

# Cyclic Nature of Liberation in After Kurukshetra

“Under the surface of a flowing river lurks another current, a strong under-tow which is primeval, savage” - (Devi, Mahasweta. *After Kurukshetra*)

After the Kurukshetra war, the lives of the common people (lokavritta, as mentioned in *After Kurukshetra*) and the people from ruling class (rajavritta) has undergone certain twists. Those mute voices are unmuted now and they are in a state of realization, acceptance and their vocals are filled with several questions to be raised against the upper royal class. The community of lokavritta are neglected by the Rajavrittis in every sense. The rules are always made favorable for rajavritta and during the process of law making the lower class (Lokavrittis) were not considered. The lokavritta sacrificed their lives for the petty rivalries from ego and power greed of the royal people. Common people always believes and desires for a life of rajavritta thinking that they are the most privileged with wealth and power. But the question is, do the power, money and luxuries can provide happiness? If so, then why the Pandavas especially the women of Pandavas are not able to enjoy the newly gained wealth and power. After the war, the state of outcaste shifts to the side of elites. So, who are the real subalterns? Is the term subaltern only stands with those who does not belong to the power structure and not having financial support?

## 2.1 The Five Women (Panchakanya)

The first story, ‘The Five Women’ in *After Kurukshetra* starts by declaring that the Dharmayuddha was over. Funeral pyres are burning and near to that, women of the dead ones are weeping. From the very first sentence it is evident that the three stories are about the life after war. This war has been glorified by the ruling class as Dharmayuddha. Through the rewriting of the epic *Mahabharata*, the concept of dharma is also rewritten. The battlefield of Kurukshetra is exactly like *The Wasteland* by T.S. Eliot. After the war, the battlefield is deserted and it is abandoned like a graveyard filled with burning pyres. “As the warriors are cremated, the skies above Kurukshetra are dark with circling birds of prey. Reek of rotting flesh. Row upon row of oil-soaked

wood pyres piled high with decomposing bodies. They are set alight. The pyres burn for days.” (After *Kurukshetra* 1)

The class privileges will follow till one’s death and sometimes even the death of a person is privileged according to the caste he or she belongs to. After the first touch of death, everyone, irrespective of class privileges, gender, race, age and other discriminations, whatever it may be, named as dead body, a name of equality. But the funeral given to these dead bodies are based on the class in which the ‘body’ belongs to. Hence, the dead bodies of the kings and those who belonged to the royal blood are cremated with all prescribed rituals. But the dead bodies of those who are from lower class, such as, the foot soldiers, servants, and attendants are less or not valued and their funerals are not based on any prescribed rituals or customs. The foot soldiers are slaughtered in hundreds in each day during the war. They were not given any armour other than a spear. They have to fight in the war as well as they have to protect the chariot-mounded heroes. So naturally they will die in large numbers.

*The Five Women* mainly focusses on the relationship of widowed Uttara and the five subaltern women. They gave a new insight to Uttara who is afraid of the widowhood and the lifeless life she want to face after her delivery. The royal housewives, especially Kunti and Subhadra finds good when they heard the news of newly appointed companions for Uttara from the outer world of royal palace. “They are from a totally different world. Uttara’s heart is bound to be lighter in their company” (After *Kurukshetra* 5). When they appoint these five women they thought that these women lacks sense to realize the extent of violence and sufferings undergone, hence they are successful in keeping Uttara in good vibe. Actually the royal wives and widows are forced to suffer and ignored at the hands of their male counterpart’s need for power. The feelings of the royal women are irrelevant in the male’s fight for his dharma.

When the war is a loss for some, certain people are benefitted from it. And these ‘certain people’ are usually from the lower class. In the story, we can see chandals. The chandals are tribal people who doesn’t have any role in war but they usually appear in the battlefield after the war to collect firewood. After the horrible war, when the life of rajavritta become stagnant, the life of

lokavritta is still in motion. The Chandals are the first instance of this movement. The five women in the story is also introduced with a movement of squatting.

If the lives of lokavritta are introduced with a movement, the royal atmosphere is entirely opposite to it. The royal palace is filled with widows and the high priests or the acharyas who are busy instructing them to the rigorous rules of widowhood. Every women are stunned with grief. They are afraid to face the realities.

Here we can see Madraja, who is the head dasi of the royal women quarters and it is she who recruits other dasis. Madraja belongs to Kurujangal region, which shows that she belongs to a lower class. Madraja represents the lower class women with some sort of power in the royal women quarters. She was taken to the palace when she was very young and after that she has never been exposed to the world of lokavritta again. So she is unaware of the issues happening around her. In this way Madraja become the true example for the subaltern character in the story. Madraja is the representative of other such dasis who have pseudo dual identity because they are unable to fit themselves in any of these identities.

Godhumi, Gomati, Yamuna, Vitasta and Vipasha belongs to the marginalized community, so they are subalterns. They are from the Kurujangal and was appointed to serve the widowed and pregnant Uttara. Before the Kurukshetra war, the royal women enjoy the bliss of marriage, a life of sumptuous. There was life in the royal palace before war. But after Kurukshetra, the royal palaces witness a stagnant life. The only movement in the palace is of those acharyas, who are busy giving instructions about the rigorous rules of widowhood. The palace is filled with the grief of young women. We can see the life came to an end in the palace after Kurukshetra.

But in case of the Lokavrittis, there is no need of dividing the past and present like 'Before Kurukshetra' and 'After Kurukshetra', because their life has a motion. They can survive every twists and turns that the life gets into because they are close the nature. Their needs keep them moving. They doesn't believe the notion of Rajavrittis that the earth can bear anything. This disbelief is again a reason for their movement. For the Lokavrittis, Kurukshetra is not a disaster or natural calamity as the

women of Rajavrittis believe. It was an egoistic war between the brothers. “Some choose one side, some cross over to the other” (*After Kurukshetra* 3). It was a war for just a throne! And it is named as holy war, righteous war when it is just a war of greed. Such terming and glorification of the war is for giving a distorted idea about the war to the common people for getting their sides and it’s a kind of self-justification.

Royal men practiced polygamy and they set extreme rules over female chastity and also on widow remarriage. Royal women should be pathivritas while men can have as many women as they wish and wives are not supposed to question their husband’s choice, as they are taught from their childhood to consider husband as god and even above the god. While men have so many wives, when their sons get married, the daughters-in-law have more than one mothers-in-law. Sometimes when mother-in-law enjoys the bliss of married life, her daughter-in-law maybe mourning for her dead husband. This is the case with Uttara. She have Draupadi and Subhadra as her mothers-in-law. As Uttara is pregnant and unable to accept the loss of Abhimanyu, Subhadra asked the five women to make her heart lighter. This is unfair because these five women are also suffering from the pain of their husbands’ loss as the war doesn’t allow them to live with their husband at least for a day. Because their husbands’ went to war and died on the same day of their marriage. But unlike the Rajavritta women, the lokavritta people do not end their life in grief and they do not lead a life of widowhood. They believe in the nature’s recycling and healing effect. So they will remarry and brings back the lively atmosphere of the village. They have the freedom to express their emotions unlike the rajavritta. They can dance and can enjoy their happiness but this is forbidden for the rajavritta women.

At one point of time, Subhadra, Draupadi and all others are worried of Uttara’s baby because they wish the baby to be a girl. This is because if it is a boy, he will be taken from the mother when he will turn five years to the Gurugraha (House of the Guru) and after the education, these boys are taken to the warfront and as usual death will embrace them at their very young age. But if the baby is a girl, then she will not be taken from her mother. This the reason for the women in the palace wishes a girl baby for Uttara.

After the Kurukshetra war, Yudhisthira came into power. The Kauravas are wiped out. Their widows too wear white dress, follow endless fasting, pujas, offerings of cows to the Brahmins. The life of every rajavritta widows is empty and endless as a desert. Everyone done with their revenge. Now their life become voiceless. In case of Draupadi, when every Kauravas were killed, after done with her revenge she becomes silent. And that silence is just a beginning. It stays with her for long.

When Draupadi becomes silent the voice of lokavritta started to hear. The five women were unified with their language which is unknown to the rajavritta. For example, when the five women talks in their own language along with some riddles, this was not understood by Uttara or any other women in the palace. They sing mourning songs in their language because they are aware of the fact that their husbands won't return back. Here, the language once neglected and viewed as something as disgust by the elites is now viewed as with a desire for adapting and adopting.

Uttara is so happy with the company of the five women. But Uttara feels that she is an odd one in the company of these five women because they are always together, sleep, ate, work, bathe, do everything together. "My child, their life is so different, their language is so different. They must feel good being able to talk in their own tongue" (*After Kurukshetra 9*). From the palace window Uttara looks the five women with a sort of desire, "Uttara keeps looking at them." (*After Kurukshetra 7*)

Unlike the Royal women, the women of lokavritta will not allow the pregnant lady to sit and pamper herself because they know that for the normal delivery the mother has to engage herself in some works and this will improve the physical as well as the mental health of the baby and the mother. When a baby born to the rajavritta, the baby was named by the priests after learning the signs and horoscopes. During this time the elder men of the family will sit together with the priests and there is no role for the mother in the naming ceremony. But unlike rajavritta, among the lokavritta, the baby is weighed against food grains. One of the grandparents chooses a name and the baby's head is shaved. Then the baby will be bathed by water in sun, the musicians will play songs and the women sing and dance accordingly. Then the baby will be feed by its maternal uncle with the little finger of the right hand. Everyone will sing and dance

together. The practices of villages were seen as something strange by the rajavritta because they were not bothered to see that.

When the royal women simply sit in the palace by doing the prescribed duties of wife, mother and daughter, the lokavritta women went out with their men and work together. Both the men and women are equally the breadwinners of the house. The most interesting fact is that, when the rajavritta marginalizes the lokavritta as outcastes, the people of rajavritta eat the same food that the lokavritta eat. If the farmers didn't pay the food grain, the royal granary would be empty.

When the royal women are weak and suppressed in their femininity, the lokavritta women are strong enough to kill the animals with a spear. Among rajavritta only their men are the warriors but when it comes to lokavritta, women too are powerful. "Vitasta says, Not just the men, the women also guard the fields. Once my mother speared a deer to death. My mother is really strong. She can lift a stone grinder all by herself." (*After Kurukshetra* 13)

When rajavritta groups everything under the category of male and female gender as dos and don'ts, the lokavritta doesn't do any grouping because they don't have time to do such groupings. For them, the need for survival urges them to do the work together. The lokavritta are always busy with some works and this busy life maintains the rhythm of their life. "Vitasta's fingers are always busy. She fetches clay from the river bank. She makes little clay figures: birds, horses, deer, carts, men, mothers with children. Bakes them in the heat of sun, paints them. She is making little toys for Uttara's baby" (*After Kurukshetra* 13). When it comes to rajavritta this maintenance of rhythm in their life is not possible because they have everything they want and the people from lower class will work for them and feed them. The only activity of rajavritta women is to follow the code and conduct, doing the duties as a daughter, mother, wife and a widow. So, instead of lively active life at some point of time they started feeling boredom. And this is the situation of Uttara as a widow.

The pre-war period is well expressed through the life of Uttara in this story. Uttara had long loose bright colored dresses which looks stunning when she dances. She loved to spend long hours on her swing, played in the garden with her companions. Her dresses were in bright colors. Her six

months of marriage. She remembers her wedding days, they were so young and beautiful couples, the way she was received to the palace of Abhimanyu, and the warm welcome she received from Kunti. But now, after the war, after the death of her husband, the life come to an awful twist. 'Widow' is the term she fears the most. It scares her because she saw the Kaurava widows wearing plain white dresses, no ornaments, hairs hangs on the shoulders. Uttara has forgotten to smile, her footsteps become timid. Immediately after her delivery they will begin the prescribed rituals and rites, the self-denial and penance. And she can stay with her child only for a year and after that her wet nurse will take her child away. "The royal offspring are not raised by their mothers" (*After Kurukshetra* 15). After her marriage, her father's palace, those mountains, puppet dancers, wanderers, magicians, everything become a dream for her. Now she feels the joyous moments that she had in her life was a dream. This happens because, the royal people keep themselves away from rest of the world by attributing the labels of class and making them inferior. Also strict rules and their superiority complex, the real source from which the class division originated, made their life lifeless. It dwarfed their ambitions and ultimately pushed them into the black hole of hopelessness.

All this thoughts of Uttara agitated her and this agitation was feared by the mothers-in-law so they asked Madraja to dismiss these five women from the palace. Subhadra is outraged at the challenging of the lokavritta about their rituals of widows dressed in white clothes. She even tries to educate the rural women about the role which every widow must learn to play in her lifetime. She gives the example of Kunti, hailing her as the epitome of loyalty, sacrifice and devoutness as she carried out her dharma even at the most difficult times. But the five women refuse to pay any heed to the preaching by a royal woman. This made Subhadra to ask Madraja to dismiss these five women. The agitation of Uttara is the first sign of her mental growth. She started comparing her life with the life of the five women and it is from these comparisons that she enlightened with the purposelessness and the void in her life.

Even though Madraja is a dasi, she has some power over the queens. Actually she can tell the queens what to do or not. "Shame on you, Madraja! A woman from Kurujangal! Yet talk like the

rajavritta?” (*After Kurukshetra* 17). Madraja, even though she is from the lokavritta, as she is brought up according to the rajavritta systems, she doesn't know about the life of lokavritta. Madraja is a person with a diasporic personality, that is, by birth she is from lokavritta but she lives in a palace with a rajavritta identity and that identity is actually a misfit. “They brought me here when I was just a babe. Nothing new about that. We're the ones they always get. Dasis for the royal household, courtesans for the palace, prostitutes for the soldiers. Just like you girls” (*After Kurukshetra* 17). Godhumi replied to her in harsh voice, the voice of reality and self-respect:

No. We weren't brought here like you. We never imagined we would end up in the rajavritta. We were married into farming families. Our husbands were sent for during the war. We knew the foot soldiers would die in huge numbers. We'd watch the fighting from afar. At the close of each day's battle we'd search for our husbands' bodies in the heart of that awful darkness. Little clay lamps in our hands, or flaming torches of deodar wood. Our husbands, our brothers, our brothers-in-law ... and – hear this, Madraja! (*After Kurukshetra* 17)

Godhumi through her questions shatters the belief of the people who lives in the palace. The people in the palace believes the war as dharmayudha and those who died in the war will attain the divyalok in a chariot. But Godhumi says that when her and her sisters' husbands died she didn't see any chariots to take them to the divyalok. The chariots from the divyalok is the myth that makes the men to set out in the warfront. Godhumi says, “No Chariots came down from divyalok. They did not go to heaven. The foot soldiers died fighting in the very same Dharmayuddha. But no funeral rites were held for their souls” (*After Kurukshetra* 17-18). Actually these men are also not aware about the hidden agenda of the war they are fighting but the women from lokavritta knows. They are the representatives of reality. It is this sense of reality dares them to set out to the battlefield to check their husbands' body.

Godhumi calls the royal palace as “chambers of silence” (*After Kurukshetra* 19) because the palace is full of lifeless white shadowy creatures and the walls of the palace will never hear any laughter, louder talks and joyful activities. The silence of the chambers now started to suffocate



Uttara. This is a great realization for her which makes her unable to live the rest of her life *without* the company of these five women. But they won't stay in the palace because their life has to move on. The life of five women can't understand by the royal people because the ruling people will not see the subjects.

Another aspect of the life of lokavritta and the rajavritta is their closeness with the nature. The exploitation of the nature and to the fellow human beings are mostly done by the royal people and that too is for their mere pleasure. When rajavritta alienate themselves from others on the basis of caste hierarchy, unknowingly it they themselves are withdrawn from the soil which results in the lack of motion in their life. But the lokavritta are so close to nature, so the nature itself recycle and replenishes their life. The five women in the story starts their journey from the palace through the battlefield when Godhumi hears the calling of Chatak, a bird which drinks only rainwater so the calling of this bird foretells the coming of rain which cools the battlefield and the waves of heat agitate the mind and heart of the people. After the steady rain for few days, the five started their journey through the path which is prepared for them by the nature. The same rains falls over every human equally, the effect it creates is different. When the rain replenishes the life of the five women with marriage and joy, the life of Uttara will come to an end with her delivery. On one side, the rain symbolizes the joyous and pregnant future ahead and on the other side it symbolizes the grief of the past and the loneliness and lifelessness of the future:

When we are widowed, we marry our brothers-in-law... We worship the earth. After a terrible calamity, the sun always rises. Even after this dreadful war, Nature has not stood still... Once we return, all of us together will perform the necessary funerary rituals for our dead. Then the elders will arrange marriages. We need husbands, we need children. The village needs to hear the sound of chatter and laughter. We will...create life. That's what Nature teaches us... As long as there is life demands fulfillment. Our widows remarry, are respected by their families. They work alongside their husbands cultivating the land, harvesting and storing the crop. They never deny the demands of life in order to

exist as mere shadowy ghosts, shrouded in silence... Crying won't bring them back to life... No divyalok for them. That's only for the rajavritta. (*After Kurukshetra* 25)

Slavoj Zizek, a Slovenian continental philosopher argues that the dominant class constructs a separate universe and within its “ideological imaginary... the lower class that surrounding [their] world does not exist” (*First as Tragedy* 5). But when this ideological imaginary destroys, the identity and voice of the subalterns become visible and heard. The royal status seems to be more curse once the death touches anyone close to them. One of the main reason that the patriarchy exists in society is because of the unchallenging attitude of women to the rules that are laid down before her. So in that sense, the royal women are the perpetrators of violence and the victim of the same violence.

## 2.2 Kunti and the Nishadin

The second story is titled as ‘Kunti and the Nishadin’. The title itself is significant here because Kunti belongs to upper class (rajavritta) and the Nishadin are tribal people which is considered as lower class (lokavritta). So, when both upper class and lower class names come together in a title symbolically shows the reversal of binaries to equality and also the alienation and marginalization of one class, that is, the Nishadin to a level of questioning the injustice done by the upper class and the realization of upper class that the alienation, hopelessness and motionlessness they are facing is the result of their own karma and the creation of a system.

When rajavritta create systems they forgot to realize that systems are for the benefit of human beings and human beings are not for the systems. Now Kunti is in such a situation, that it's time to receive the results of her karma and the nature now gives the sealed mouths to open and speak about the injustice that they received from the rajavritta.

Kunti, the queen, now abandons the rajavritta life and choses the lokavritta life on her vanaprastha, the last phase of her life. She accompanied with her elderly brother-in-law, Dhritarashtra and his wife Gandhari. Dhritarashtra is blind and Gandhari is blind-folded. So the forest life brings Kunti down from the rajavritta fantasy to the lokavritta naturalism. “She is the

one who collects the firewood for the daily ceremonies of fire” (*After Kurukshetra* 27). Kunti is one of the most revered character in Hindu mythology. She is praised for her virtues of intelligence, devotedness and kindness and her preaching about concepts like spirituality, truthfulness, selflessness, modesty etc. are belauded by the followers of Hinduism. But Mahasweta Devi presented her in a different perspective. Now she is old, haggard and world-weary.

“Kunti has never tried to learn the language they speak” (*After Kurukshetra* 28). Whatever people tries to communicate with each other is a language. Through language the psychology, culture, tradition and emotions are revealed. So learning one’s language is an attempt to learn a person deeper. Here we can see Kunti, when she was a rajavritta she never tried to learn the language of the subalterns. This negligence was her great mistake as the time changes. Now the circumstance is teaching her about the negligence that she had in her life through the Nishadin.

In the forest Kunti met some Nishadins who are very busy in their activities and she started watching them. Nishad are “[...] one of the ‘uncivilized’ races of ancient India chiefly living by hunting: swineherds, fishermen or fowlers by caste” (*After Kurukshetra* 27). Watching the dynamic life of Nishadins strikes her for the first time that she is wasting her life living like a rotting, withered leaf. She started looking back to her rajavritta life. The life as the wife of Pandu, the mother of Pandavas, as the queen, as a daughter-in-law and in between she never find any space of her own, her true self. Here memory plays a vital role because, the quest for self happens initiated primarily through the memory. Kunti, when she has the crown of power in her head, she forget all around herself other than her five sons. She was always hesitant to see the reality and hence she is one who is blind in real. She envies of Gandhari and her self-imposed blindness. She blinded herself as a way to absolve herself from all the injustices around her, thus she is an individual who lacks courage to challenge the injustice and havoc caused by it.

Forest and the Nishadins refreshes her memory. But even though the forest makes her to remember her of her past, she is hesitant to see the present, the present presence of Nishadins close at her, not even by a look. “Her life had been the rajavritta, the gods, serving brahmans. Had she ever

spoken to a dasi? Had she developed any genuine bond with Hidimba? Life outside the rajavritta had not touched her at all” (*After Kurukshetra* 29).

Now Kunti is about to confess, the Nishadins moves closer to her but she doesn't care. She thought that even if the Nishadins hear something they won't understand. So she started to reveal her inner heaviness to the nature, to the Nishadins unknowingly. She had this courage only because she thought that they won't ask her any questions because she belongs to rajavritta and the Nishadins belongs to lokavritta and they are not supposed to question the rajavritta because they are subalterns.

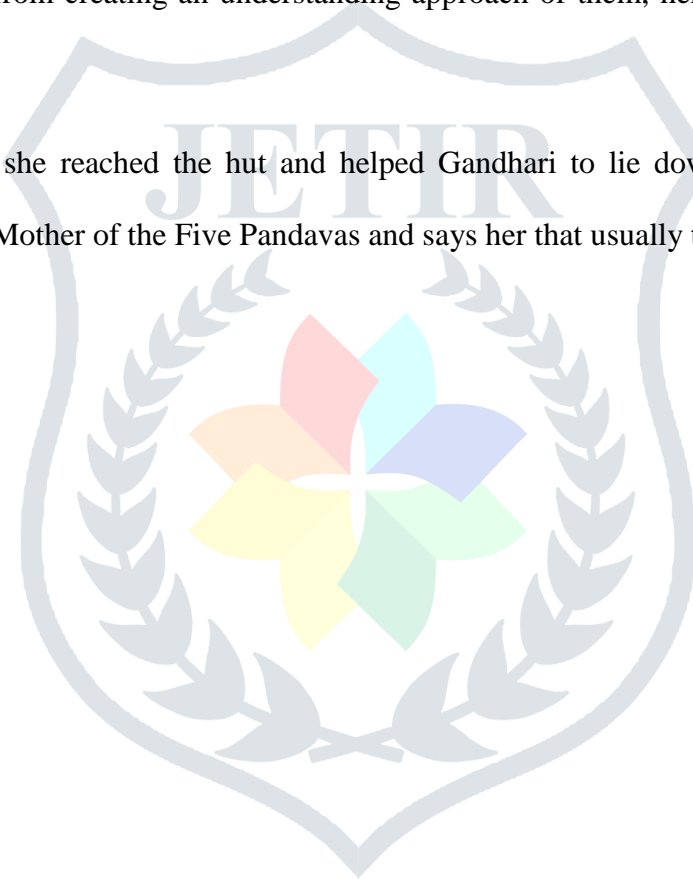
Kunti started her confessing by saying that Draupadi, Uttara and Gandhari they were overwhelmed of their husbands and sons but she didn't. She is questioning herself whether she had a lavish love on Nakula and Sahadeva because they are motherless boys. They are the sons of Madri, the second wife of Pandu and she also acquired the mantra for summoning the gods from Kunti and got Nakula and Sahadeva from the attendant physicians of gods. Pandu is abstained from sex because of a curse but one day he experienced a momentary lapse in abstinence and took Madri by force. But because of the curse he died at the moment of sexual union. Madri committed sati and Kunti along with her three sons and two sons of Madri return to Hastinapur.

But Kunti did a great sin to her son, Karna. The first born son of Kunti is abandoned. This abandoning, he experienced throughout his life, even at time of death. Kunti never acknowledged him as her son and one among the Pandavas but Karna considers himself to be. Kunti lacks the courage to shed tears when he died. Karna was brought up in the palace of Kauravas and Gandhari mourned for Karna even though he is not her son. Before the Kurukshetra, war Kunti met Karna only for begging to him for sparing her children, when she do so, she did not even acknowledge him as her son at least in her mind, especially in such a crucial time. He is born in to an elite class but then he is one among those sympathized subalterns in Mahabharata.

And Kunti realized that if she won't speak out her deeds at least now that will become a greater sin. From all these thoughts she lifted her head and finds that the Nishadins are staring her. “That gaze, full of pity. Pity? For Kunti? The Nishadin was pitying her?” (*After Kurukshetra* 38). Kunti couldn't

accept a Nishadin woman pitying on her which she considered it as a great insult. She became speechless. And the Nishadins started talking and laughing to each other. “Talking before the Nishadins was the same as talking to the rocks and stones. To the earth. They did not know her language, and she did not know theirs” (*After Kurukshetra* 33). This shows how the rajavritta class views the lokavritta as rock hearted, as things of worthless and creatures who lacks soul. She never take a chance to communicate with them, and without knowing anything about them, she considers them as nothing out of her knowledge received from her ancestors and this knowledge and the strict class divisions denied her from creating an understanding approach of them, hence, this developed a prejudice over them.

On that day, when she reached the hut and helped Gandhari to lie down, Gandhari salutes Kunti by calling her as the Mother of the Five Pandavas and says her that usually the hands of



Kunti are cool but this day it is warmer. “As if the blood is circulating through your veins. Even your touch is alive, today” (*After Kurukshetra* 34). This shows that, the moment she started to confess her sins and her sins are mainly from avoidance or negligence, her life becomes lively, her eyes are now open enough to notice the unnoticed. Why Kunti did accompany Dhritarashtra and Gandhari to forest? It’s only because her rajavritta life was tearing her apart.

She confessed all her sin, the abandoning of her son Karna but the next day too she didn’t confess her great sin, the murdering of a mother and her five sons in the house of lac because she not even consider it as a sin and she never have a thought about the incident. The elderly Nishadin asked Kunti when they saw Kunti sitting silently without any confession:

No confessing of sins today?

You ... you ...

I’ve heard you out day after day, waiting to see if you will confess your gravest sin.

Your language... like mine...?

Oh yes, I not only understand it, I speak it too.

Today’s the day I’ve been waiting for. We’ve been seeking you for years. We don’t enter the town, you see. In the end you came to us, it was bound to be. We’ve waited years for you, Kunti! (*After Kurukshetra* 39-40).

Yes, it’s the turn of the marginalized to raise their questions regarding the injustice done to them by the rajavritta. Now the nature has given them a chance to show their voice and power. “The Nishadin laughed. She said. It hurts, doesn’t it? That a Nishadin should call you by name? Yes, I took your name. In this forest you are defenceless, Kunti. Your sons are not with you, they can’t send in their soldiers to punish us” (*After Kurukshetra* 40). Calling the name of an upper class by a lower class is the first step of ensuring the subalterns’ position in the society because they are allowed only to address the upper class with the names that shows respect and submission towards the upper class. The subalterns are not allowed to mention their own names

at least. Here Kunti is addressed by the Nishadin by calling her name and attributed the same fear of inferior because in the forest she is an invader and she is not used to it like that of Nishadins. There are hidden traps as well as helping hands which is not visible unless you become familiar to the nature. Her sons are not surrounded by guarding her and they are not able to protect her. “Had Bhima been around he would never have let her do this chore” (*After Kurukshetra* 27). It is the time of Kunti to receive the results of her karma.

When Kunti abandoned her son born before her marriage out of shame but among lokavritta, especially among nishadins, if a girl makes love to the boy of her choice and gets pregnant, they celebrate it with a wedding. “We honour life. When a man and woman come together, they create a new life” (*After Kurukshetra* 41). This won't understand to the rajavritta because they consider such things as sin and their marriage are simply based on pride, honor of wealth and position and more than power. In such a situation humanity, emotions, and wishes of a person are not given any importance. This will make their life lifeless and they want adjust with the life they got which will design their destiny.

To lokavritta, to sacrifice or harm the innocents for an individual's self-interest is the most unforgiveable sin. By saying this they pointed to Kunti's greatest sin of killing the innocents to save her and her sons' life. The eyes of nishadins were burned with anger and revenge:

A scheme, right? A cruel plot? Only the rajavritta can do such a thing. You live there for one year, knowing full well that the place will be burned to ashes, that you have to save yourself and your sons. You had to provide irrefutable proof that the six of you had been burned to death. Nishads and Nishadins were regular visitors there, weren't they?” (*After Kurukshetra* 41)

The fire in the eyes of Nishadins hypnotized Kunti and she refused to lie to their questions. “Shut up. Listen” (*After Kurukshetra* 41), the most powerful words from the subalterns to upper class. Actually the plot was arranged by Dhuryodhana to kill Kunti and her five sons, but Kunti, who came to know about his plan, invited a mother and her five sons who belonged to nishads, for sacrificing their life instead of Kunti and the pancha Pandavas:

You have held feasts for so many Brahmins so many times, Kunti. How often have you invited any Nishad-Kirat-Sabar-Nagavanshi forest tribals? And did you serve wine every time? No. [...] Just that one time the vratya, the outcastes were invited? Yes. Drunk on so much wine, that Nishadin mother and her five sons lay there senseless. You knew this, yet you escaped through your secret tunnel, didn't you? Yes, I did. (*After Kurukshetra* 42)

The pious and upstanding Kunti, the queen of Rajavritta, is the instigator of violent deaths of six people. Kunti's current situation is made worse by the thought of absence of any sense of guilt or even the recollection of her crime.

The Nishadin mother was the mother-in-law of the Nishadin who is speaking to Kunti. And she is the eldest daughter-in-law and the other women who are accompanying her were married to the other sons of this dead Nishadin mother. By hearing all this Kunti find out that they are not leading the life of widows and by hearing this, with pride the Nishadin said that, they won't deny the demands of life so they remarried have husbands and children. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth is the way of rajavritta not the lokavritta. And Kurukshetra was all based on this concept. And knowingly forgetting about the sins is a best justification. Kunti did the sin of forgetting. "You couldn't even remember this sin. Causing six innocent forest tribals to be burnt to death to serve your own interests. That was not even a crime in your book. In our eyes, by the laws of Mother Nature, you, your sons, your allies, are all held guilty" (*After Kurukshetra* 43).

Yes, according to Nishadin, it is the law of nature to receive the result of one's karma. And it is such law of nature brings Kunti to the place where she had committed her greatest sin, the forest. From the signs of the nature, the Nishadin predicted the coming of forest fire and its purpose is to engulf Kunti, she burnt the mother and her five sons in the house of lac, for her sins. The forest is full of resin bearing trees and resins are highly inflammable. The resin oozes out of the trunks and congeals and it will turn to forest fire. "Resin is highly inflammable [...]. Resin oozes out of the trunks and congeals. Sometimes dry fir cones fall off the trees and roll



down the hill slopes. Then, when those dry cones hit the resin, sparks fly. A fire starts. Forest fire” (*After Kurukshetra* 43). But like the secret tunnel in the house of lac, the forest has also made a secret tunnel, which is beyond the reach of the forest fire.

Three blind, weak and infirm people cannot make it there. One is blind from birth, another has chosen to blind, and you, you are the blindest of the three. You can murder innocents and then forget all about it. Nishadin, is it impossible to forgive me? To beg forgiveness is typical of the rajavritta. We don't understand such things. When the five of us came away here, others came with us. For years, this forest has looked after us. [...] The fire will do its work, then rain will quench the flames. The scorched earth will turn green again. (*After Kurukshetra* 43-44)

The above statement tells us that, the class division in the society creates an inferior feeling among the people and they started considering themselves as lower caste by the people whom are considered themselves as elites. This imposed inferiority later shaped their ideology and eventually they accepted the state of inferiority as marginalized and alienated beings of the society. Marginalization is a kind of blinding ourselves to the realities or it can be the justifications of the injustices we do to others, so it's a kind of blindness, the blindness that Kunti had.

Kunti despite of her ideals, conscience and introspection turns out to be the most misled one among the three rajavritta – the blind Dhritarashtra, the Blind-folded Gandhari and Kunti. Kunti proves to be the most blind among them. Her ethics were limited to words and her decisions are motivated by selfish reasons. The inability to remember about the murder of six Nishadins points to the inherent prejudice of upper class towards the lower class. For them, the Subalterns are not just marginalized, they simply do not exist as a human entity. Here we can see the biological function of a woman in positive light among the lokavritta. But the royal women are clinked to the subjectivity of man. The dharma of the royal women commands them to subvert their subjectivity to uphold the semblance of phallic power.

### 2.3 Souvali

The third story is about a vaishya girl named Souvali, who was in the service of

Dhritarashtra when Gandhari was with her child. The story focuses on the differences between the center and margins of society. According to Rajsekhar Basu's *Mahabharata*

*Saranubad*, Souvali bore a son named Yuyutsu (*After Kurukshetra* 45).

The story begins with a statement, "ON THE MARGINS OF THE TOWN LIVE THE MARGINALIZED" (*After Kurukshetra* 45). The capitalization of the whole sentence shows the harsh hatred, anger and more than the revenge consciousness. As mentioned in the above quoted lines, the people who are considered as marginalized lived on the margins, away from the so-called privileged class lives. Unlike the settlements of the rajavritta, the settlements of these people is lively, noisy. Souvali lives in a large hut. "Ageing, but still not informed. Copper skin. Salt and pepper hair braided in a long plait. Black Choli. Green ghagra, yellow chunni tucked in at the waist, drawn across the breasts and thrown over one shoulder" (*After Kurukshetra* 45). From the descriptions about Souvali's appearance shows that she is leading a normal life as everyone in the pavement. She is waiting for her son, Souvalya and he used to visit her often. And Souvalya comes after doing the tarpan for his dead father, Dhritarashtra. He is chosen to do the rituals because Dhritarashtra's all legitimate sons are dead and only Souvalya remains. If they won't allow him to do the rituals it will go against the dharma. "Never went near him, never called him 'father', and today I did the tarpan for him" (*After Kurukshetra* 47).

Yuyutsu is the name given by the rajavritta and by giving name they are done with all their responsibilities to their children born from the women of lower class. These children are not given any identity of the rajavritta but this time Souvalya is given the identity of a rajavritta's son only for doing the rituals and this is the cyclic behavior of nature, it's a kind of revenge.

Ahana and Varuna belongs to the lower class and they went to see the tarpans conducted by the rajavritta, they watch all the procedures with fun. And this fun is another revenge version of those who are marginalized. Once their rituals and life are mocked and thrown into filth by the

rajavritta but now after the war the life took a turn and now it is the subalterns who are mocking at them. “Finally Yudhishtira said in a dry tone, Son of Dhritarashtra! I know you are a man of conscience, son of a good woman. [...] “(After *Kurukshetra* 48). Souvalya has his duty for his dead father and he did it.

As a woman who gave birth to Dhritarashtra’s son Souvali must be considered as his wife and she too have her own duties as a widow but she hesitates to do it. “I have no such duty, my son. Born into a vaishya family. They took us to serve as dasis from our childhood. Then, when Gandhari was carrying, I got pregnant with you. When you were born, I forgot all my sorrows!” (After *Kurukshetra* 48).

The reunion of Mother and Son is something new to the royal dasis. “In the rajavritta, male offspring aren’t left with their mothers for long. They are suckled by wet nurses, they stay with the dasis. I showed you with care and love, kept you safe” (After *Kurukshetra* 48). This shows that the strict rules of rajavritta which neglects the natural instinct of motherhood. They denied the mother-son bond and ironically they consider mother as a god and kept the god silenced. The dasis who serve the royal women are also bound to such rules. That is why Souvali is separated from her son. “Why did you leave, Ma? Because they sent you off to the gurugriha, to the home of your teacher, when you were barely five. How I cried and wept, Souvalya! But even little boys aren’t allowed to stay in the royal women’s quarters” (After *Kurukshetra* 49). She suppressed her agonies within her but her natural instincts forced her to come out from the situation. “Who else would retrieve their arrows? Who else would fetch the birds they shot down?” (After *Kurukshetra* 49). Souvali was a bird who is shot down by the rajavritta but her wounds and her living son, her hope, gave her immense courage to beat back and get out from the suffocating situation.

That’s when I asked Gandhari to release me from my dasi status. She didn’t say anything. Then, in desperation I told the head dasi, Dhruva, I’m going to live on the outskirts of the town. If my son looks for me, please tell where I am... I didn’t wait for anyone. Couldn’t even inform your

father. He was well protected, guarded by the watchful eyes of Gandhari. If I could have I would have told him, you took my youth, you took my son, he is your flesh and blood but you never treated him so. You can stay here with your Duryodhana, I'm off. (*After Kurukshetra* 49)

Souvalya never known a father's love. On the outskirts we can see a harmony and bond of love between people which is unseen among the rajavritta. Because they are blinded with the thirst for power. The success and harmony that the lower class enjoys after Kurukshetra is because of the inner sight and the wisdom to learn from other's failures. "Souvalya nursed a secret grief, his mother had forgotten about him. But when he saw how carefully his childhood toys, tiny bangle, golden comb had been preserved all these years, it hadn't been hard at all to turn to her and call her 'Ma'" (*After Kurukshetra* 50). Now Souvali is respected for being a warrior's mother. No thief will dare to enter into her house because of her son. Now the unprotected dasis is protected by her son. This is extremely reverse situation when we compare the unprotected state of Kunti. Once her son was taken from her but today when she dared to come out from the rajavritta safe circle, the nature gives her back whatever she lost during her life with rajavritta. Now she is speaking back to the rulers.

Souvalya sided with Pandavas in Kurukshetra because the Kauravas called him dasiputra and treated like one. Yudhishtira said that those who wish to join with them can be with them and they treat them with honor and because of this Souvalya sided with Pandavas. He was humiliated and his pride was crushed by the rajavritta. Like his mother he too crossed over without any hesitation. "Can you understand why I joined them?" (*After Kurukshetra* 51), asked Souvalya to his mother. "She said, All those years of constantly being ignored, all that humiliation" (*After Kurukshetra* 51). When Souvalya complained about the behavior of Kauravas, Souvali makes him understand that in war they give preference only for power and victory. She points to Bhima as an example, that he was so insulting to his father. She sighs that war has robbed the humanity. "How boastful the victors were! How arrogantly they behaved!" (*After Kurukshetra* 51).

Souvali is feeling so proud for her Janavritta identity:

Say that only dasiputras suffered such unmanly needs, cried for their mothers. It's true. It's in the Janavritta, amongst the common people, that we are in touch with our natural emotions. Tenderness, caring, compassion, romance, love, anger, jealousy. But in rajavritta, you know how they keep such natural emotions strictly in check... And that's their downfall. It's always been power, greed, arrogance and enmity that's caused the ruin of the rajavritta. (*After Kurukshetra 52*)

Now Souvali's attitude has greater relevance in this context. She is turning all the disrespect, humiliation and unkindness that she received during her life with rajavritta, into a furrow of self-realization and the courage to come out of the situation without being stuck into the situation of widowhood and its stable life.

She is not ready to accept the rituals of rajavritta because these rituals or those who made such rituals never treated her as a human being with heart and her self-respect, so she is stubborn not to submit into all those rubbish things. "I'm just a dasi. Was I his wedded wife, that I should undergo the death rites? In the royal household, so many of us dasis come and go, so many bear children... observe ashaucha, the contamination rites? Do tarpan? Wear white cloth, fast? Why?" (*After Kurukshetra 53*). Her eyes are gleaming and she says, "I'll feast on sweet kheer laddoos, ghee-rich jowar pithas, golden honey. And after I'm full, I'll sleep peacefully holding my son in my arms." (*After Kurukshetra 53*)

"Souvali shut the door. It feels good to have defied the dead Dhritarashtra" (*After Kurukshetra 53*). Souvali's shutting of door is symbolic. She shuts the door towards every norms that makes her inferior and marginalized. Now she determined to live her life according to her wish. While Souvali is having a life of her own choice, the other dasis in the palace are roaming around the palace in the dress of widowhood and making their life stagnant. "Souvali tells herself, Why worry about all that? I'm hungry, so I'll eat. I left that place of my own free will. Today too I'll let my own dharma tell me what's right?" (*After Kurukshetra 53*). Souvali believes that if a person want liberation he or she should travel back to their roots, to their mother.

Mamatva, motherhood is the root of a person and it is from her all civilizations emerge. “She thinks to herself, If you must learn, learn from your mother. I was nothing but a dasi in the royal household but here, amongst the common people, I’m a free woman. And she begins to eat. Food cooked by her has never tasted so good.” (*After Kurukshetra* 54)

Souvali considers her son as a fool because she knows that even Pandavas will not accept him even though he too have royal blood in him. The royalty honor people for their benefits only. They marginalize for satisfying their tendency of use and throw and to claim their superiority. “When will Souvalya realize? That even the Pandavas will never accept him as one of their own?” (*After Kurukshetra* 54). She is saddened by the fact that her son has not learned from his own mother’s plight.

The subalterns presented by Mahasweta Devi, never submit to the feeling of helplessness and misery that arises during their victimization and allow themselves as well as others to bounce back after being violated. Through this presentation, Devi is able to make a shift in the general perspective about the subaltern, especially subaltern women. This made Devi to mobilize the past successfully, and allowed the subaltern to articulate their experience of violence. The Five Women, the Nishadin and the Souvali are the examples of the subaltern who can speak. Thus Mahasweta Devi through her work, *After Kurukshetra* clearly mentions the cyclic reversal of liberation and a shift in the general perspective about the subaltern, hence they attain an equality with the hegemony.