

- Peer-Reviewed, Open Access Journal
- Indexed in NepJOL; Star-Ranked in JPPS
- Permanently Archived in Portico



Research Article/ DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/sjah.v8i1.90844>

Poetics of Abjection: Mapping *Homo Sacer* in Usha Ganguli's *Rudali*

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Article History: Submitted: 15 Nov. 2025; Reviewed: 15 Jan. 2026; Revised: 5 Feb. 2026

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Abstract

This article reads Usha Ganguli's *Rudali*, a dramatic adaptation of Mahasweta Devi's novella with the same title, to examine the precarious socio-political condition of *rudalis*, the Dalit women hired to mourn the death of rich people. Their abject lives resonate with Giorgio Agamben's idea of *homo sacer*, figures stripped of civil rights, social recognition, and human dignity. To show the intersectionality of class, caste, and gender, this article makes a close textual reading of dialogue, characterization, and stage design. It also investigates how the ritualized mourning spectacle augments the recognition of *rudalis* who are otherwise excluded from the socio-political realm, and why Ganguli recasts them as agents of political resistance in postcolonial India. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, understood as social disgust and exclusion, and Agamben's notion of *homo sacer*, the article explores how caste, class, and gender-based expulsion relegate Sanichari and her *rudali* community to bare existence, rendering them expendable within the hierarchized socio-economic structures. It argues that ritualized mourning becomes a counter-discursive practice through which *rudali* community expresses their dissent and resist social abjection. Therefore, the charting of their grief as a public performative act, Ganguli's rework transforms the culturally silenced *rudali* *homo sacer* into a speaking subaltern whose mourning mediates to expose systemic injustice. Finally, the play, as a cautionary poetics of resistance, stages the ransacked lives of marginalized *rudalis* while critiquing the uneven social order. These findings serve to broader questions of intersectional injustice and the politics of visibility confronting marginalized communities.

Keywords: Abjection, *homo sacer*, outcast, political resistance

Introduction

Usha Ganguli's theatrical adaptation of Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali* (1992) stages the impoverished existence of *rudalis*, untouchable women hired to mourn the death of Rajput elites in Rajasthan, India. The play outlines the intersection of ritualized grief and political erasure of mourning community to look into the social practice of excluding the impoverished community. The staging of the poverty-ridden protagonist, Sanichari, an excluded *rudali* mourner, whose inclusion in

ritualized mourning in order to glorify the death of the elites echoes Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection and Giorgio Agamben's notion of *homo sacer*. Kristeva explains abjection as discarding or putting aside something, especially the mother by the baby to form identity. Likewise, Agamben's *homo sacer* also refers to the socio-politically excluded figure who is subject to disgust, or, whom anybody may harm without legal offence. Ganguli's play unsurprisingly revolves around the contradiction while unpacks the lives of the politically ripped off *rudalis* whose mourning performance becomes the status marker of the rich. The visits of a pompous Thakurain and Jogilal Thakur who ask Sanichari to hire a larger number of professional *rudalis* at the death of their fathers respectively. The Thakurain brags, "When he dies, I'll show them all what a kriya (funerary translation added) ceremony is" (141), which underscores how the mourning functions as a prestige marker among Rajputs. Nidhi Dugar Kundalia explores the genealogy of the *rudali* culture which was in vogue in the past and is steadily declining when "Ganju and Dushad" (Ganguli 141) like scheduled communities opt for alternative profession in modern India. With this Noemi Marin also brings the cultural and religious significance of funerary lamentation into light in Irish and Romanian dirge performance by elderly single women beyond India.

Ganguli's play, set in feudal Rajasthani culture, charts the black clad lower-caste *rudali* women "beat their foreheads and breasts rhythmically in exaggerated, stylized movements rolling on the ground" (Ganguli 153) during public mourning performance. Focusing on the black clothing of the *rudalis* as the semiotic of protest, Lise Danielle Hurlstone calls a "performing marginal identity" (43) against the culture of producing the abject liminal life. The mourners' identity operates in two ways; on one hand, it outlines the aesthetic (poetic) and affective structures through which social abjection, admittedly known as social disgust and exclusion in Julia Kristeva's term, is produced, represented, and experienced, and the other, it simultaneously enables the *rudalis* to occupy public mourning spaces as acts of protest to reclaim agency. Adhering to this, Reetamoni Das and Debarshi Prasad Nath note that the mourners' learning to cope with difficult circumstances which they tactfully subvert for their "survival strategy" (136). They underscore the mourning of *rudalis* as a political space that mediates to critique the stark intersectional structural disparity in India.

Ganguli depicts Sanichari's politically devalued life similar to an outlawed *homo sacer* who survives a biological life. Sanichari's embodiment of structural violence and vulnerable life amid the overarching "starvation, poverty, disease, and drought" (Subramanyam 37) also draws on the domestic and social disgust. Her name, Sanichari after "Saturday or Sanichar" (Ganguli 96) refers to the accursed name adhering to malicious planet Saturn symbol of misfortune. Hurlstone recounts Sanichari's misfortune, her father dies, her mother, Peewli alias Bikhini's abandons her to show her abject life. Her bad luck continues when she loses her husband and in-laws so that Somri indicts her, "You (Sanichari) were born on an unlucky day, Saturday. It's your destiny to devour everyone around you" (Ganguli 96)! Likewise, her grandson, Haroa, also accuses her, "You've devoured everyone, you *dain*" (114) which signifies Sanichari's *homo sacer* state of life that is liable to invite domestic and social disgust. Pointing to her vulnerable life as a lower-caste female, Saho and Acharya further reveal her downtrodden widow position in Hindu social structure. Additionally, her penury-ridden life reduces her to indentured labor, working like "the laboring cattle" (Katyul 58), a condition further underscored by Haroa's metaphor of making him a "donkey" (Ganguli 106). Grounded in such dehumanizing depictions, the article repositions the illiterate and impoverished Sanichari, foreshadowing her domestic and social repulsion as the abject *homo sacer*, in order to interrogate the vulnerable and precarious lives left unprotected by social security.

The play graphically charts the production of abject and socially unprotected life of *Dalit rudalis* and the affluent life of Rajput *Zamindar*. Therefore, this article situates Sanichari and *rudalis* community within the caste hierarchized discriminatory social practice to parse their vulnerable lives. For this, it makes use of Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection and Agamben's concept of *homo sacer* to explicate *rudalis*' embodiment of *homo sacer* and the reversal of their position through mourning performance. Sanichari along with her tribal community undergo their constricted life. The inclusion of the abject tribes, mainly "Dushad and Ganjus" (Ganguli 126) as *rudalis* and menial labor from domestic sphere of the *zamindar* to the graveyard helps perpetuate the feudal structure. These people

are used for *rudali* performance, bonded labors, and the dead body carriers during cremation (Ganguli 131). While delving into the oppressing system, Maitreya Ghatak notes, “[T]he exploited lower castes as ‘the *bandhua majdoors*, or bonded labourers” (1) in Devi's *Rudali* to uncover their abject lives in Indian oppressive social stratification. The article, thus, postulates that *Rudali* performance paradoxically includes the socio-economically abandoned community in the feudal order of society to perpetuate the exploitative system.

By re-appropriating *rudalis*' strategic transformation of the ritualized mourning into an instrument for the economic autonomy, this analysis looks into the long-lasting feudal system that reduces them to unworthy abject political being, *homo sacer*. Sanichari's abjection from her domestic to social sphere where she gets economically exploited by Ramavatar *zamindar* whose debt made her indentured labor for a long time. Eerily, the provision of his high interest while lending money is normalized that leads the debtors go bankrupt. Above all, poverty, exploitation, and deprivation lead her to social abandonment, an abject being who has no social security. Besides this, her the low-caste female body functions as such an abject entity embodying social exclusion to sustains the social order by. Sanichari's accursed name and laboring body, marked by widowhood, caste impurity, and menial labor, becomes the abject and ‘impure’ body upon which the elite people construct social segregation and constitute her a politically ripped off abject *homo sacer*. Therefore, the prime focus of the study remains in posing Ganguli's *Rudali* beyond “the colonial and patriarchal contexts” (Guha 13) in order to study the poetic of *rudalis*' abject *homo sacer* position. To this end, the article explores Ganguli's aesthetic, dramaturgical, and performative strategies to review how caste, class, and gender intersect to produce abject *homo sacer*.

Given that impoverished people are docile which Ganguli's *Rudali* justifies because the untouchable communities embody the discursive truth. However, the *rudlis*' precarious survival which Radha Subramanyam juxtaposes with “gendered subaltern” (34) to affiliate with Agamben's abject *homo sacer*'s stripped-down life. Despite this contention, the play relocates the abject subaltern woman into a poetic and political subject whose social exclusion informs Agamben's *homo sacer* and his ripped off social life. Put simply, Sanichari's community's labor and *rudali* performance is validated to retain the feudal social order by compelling her community to remain under socio-economic suppression. Hooking on *rudali* culture, this analysis of abjection in the play destabilizes both the sovereign power of the *zamindars* as a representative of the regime by letting socially abandoned *rudalis* perform the dirge to dignify even their dead bodies. To parse the reduction of untouchable Dushad and Ganju to abject *homo sacer* whose biological survival speaks of their losing of the socio-political entitlements, the research reimagines their mourning performance as a poetic tool of political resistance against social abandonment/ abjection. Against such backdrop, the study aims to figure out the ensuing issues: In what ways does the dramatized version of *Rudali* help explicate socially abject *rudalis* as *homo sacer*? Why does Ganguli recast the abject *rudalis* as political agents in postcolonial India? In sum, *Rudali* as a literary site helps take stock of the ripped off life to advocate social justice by providing them mourning space that ironically debunks the feudal social order.

Literature Review

Though this article focuses on Ganguli's dramatic rendering Devi's novella *Rudali*, the empirical literature review is based on Devi's *Rudali* as the novella has garnered more critical receptions than its drama version. As a compelling narrative, *Rudali* has drawn scholarly receptions since its publication in different languages. While perusing her book, Maitreya Ghatak traces social activism (xv) which means Devi possesses a reason in her writing so that she deals with social disparity. Focusing on her critique of *rudali* culture and social ostracism of the improvised community, Manjusha C B and V. Vijayalakshmi dissect, “There are multitudes of human beings both men and women who are left out in the fringes of this society deprived of even their basic rights...such women who are suffering in reality just like Sanichari” (54). They discuss the miserable life of the underprivileged community intentionally left in the ‘fringe’ of Indian society who matches

with Agamben's politically constituted *homo sacer*, an abject figure unsafeguarded by socio-political rights. Identifying the ripping off citizenry rights of *homo sacer* in *rudali* community, Subramanyan explores representation of feminist consciousness among the gendered subaltern in Rajasthani society. He argues, "The representation of a gendered subaltern by a text that only has the tools of the dominant structure and is attempting to mediate feminist consciousness and realism with popular appeal leads to a necessary ambivalence in narrative and subject" (34). Subramanyam explicitly uncovers narrative 'ambivalence' when he traces Sanichari's turning to a vocal *rudali* from a subaltern to the mourning subject. He traces the shift of her subjectivity in the play.

Unlike Subramanyan's exploration of ambivalence in *Rudali*, B Vijaya delves into Devi's book to critique the exploitative Indian regime which recalls both Kristeva and Agamben's notions discussed above. Meanwhile, Vijaya writes, "Devi is the chronicler of tribal people in India" (18). *Rudali* women belong to this community whose marginalized life manifest the bare life consigned to *homo sacer* in Agamben studies. Susmita S. Chakravarty's reading of *Rudali* also shows the ethos of tribal women in India. She remarks, "*Rudali* . . . evokes a subaltern ethos. Based on a story by Mahasweta Devi, a Bengali writer and activist who works tirelessly on behalf of India's tribal populations, it explores the many levels of oppression to which the lower-caste, impoverished female is subject. In recent years new trends in Indian historiography have also placed the subaltern at the center of India's political and nationalist struggles" (285). Chakravarty charts the impoverished life of *rudalis* paralleling to the abject *homo sacer* who attributes marginal survival; ostracism, outlawry, caste, and gender disparity in *Rudali*. Therefore, the critique of women's marginalization in *Rudali* has been a pertinent issue that this article aims to assay tailoring the concepts, abjection and *homo sacer*.

Kristeva argues that "[l]iterature has always been the most explicit realization of the signifying subject's condition" (82) which means literature always deals with subject formation; identity that comes out of abjection. In this context, seeking social Darwinist exegesis wherein the fittest holds authority and pushes the weak one to the edge in Kristeva's abjection Childers and Hentzi describe, "The abject represents what human life and culture exclude in order to sustain themselves" (128). They mean that there is survival of the fittest which is evident in the exclusion of the *rudali* community in Ganguli's play.

Though there is no unified literary application of *homo sacer* and abjection in *Rudali* which this study aims to explore, Samantha Pentony has used Kristeva's theory of abjection in relation to the fairy tale in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* and Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*. In the same vein, Arya's *Abjection and Representation: An Exploration of Abjection in the Visual Arts, Film and Literature* also delves into Kristeva's abject theory while analyzing arts, movie, and literary writings. On the other hand, Sarah Lee, in "The Enduring Legacy of *Homo Sacer*," remaps boundary between political life (*biós*) and bare life (*zoé*) consigned to *homo sacer* while dealing with Kafka's *The Trial*, George Orwell's *1984*, and J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Donna Reeve also uses Agamben's *homo sacer* to critique social receptions towards impaired body. The discussion above reveals that both abjection and politically ripped off *homo sacer* can be the apt lenses to probe politically insignificant life of professional mourners in *Rudali*. Therefore, the article holds relevance in taking recourse to these nuances to look into *rudalis*' abjection and politically unworthy life in Ganguli's drama version.

Intertwining Abjection and *Homo Sacer*

The close reading of *Rudali* explores characters, setting, and dialogue to interpret the poetics of abjection. The explorative mapping of the abject *homo sacer* in Ganguli's play leads to investigate Sanichari and her associates' relegation to politically unworthy beings. The analytical reading of the play also assists in probing how these abject lamenters purposefully make use of their performative acts as a political space to reclaim their agency. The mourning community characterized by grinding poverty, vicious exploitation, and political insignificance copes with the abject life as if they are unacknowledged *homo sacer*. Further, it contends that Sanichari and others orchestrate a strategic mournful performance by subverting their role to reclaim their social recognition amid the triple-

bound abjection of caste, class, and gender. To take stock of the social marginalization in the discriminatory Indian society that harnesses the hegemony of elites, the study takes recourse to Kristeva's nuanced understanding of abjection and Agamben's conceptualization of socio-politically stripped-down *homo sacer*.

In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva draws on Jacques Lacan to build up the concept of abjection. She reviews Lacan's mirror and symbolic stages to talk about the othering the mother by the baby, unlike their symbiotic relation in the pre-Oedipal stage. The process of othering/ abjection is a necessary evil for the subject formation. She further features abjection as the things that disturb. Therefore, such things must be expelled to maintain the integrity of the self. Focusing on the child's revulsion toward the maternal body, she adds, "Abjection, on the other hand, is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady" (4). Central to her conceptualization of abjection, she notes it as the fundamental process by which the embryonic subject is violently expelled from the pre-symbolic, identical unity with the mother and the world. In this process, the baby expels its mother physically and mentally, what disturbs its proper 'self.' Regarding the expulsion of the mother by the baby, Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi describe abjection as a process to explore identity or order, "the abject represents what human life and culture exclude in order to sustain themselves" (128) that underscores the formation of subjectivity. Building ideas on how the child expels the mother, Rina Arya also explains Kristevian abjection as "[t]he process by which the infant separates from its mother" (18) to form its identity. She considers it as "the most 'primitive' expression of abjection occurs in the pre-Oedipal relationship between the infant and the (figure of the) mother, where the former experiences the latter's body as abject" (17). In consonance with Arya's reading of abjection in which the child builds repulsion towards its nurturing mother since embryonic stage, Estelle Barrett simplifies abjection as an emotional process of repulsion and rejection that the fetus builds up during gestation. Barrett remaps the origin of abjection since the embryonic stage where the fetus unconsciously denies the mother's cues in the womb.

To recap, Kristeva configures abjection as the psychic process by which identity is constituted through the expulsion of unclean, impure, redundant, or taboo. In the dichotomy of self/other, inside/outside, rich/poor, eastern/western, civilized/ savage, and male/female, among other afford Kristeva's abjection arises in each pair one rejects the other, however, there is inexplicable fascination. While remapping Kristeva's abjection, Michelle Symes relates it to gender rejection: "The abject is the outcast feminine in the figure of the maternal that is rejected because it is unnamable, heterogeneous, abominably real and cannot be integrated into the Symbolic" (2). Symes's reading of the rejected maternal figure can metaphorically correspond to the socially rejected *Dalit* populations in Ganguli's *opus*. The lower-caste poor people are the 'abominable' being in Indian society, however they become an integrated part of the funerary mourning. Following it, Arya also notes, "For Kristeva, abjection is a vital and determinative process in the formation of the subject . . . which originates as a psychic process but it affects all aspects of social and cultural life. Systems, laws and taboos work to safeguard societies and communities" (2). Focusing on Arya's abjection as vital for law and system, the culturally expelled *rudali* community while undergoing ostracism persists to safeguard "the gender and class disparities, the primers of my culture" (Kristeva 2), which aptly help to explicate the production of abject *homo sacer* on the basis of class, caste, and gender injustice in Ganguli's play.

In line with Kristeva abjection that can be a tool of reading social ostracism, Agamben also discusses the socio-politically ripped off *homo sacer* figure in *Homo Sacer* (1998), when the regime normalizes the state of exception to terminate the civil rights of the people. Agamben's understanding of this figure characterizes the latter's statelessness because his "entire existence is reduced to a bare life stripped of every right by virtue of the fact that anyone can kill him without committing homicide" (183). Hence, *homo sacer* marks anyone who is excluded from the sphere of the law (*polis*) yet remains bound by it. This figure characterizes a mere biological life that never yields political significance (*biós*). Hence, abandoned by law, the *homo sacer* has neither a political life (*biós*) nor natural life (*zoé*) when his/ her civil rights are cut off by the sovereign. Further, the *homo sacer* is considered to be a secluded outlawed bandit who lives in a state of exception because he is abandoned

by law. Agamben mediates *homo sacer* to analyze the relationship between law and common people providing a model to critique social issues like pauperizing, exploitation, political dispossession, statelessness, and gendered subaltern. The study takes into consideration of this outlawed figure to deal with the aforementioned discriminatory social issues. *Rudali*, contains the intersectional issues illustrating the precarious life of the marginalized *rudalis* who are deprived of legal protection, economic security, and social inclusion.

To recap, *homo sacer*'s abjection/rejection accentuates the fissure between biological (*zoé*) and the social-political (*biós*) life wherein biological life is included within the realm of power to be outlawed (Diken and Laustsen 296). Put simply, the inclusion of *homo sacer* marks his exclusion because he has no social security or any legal injunction. While identifying the relationship between *homo sacer* and zones of exception, Agamben shows the precarity of civil rights, "[T]he sovereign is the one with respect to whom all men are potentially *homines sacri*, and *homo sacer* is the one with respect to whom all men act as sovereigns" (Agamben 84), because the whim of the sovereign can rip them off. Focusing on the unlimited power of sovereign who can rip off public rights, Agamben labels women, orphan, children, refugees and asylum seekers as *homo sacer* (132). To simplify, the sovereign defines the *homo sacer* by means of sovereign ban and normalized state of exception through the discursive practices. To turn to *Rudali*, in which Somri, Parbatia, Haroa, and the *zamindar* hate Sanichari because of her gender, class, and caste. The play further exposes the abandonment of *rudalis* because of their illiteracy and compliance with the social system. To recap, the abject bare life of the *homo sacer* corresponds to the social exclusion of *rudalis* who are not safeguarded by law in *Rudali*.

This analysis brings Kristeva's abjection into conversation with Agamben's nuance of *homo sacer* to examine the lost agency of *rudali* which they like to reclaim through mourning performance. Ganguli stages the spectacle of *rudalis* appreciating the dead one, for example, when Gambir Singh dies, "Malik, malik! A whole mob of *rudalis* is coming this way, crying at the top of their voices" (153), articulating good words for the dead. Because the mourning glorifies the death of rich people even though some of them would perpetrate the poor mourners. The *Dalit* irrespective of their class, gender, and age, and, in particular, *rudali* women face the social abjection prevailed in Rajasthan that helps upper-castes' people to perpetuate their identity and dignity in a way the baby forms its identity after dissociating from its mother. To talk about the familial repulsion appropriating Kristeva's abjection, Haroa and Parbatia discard Sanichari because she could not offer them food. Haroa accuses her, "You never gave anyone enough to eat. You starved my grandmother, you drove out my mother, you killed off my father" (113). Haroa's disgust indicates that the poor Sanichari is unworthy and abject at home because she cannot supply adequate foodstuffs despite her hard work. And Somri, Budhua, and Sanichari's husband death also exemplify their politically insignificant abject ill bodies. More precisely their untimely death underscores their devalued and underprivileged lives, which also illustrate Agamben's socially rejected *homo sacer* and Kristeva's nuance of abjection.

To sum up, the social exclusion and political unacknowledged life of penury-ridden *Dalit* community aptly help re-appropriate both Kristeva and Agamben's nuance of abjection and bare life consigned to *homo sacer*. Like outlawed and abandoned *homo sacer*, who suffers ostracism while living in a normalized but elongated state of exception; the *rudali* community seems abandoned by the state as non-person which their starved, sickness, and uncared bodies illumine. Their economic and psycho-somatic exploitation has been normalized by discursive truth of caste hierarchy. The *rudalis* resonates with Kristeva's abjection because the existing social structure casts them off, repels and excludes but involves them through mourning while asking them to be outside the 'respectable' society of elites that illustrates Agamben's *homo sacer*.

Abject Bodies and the Politics of Mourning: *Rudalis* as Abject *Homo Sacer*

The extreme poverty, female as secondary being, and *rudalis*' belonging to the *Dalit* community are the triple bench markers that show their social exclusion in Ganguli's drama *Rudali*. Among the *Dalits*, Sanichari receives familial and social disgust since her name is after *Shani* (Saturn), the inauspicious planet that prefigures her abjection. However, other *Dalit* people, who

possess good names and born on auspicious days also have the penury-driven lives which explicitly compels to rethink that abjection emerges from social structure. The death of family members forces Sanichari to confront the cruel economics of debt which invites the deeper disgust in her society. To cure and cremate them as per Hindu custom, Sanichari enters into further debt-trap deepening the family's misery as she turns out to be a bonded serf which she remaps as, "My whole life has been spent working, working" (Ganguli 121). She pointedly nails to the exploitative social structure and injustice as its repercussion. Fed up with the system that badly cheats her, Sanichari remarks: "Mohanlal landed me with a second *kriya* (sic) ceremony. I had to feed the whole village on curds and chivda after taking a loan from Ramavatar. . . . Who knows . . . the thakurs and brahmins (sic.) are all in this together. They control everything. It took me five years to pay off my debt to the thakur" (1.6. 122). Despite Sanichari's hard work along with her son, it took her five years to pay off the geometrically increased loan. Naturally, her complaint draws on the systemic unfairness that the abject *homo sacer* must endure. Her grandson, Haroa's observation further strengthens the somatic torture: "I work like a donkey all day long, carrying heavy loads. . ." (Ganguli 106). It illustrates the dehumanized life of the poor who is unsafeguarded by law. By the same token, the Brahmins and *Thakurs* who represent the "sovereign" (Agamben 84) hold authority to rip off the poor's civil rights. Their power is so ubiquitous that they control and regulate the *Dalit* people to perpetuate the exploitative social order.

Recapping the pauperization and relegation to debt-trap, Bijua remarks, "What else? On the fourth day one has to feed five brahmins on *dahi* and *gur*. I tell you, living is tough for poor people, but dying is even worse" (Ganguli 100). Bijua narrates how the poor turns to poor being trapped by the social order constituted by elites. The irony here is the elite's death is performed by hired mourners whereas the death of the poor makes rest of the family members dispossessed like *homo sacer*. In addition, identifying the abject *homo sacer* life of the poor in Tahad, Sanichari's grandson, Haroa's statement reveals precarity of abject life, "He makes me slave all day and pays me a measly twenty rupees a month. . ." (107) to underpin the exploitative structure normalized by the elites. Haroa further unpacks the child labor abuse when he questions, "Does that mean he can hit me when he likes, abuse me as he likes. . ." (107)? Here, Haroa emphasizes the ongoing injustice while working for the elites. Lachman Singh's son thrashes him with the shoe that dramatizes the harm over the *homo sacer* and "the impunity" (Agamben 72) of the sovereign.

On the other hand, Sanichari's mourning profession at rich people's death literally serves maintain caste and class disparity in India though *rudali* dirge is a creative practice (Kapoor101) making the marginalized *rudalis*, or, "wailing motherhood" (Ghosh 296) publicly visible. The public spectacle of rich people's name and fame even after their death undeniably marks a survival and protest strategies of the poor—an act of reclaiming social recognition within a feudal system that rendered the *rudalis* politically invisible. In addition, *rudalis*' marginality prevents them from accessing power in any of its many forms – social, institutional, political, economic – within a society (Hurlstone 4-5) whereas performative *rudali* tradition brings them on the surface with their novel subjectivity which deconstructs the trajectory of the power dynamics. To put it plainly, as the baby discards its mother to form its identity, the *Dalit rudalis*' embodiment of the stratified structure also necessitate the elites to form their noble position.

To spotlight the Dalits' journey from being to becoming, Ganguli's play graphically presents *rudali* job as "performing marginal identities" (Hurlstone 1) that lets the lamenters their subjectivity. Although the landlords' funerals are lavishly performed while Bikhni, Budhua, Sanichari's husband, and Somri die unnoticed illustrating the poor's outnumbered marginalized lives. Their death also indicates their uncared or outlawed life as if they are Agambenian *homo sacer* born in India which indexes the paradox of modern welfare states. Encapsulating this social disparity and production of vulnerable populations in *Rudali*, Das and Nath comment, "It is the landlords who enjoy all the luxuries of life when ones who work in their field are left to starve" (123-124). They discuss the harsh reality of life while delving into the fissure of class disparity in Indian society. Admittedly, the hired *rudalis* (some of them opt for prostitution for livelihood) whose ritual cries parody the very funerary

that deny them humanity. This stark irony fuels Devi's poetics of abjection while staging the compulsion of opting *rudali* and prostitution while residing in the outskirts of society to combat the massive starvation, unemployment, and illiteracy exposing the moral decay of the sovereign.

The *Rudalis*' Mourning as Counter *Homo Sacer*

The way *rudalis* commodify their tears by performing grief for their livelihood and the low-caste women opt for prostitution accentuate their socio-economic abjection and the reduction of their emotional life to a commodified biological life. The rise of *rudali* wage from two to fifty after Bikhni and Sanichari forge their bond and their comment on the demeanor of the rich, "That bastard is the biggest miser going" (Ganguli 138), show the criers are not the mere docile being whose crying symbolically ridicules the systemic oppression (Chakravorty 297). Through their grieving, they occupy the public space to counter the suppressing social structure. In their wailing, the abject *rudalis* ironically tribute to the dead one who used to be their oppressor, which Eljo Thomas and Neethu Sebastian count as the voice of the voiceless (73). The "grievability" of the rich's death implicates the *rudali* mourning at the death of "*Mahajans*" (Ganguli 118) whereas the miserable life and death of untouchables go unnoticed which shows the underbelly of biopolitical management of the populations. Sanichari fails to grieve her in-laws death, however, she grieves the Mahajans' death that indicates the abject life of the poor is unworthy enough for people to grieve.

In Ganguli's drama, the *rudalis* grieve not only for the rich corpse who would inflict them injustice when alive. Conversely, their mourning ironically transforms abject body into the economics of tangible expression—a form of biopolitical testimony that nails to the need of social inclusion of tribal subaltern (Vijaya 18 and Chakravarty 288). The bodily performance and mourning expressiveness, cries and tears function as an embodied discourse that transgresses the social control, evoking Kristeva's notion that "the abject disrupts symbolic order" (91) through the erstwhile affective domains. The women's cries as the metaphor is so potent that it transcends the abject body and, in J. Maggio's sense, becomes audible and visible subject. Put differently, the performative mourning not only transgresses Rajputs' discriminatory cultural border but also defies Agambenian understanding of the perpetuity of *homo sacer* and his "inclusive exclusion" (85) from political realm. In other words, the *rudalis*' mourning showcases an inversion of Agamben's sovereign logic of political invisibility of *homo sacer*, which implicates socially rejected low-caste women in Ganguli's play have turned into an unavoidable cultural part during funeral ceremony. To simply put, mourning ritual overrides the feudal power structures that calls for change in the conservative society.

Furthermore, Ganguli's staging of female corporeality not only as "whore" (95), mourners (128), and farmhands but also the "labourers" (126) challenge the patriarchal hegemony and the sense of economy of purity and pollution. By professionalizing grief, as the "politics of crying" (Guha 13), Sanichari and her companions compel to rethink the sovereign who produces *homo sacer* which Das and Nath assume as the inversion of caste and gender disparity in Hindu social structure. Additionally, *rudali* women embody "the cultural identity of tribal women" (Kapoor 97), who earn livelihood and profit from their participation in the funerary mourning practices of the politically protected upper castes. It naturally shows the disruption of the binaries of low/high and sacred/profane. Espousing with this logic Manjusha and Vijayalakshmi argue that such disruption becomes a decoding vision of misery (53) when mourning gains both the cultural and economic spaces. The *Dalits*' bodies, previously marked as untouchable, abject and abandoned, finally become the sites of economic agency and an ethical commentary when the play resurfaces prostitution and *rudali* job. Indeed, the ritualized mourning speaks of "suffering and marginalization of the women from unclean and impure" (Pillai 253), and degraded or "fallen" (Kapoor 95), community. Above all, Sanichari's final act of organizing the professional mourners from the *randipatti*; "whore's quarters" (Ganguli 147) through which she and other socially stigmatized women successfully exit from the politically constricted realm along with their ripped off life. Subsequently, they create a self-governing, politicized economic as well as creative corporeal performance that becomes the intriguing note against the structural injustice, in general, and caste and gender-driven Hindu social hierarchy, in particular.

Conclusion: Undoing *Homo Sacer* through *Rudalis* Poetics of Expression

The critique of *rudalis* as abject *homo sacer* women (excluded, impoverished, and silenced) and their conversion into a poetic and political agent, who draw attention on social inclusion, provide a new insight to examine the dire social disparity in India. Tailoring Kristeva's notion of abjection and Agamben's *homo sacer* as the theoretical insights, the study reveals how the social order revolves around the expulsion and production of impoverished *rudali* bodies which the *Dalit* women invert from mere beings to becoming human in Ganguli's play. The analysis also interprets the inversion of abject *rudalis* as a counter-sovereign act: reclaiming emotion, language, and ritual roles as well as empowering domestic economies from the control of the feudal order to suggest a way forward to include the underprivileged community. That is why, Ganguli's trajectory of aesthetic abjection dramatizes *rudalis* crying as a political tool to deflate the caste, gender, and class-based social order.

To conclude, the examination of transgressive *rudali* performance along with mapping of the *Dalit* communities surviving the abject lives in *Rudali* provides a new insight in perusing the uneven social structure. While taking recourse to Kristeva's abjection and Agambenian *homo sacer*, the article reveals a complex interface between psychological, social, and political mechanisms that relegate the impoverished community to a dire state of dehumanization. The *rudalis* and prostitutes are not only abject figures outlawed by law who embody society's abject elements but also prototypes of dehumanized *homo sacer*, whose existence is rendered politically insignificant. Yet their performative participation in the ritual mourning as *rudali* necessitates the smooth running of feudal sovereignty and social order. Unlike the general assumption of silenced and impoverished *rudalis*, they are vocal when they transgress the stereotyping border of gender, class, and caste. Their mourning performance functions as a mighty political debut to rupture the hegemonic social hierarchy. To sum up, the reconfiguration of politically unsafeguarded and abject *rudalis* as the ones who transform their stigmatized occupations, prostitution and *rudali* performance, into the economic platforms provides a graphic picture of their emerging empowerment and thus demands for more nuanced readings of this text than the ones exist to this date.

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