Though her profession is odd, it is the only one which can rescue her family from its problems.

Dhouli takes up a different turn. Misrilal, the youngest of the Misra family, gets attracted towards Dhouli. He falls behind her saying that he loves her, he cannot live without her and promises her that he would marry her. Though, Dhouli resents his proposal, she becomes a prey to his words. She becomes pregnant. The Misras know this, when it becomes a news in the village. They send Misrilal to the town and start harassing Dhouli and her mother. They stop giving them the grains, for the work they do in the household. They deny them everything. Dhouli, waits and waits for Misrilal, trusting him that he would keep his promise of marrying her. Knowing the dexterity of Misrilal, she sobs. Unable to bear the hunger anymore, one-day, she accepts the proposal of prostitution. A head coolie, knowing the predicament of Dhouli, falls behind her and catches her hand and asks her to sleep with him. In her agonised condition, she accepts his proposal and bluntly tells him, "Bring some money . . . *makai, salt and dal".²⁸ After satisfying his desire, she says to him:

'Never come empty handed' 'Don't

let anyone else in'

'Whoever is ready to pay can come.'²⁹

She entertains the clients and becomes a prostitute. Her profession, now feeds her, her son and her mother to the brim. Though she knows that this profession is sinful, she is forced to take it up for her livelihood and relieve her family from starvation.

The circumstances of poverty become an opportunity for the rich people to exploit and subjugate the poor. The suffering and affliction of the poor are never noticed by them. They never consider them as human beings. They suck their blood for their selfish motives. In all these works we find such exploitative Mechanism victimizing them to the maximum.

The maliks in Rudali exploit the poor. They give money to the poor and make them their bonded slaves. They do not care for their lives. They extract the work from them. Sanichari becomes one such slave. For the funeral rites of her husband, she takes twenty rupees from Ramavatar, puts her thumb print on a paper stating that she would repay fifty rupees through bonded labour on his fields over the next five years. Ramavatac-takes it as an opportunity to beguile the poor for their ignorance. Sanichari toils much though, she is weak. For her over time work in his fields, she is hard pressed to feed and take care of her little son, Budhua.

The maliks keep a few low caste women to satisfy their sexual desires. They desert them when their interest and passion for them is lost. They tread them into mud. "The malik - mahajans create prostitutes by keeping women and then cast them off, thereby force them into the market place."³⁰ The maliks – feudal lords.

poor women's poverty drives them to the subjugation under their masters and ultimately makes them prostitutes. Dulan gives an example of Gambhir Singh. Gambhir Singh keeps a whore and has a daughter by her. As long as the whore is alive, he keeps the child in comfort. When the mother dies, he tells her daughter, "a whore's daughter is a whore-practice your profession and support yourself."³¹ Thus, he ditches the girl. The girl later, rots in the whore house. Her rate falls from five-rupees to five paise per client. All the kept women are deceived by the and are turned into whores.

Similarly, Dhoulis in Dhoulis turns into a whore as she is deluded by rilal. After his flirtation and satisfaction of lust with her, he escapes from the scene, making her pregnant. When this becomes news of the village, Kundan, brother of Misrilal raises a hue on Dhoulis and her mother, he says, "We'll kill them both, mother and daughter and get rid of their bodies."³² Hanuman Misra, the elderly man of Misras, cries at Kundan, "You silly ass . . . Don't bother murdering them, deny them food instead. Sack them."³³ Then, Dhoulis and her mother are sacked. Though, they suffer from hunger, Dhoulis waits for Misrilal, trusting him that he would marry her or take care of her life. She loses hope, when she discovers his beguility. Many people try to harass her, but, waiting for Misrilal, she rebels against them. One day, for her survival, she

becomes a prey to such people. For sustaining her life and her family, she takes up prostitution.

and Misra family burn with rage, when they watch the straits of Dhoulis. They cannot endure, when they see a kept woman of theirs, being used by the coolies and low class people. This brings a bad image to them. Unable to bear her action, one day Misrilal, Kundan and Hanumanji summon a panchayat meeting. People gather there. In the meeting, Hanumanji announces:

Dhoulis cannot practice still done in their homes everyday³⁴.

Then Dhoulis asks them why they did not pay for the upkeep of one of their own offspring who is born to her. Hearing this, Hanuman Misra with all ego and frustrated fury, takes off his shoe and flings it at her saying, "Shut up, *randi!". She does not say anything. She becomes a puppet controlled by the will of others. She is thus, abandoned from the village and is shifted to Ranchi, a town, getting separated from her child and her mother. Her agony has no bounds.

The malik mahajans in Rudali do not have emotions for their own parents who have given them birth. They do not even shed tears for their fathers' or mothers' deaths. They are busy in finding the keys to their safe. They employ someone to cry for their parents' deaths. They exploit the poor for such mournings. They want to exhibit their pomp through the death ceremonies they celebrate. They employ rudalis for the mourning and wailing over their elders' corpses. They make grief a commodity. They do not spend money at all for the welfare of poor labourers who toil days and nights in their fields, instead, by lending them some money, they make them their life long slaves. They do not have sympathy for the poor. The price of these death ceremonies, of course, is truly paid by the low castes, from the hides of whom the lords extract the sums they have overspent.

Maatang Sunri in Aajir finds the opportunity to exploit the poor during the famine. When Golak Kura comes to sell himself and all his

* randi – ironically, used for both a widow and a prostitute.

descendants, he grabs the opportunity. He gets the cheap labour. Just by paying three rupees, he binds Golak Kura and his progeny forever. He not only exploits, but, tortures them to the limitless. Through Paatan, grandson of Golak Kura, we can see the Predicament of a bonded labourer. Maatang Sunri treats him as an animal. He whips him whenever he talks of marriage. Paatan is denied of both love and marriage. He lacks freedom and his life is arrested. Besides all this, his Mistress goes on pestering him with her lusty nature. She has an extra-sexual urge. When he rejects her proposal, she feels frustrated of his behaviour. She hates his love for any other woman. She thinks that she is the only person to possess him. When Paatan tries to run away with a gypsy girl, she sends her men to flog him and get him. She enjoys the sadistic pleasure, when he is tortured. She says, "I'd love to see your blood flow. I'll make my hands red with your blood and then go to sleep tonight."³⁵ In this way, he is tortured by both the master and

the mistress. Towards the end, we see how the bonded labour is operated by the dexterity of the rich through the ignorance of poor. When Paatan strangles his mistress, he knows the truth from his master that the bond has long back turned to dust. The beguility of Maatang reveals, how the masters exploit, bully and victimise the poor by their might and power in the villages, taking the ignorance and weakness of the poor as an advantage.

Haldars family in Breast-Giver for retaining the beauty and charm of the daughters-in-law, employ Jashoda for breast-feeding their children. Though, Haldar's son hits Kangali with his car and makes him crippled, the family never thinks of the livelihood of the Kangali's family, instead, they feel that by giving Jashoda, the odd profession of breast-feeding, they can wash away their sin.

Having no other way for livelihood, Jashoda agrees to take up the profession. She feeds more than fifty children of Haldars family. By over-feeding the children, she develops cancer in her breasts. She experiences a lot of pain in her breasts. Later, she develops sores on her breasts, which give a foul smell. Knowing her condition, all the people move far away from her. All the milk-bred sons of Haldars family never wish to take care of her. Her husband and her own sons neglect her. They leave her in lurch and desert her. Everyone betrays her. After a long-suffering and affliction, she dies in the hospital. Her body is left in the hospital morgue uncared for and at last cremated by an untouchable. Thus, she is forsaken by all and dies alone. This story gives us the glance of rich people's attitude. They are opportunistic and exploit the weak to their hearts' content. They do not either care for their needs or for their lives.

Conclusion:

Mahaswetha Devi looks into the depths of poverty, where people strive for food and livelihood. All these stories reflect the conditions of poverty and the predicament of poor. They show how people take up different straits of livelihood and suffer in the hands of exploitative class. Sanichari in Rudali suffers all her life in solitude and has none of her relatives to make her life tolerable. She strives as a bonded labourer for a few years. Later, she joins the profession of Rudali to relieve herself from the pangs of hunger. Golak Kura in Aajir suffers hunger and starvation during famine and submits himself and all his descendants to bonded labour and undergoes humiliation in his master's hands. Jashoda in Breast-Giver out of poverty, shoulders the burden of her family by taking the profession of breast-feeding. By over feeding, she develops breast cancer. She suffers and dies uncared for, by the negligence of Haldars family and her family. Dhouli in Dhouli is deceived by Misrilal in the name of love and carriage. When this is questioned, she and her family are denied of food. Unable to bear the pangs of hunger, she submits herself to prostitution. Feeling for the prestige and unable to tolerate their kept woman practicing prostitution, Misras announce prostitution as a sin in the village and abandon her from their village.

In all these works, the feudal lords and rich people exploit the poor for their selfish motives. The poor who are already weak by the dire poverty, become more submissive for their livelihood and undergo humiliation and affliction in their masters' hands. They are relieved and freed from their suffering and poverty only when they die.

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