



# Unveiling Sanichari's Stoicism in *Rudali* by Mahasweta Devi: A Freudian Psychoanalysis

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## Abstract:

This research paper offers a Freudian psychoanalysis of Sanichari, aiming to uncover the unconscious forces, defense mechanisms, and internal conflicts that shape her character and actions. Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali* presents a compelling character in Sanichari, a woman whose life is full of tragedy, marked by the loss of her husband and son and abandonment by her grandson. Using Freud's psychoanalytic framework, her character can be understood through defense mechanisms such as repression, denial, projection and sublimation which she employs to cope with overwhelming grief and anger. As the narrative unfolds, Sanichari's involvement with the Rudali, a group of professional mourners, becomes central to her identity. Her role as a Rudali allows her to channel her repressed emotions into a socially accepted outlet, illustrating the psychoanalytic concept of sublimation. In this paper, by delving into her psyche, a deeper understanding of Mahasweta Devi's portrayal of Sanichari who is undergoing anguish in the face of adversity, is gained.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, defense mechanism, grief, loss

## Introduction

In the realm of literature, characters often serve as intricate mirrors reflecting the complex human emotions. One such character that stands as an embodiment of these emotions is Sanichari from Mahasweta Devi's literary masterpiece, *Rudali*. This novella is renowned for its apparent portrayal of human suffering and stoicism.

Mahasweta Devi, a genius in the world of Indian literature and social activism, possessed a remarkable ability to unleash the hidden layers of human consciousness. Through her works, she unveiled the harsh realities faced by marginalized communities, giving voice to them. This led to her editing a Bengali quarterly *Bortika* – a forum for the poor peasants, tribals, agricultural and industrial laborers and the rickshaw pullers. Mahasweta Devi was awarded the Padma Shri, not for her work as a writer but as an activist working with the tribal groups of the Purulia and Medinipur districts of West Bengal. Some of her notable works include *The Queen of Jhansi*, *Hajar Churashir Maa*, *Aranyer Adhikar*, *Agnigarbha*, *Bitter Soil*, *Chotti Munda Evam Tar Tir (chotti munda and his arrow)*, *Imaginary Maps*, *Dhowli*, *Dust on the Road (activist and political writings)*, *Our Non-Veg Cow*, *Bashai Tudu*, *Titu Mir*, *Rudali* and many more.

*Rudali* is a dynamic short story in Bengali that was adapted into a play in Hindi by Usha Ganguli, a leading theater director in 1992. Both the story and the play were translated into English by Anjum Katyal, in 1997, a notable Indian translator, writer and editor known for the promotion of literary and cultural exchange.

English writer and critic, Lytton Strachey rightly said, "Psychoanalysis is first and foremost an art of interpreting." Psychoanalytic criticism is a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation and analysis of literature. Since the 1920s, a widespread type of psychological literary criticism has come to be called psychoanalytic criticism whose premises and procedures were established by Sigmund Freud. Freud had developed the dynamic form of psychology that he called "psychoanalysis" as a procedure for the analysis and therapy of neuroses, but soon expanded it to account for many developments and practices in the history of civilization, including warfare, mythology, and religion, as well as literature and the other arts. (Abrams 320)

Freud's psychoanalytic framework is a multifaceted exploration of the human experience. The interplay between these psychological forces forms the basis of Freud's theories, illuminating the complexities of human motivation, defense mechanisms, and emotional conflicts.

Sanichari, the central character of *Rudali*, stands as a testament to Devi's narrative skill, encapsulating the essence of struggle, sorrow, and survival. This research endeavors to engage in a psychoanalytic exploration of Sanichari, seeking to unravel the intricacies of her character as portrayed by Mahasweta Devi. By delving into the depths of her consciousness, the suppressed emotions, defense mechanisms, and psychological conflicts define her existence. Sanichari's life is marred by personal tragedies and societal oppression, providing for the application of psychoanalytic principles to understand her actions and motivations.

Repression as a Defense Mechanism:

Repression involves pushing traumatic or distressing memories and emotions into the subconscious mind to avoid dealing with them consciously. Sanichari uses repression to cope with her painful past and the

tragedies she has experienced: “Sanichari felt an earthquake within. She exploded. Cry? Me? Don’t you know? I can’t shed tears? These two eyes of mine are scorched?” (Devi 90).

Sanichari represses her own suffering and the injustices she faces as a low-caste woman in a patriarchal society. She goes about her life, fulfilling her duties as a Rudali, without openly expressing anger or resentment at the exploitation and discrimination she endures. Throughout the novel, it becomes clear that Sanichari has faced numerous traumatic events in her life, including poverty, abuse, and loss. She represses these memories and emotions, choosing not to confront or acknowledge them consciously.

### Consequences of Repression

Sanichari's repression leads to emotional detachment from her own experiences. She becomes emotionally distant and numb, which allows her to continue functioning in her role as a Rudali.

### Denial as a Defense Mechanism

Denial involves refusing to accept or acknowledge the reality of a distressing situation or emotion. Sanichari employs denial as a coping mechanism to shield herself from the harsh truths of her life.

Throughout the novel, Sanichari often downplays the extreme poverty, discrimination, and abuse she faces, convincing herself that her life is not as difficult as it truly is. Sanichari avoids confronting her own emotions, especially those related to her traumatic past. She refuses to engage in discussions or self-reflection that might force her to acknowledge the pain and sorrow she carries.

### Consequences of Denial

Denial leads to the repression of genuine emotions. Sanichari buries her feelings of anger, sadness, and frustration deep within, which can result in emotional turmoil and internal conflict. Denial helps Sanichari maintain a fragile sense of hope and self-esteem. It allows her to believe that things will get better without facing the full weight of her circumstances.

### Projection as a Defense Mechanism

Projection involves attributing one's own thoughts, feelings, or impulses onto someone else. Sanichari employs projection as a way to cope with her emotions and externalize her own inner turmoil. Sanichari often blames others, particularly individuals from higher castes or those in positions of power, for her misfortunes.

### Consequences of Projection

Projection enables Sanichari to avoid self-reflection and confront her own emotions. By enabling her feelings and experiences to external factors, she can avoid acknowledging her own pain and trauma. The constant projection of negative emotions onto others can strain her relationships and lead to misunderstandings. This is evident through her relationship with her grandson and daughter in law.

### Sublimation as a Defense Mechanism

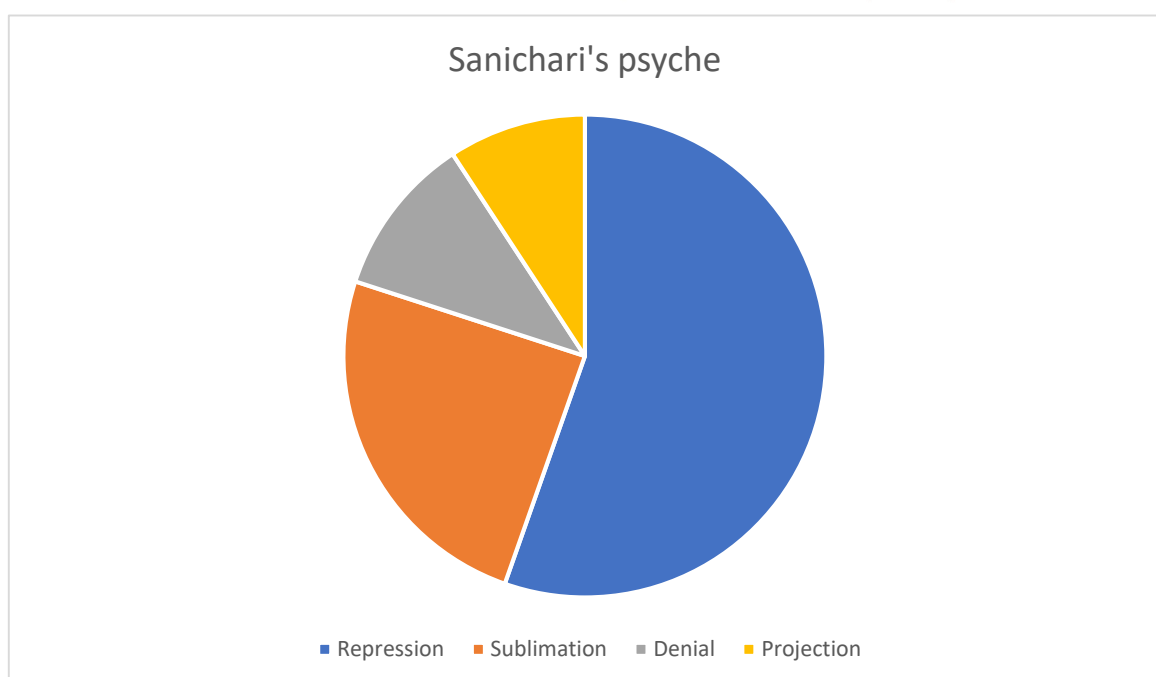
Sublimation involves channeling one's inner turmoil, desires, or negative emotions into socially acceptable or productive outlets. Sanichari employs sublimation as a way to cope with her emotional distress and express herself within the confines of her culture. The article, "Communal Expectancy and the Authentic Self of Men and Transgenders - Arms and the Man by George Bernard Shaw and Birthday by Meredith Russo" the author Suganya et al. explains the emotional distress in men and transgenders (Suganya et al. 881)

Sanichari's primary form of sublimation is her role as a Rudali, a professional mourner. In Indian culture, it is socially acceptable for women to express their grief through mourning. "Just for wailing, one kind of rate, wailing and rolling on the ground, five rupees one sikka... Wailing and rolling on the ground and beating one's head, five rupees two sikka..." (Devi 96, 97). By becoming a Rudali, Sanichari expresses her inner sorrow and suffering. She wails and mourns for others, allowing her to release her suppressed emotions. Sublimation through mourning rituals and singing allows Sanichari to experience a sense of catharsis. It provides her with a temporary release from the emotional burden she carries.

### Consequences of Sublimation

Sanichari's role as a Rudali becomes an integral part of her identity. It demonstrates her ability to adapt to her culture's expectations while finding a way to cope with her emotional distress. In the article, "Gender Performance on the Reinvigoration via Food", the author Suganya et al. describes the role of women who act upon their impulses to reduce the distress in the lives of men and others in the society. The article focuses on the ways in which the act of women in relation to food offering, and consumption through empathic emotion regulation by women reinvigorates into an optimistic multicultural environment (Suganya et al. 883).

Sublimation allows her to balance her inner turmoil with her external responsibilities, providing her with a means of emotional release and cultural acceptance.



## Conclusion

Sanichari in Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali* through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis employs a range of defense mechanisms, including repression, denial, projection and sublimation to cope up with the profound adversities in her life. These mechanisms are not merely psychological constructs but powerful tools that allow Sanichari to endure and find purpose amidst the oppressive social and cultural forces that surround her.

Through the analysis of specific examples from the text, one can uncover how repression allows her to bury traumatic memories, denial shields her from acknowledging her harsh reality, projection externalizes her inner turmoil onto others, sublimation channels her emotions into culturally acceptable outlets, and rationalization justifies her choices in the context of her challenging circumstances. The character of Sanichari serves as a symbol of stoicism. It underscores the enduring human capacity to adapt and survive, even in suffering and tragedy.

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