

**SAVITRI'S LIFE ON THE SILVER SCREEN: A DETAILED REVIEW OF THE
CELEBRIOUS BIOPIC 'MAHANATI', FROM A FEMINIST POINT OF VIEW**

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Abstract

With great power comes great responsibility. This paper delineates the fact that it is seriously difficult to gain a place in every human's heart when a person is fortunately blessed with an exceptional life. This is gloriously/evidently portrayed through the distinguished epithets Mahanati. It has been one of the most impatiently awaited movies of the year. Keerthi Suresh, one of the best Tollywood actresses in the Indian film industry is the soul of this film, she has exquisitely played the role of the veteran actor Savitri. Savitri's husband Gemini Ganesan, the role played by one of the most loved actors, Dulquer Salmaan, also from the Tollywood industry has nailed the screen and has lived in it. The director and the cast haven't failed to do justice to the movie. Mahanati is based on a true story of the legendary actress, Savitri, who was a victim of jealousy, envy, physical and psychological violence. Her fame couldn't be easy for Gemini Ganesan to digest. She leads a miserable life towards the end of her journey on earth, and finally dies unconscious in a coma. The movie pictures the entire life of Savitri from her childhood to her tragic end.

Index Terms: Savitri, Feminism, Patriarchy, Chauvinism, Violence.

Savitri, the legendary actress was one of the highest-paid and an eminent Indian actress from 1950s to early 70s, and is known by epithets Mahanati Savitri. Not only an acclaimed actress but also a playback singer, dancer, director and producer, where initially she was well-known for producing films in Telugu and Tamil. In 1952, her first role was in Telugu-Tamil bilingual film, "Pelli Chesi Choodu" and translated into Tamil – "Kalyanam Panni Paas". Later worked in Kannada, Hindi and Malayalam Cinemas. She worked approximately in more than 250 films. This became a crucial measure that infuriated her spouse Gemini Ganesan, who gradually began to nurture jealousy, envy, anger, left-out, isolated, frustrations, etc. It was massively difficult for him to accept her growth in the industry. Moreover, they worked in the same industry as actors and not to kiss out that Ganesan was the one who showed her the entrance to this cinema journey out he himself could not elevate his career further, rather it was Savitri who within as time flourished and created her own existence as a Romantic hero. The movie 'Mahanati' is about Savitri's Journey from her early life to her post actress. "It is not easy to bring a legend's story to life on screen" (Kavirayani 2018) but the director has well managed to portray it which has undoubtedly reached a mass number of people through this particular movie 'Mahanati'.

The relationship of the legendary woman with the actor Gemini Ganesan came into limelight and she witnessed a bright life, unfortunately the end of her journey was equally dark and deplorable. Keerthy Suresh breathes the tragic end of Savitri, and on the other hand, Ganesan's features and traits are exceptionally portrayed by Dulquer Salmaan. In short, he has nailed it in executing it. Applying the study of Feminism, the society believes in equal opportunity and facilities for all genders. Man and woman, at work, driving, sports, income, speech, etc. no matter what the field is, both the genders have their own liberal space and are free to create their own existence. The movie is based on a true story of the legendary actress, Savitri, who was a victim of jealousy, envy, physical and psychological violence. Her fame couldn't be easy for Gemini Ganesan to digest. People have surely heard and known about the actress Savitri and her films with her brilliant acting skills but there are hardly few who know her life off-camera. She leads a miserable life towards the end of her journey on earth, and finally dies unconscious in a coma. The dialogues prepared by Burra Sai Madhav are quite significant and moving.

The concept of Feminism that shouts out loud about the belief in "full social, economic and political equality for women" (Brunell 2017), corresponding to the concept of the movie Mahanati,

the spectators aren't satisfied if they are talking about Feminism. Surely being elevated and her continuous achievements had been to lime light to the public and definitely with huge power, huge responsibilities walk along. Savitri's misfortune was her love and affection towards the wrong person in her life. Her husband gradually starts to feel uneasy in the same house just because of her popularity. The leftovers were the possessions and the positions, only these things mattered under the same roof. It was equally difficult for Savitri to live her normal life. She was devastated, at the same time astonished to find such a weird emotion growing in Ganeshan's mind. Her strongest support had been deviated and Savitri slowly fell under the victim of violence, both physically and emotionally. The mode of solution is that she gets addicted to alcohol and ruins her life completely. She neglects taking care of her children, ignores her awards and achievements, she entirely disregards her offers from the industry.

The emotional breakdown had transformed her beautiful physic and vigorous enthusiasm for work into dust. People began disliking her appearance and her behaviour. The difficulties and problems were thundering one after the other. The loans to be covered, and Savitri meeting her another misfortune was a servant whom she immensely trusted. He betrayed his generous lady owner in terms of money and no guilt but with no shame. This shameless act of the servant was an addition to her deterioration and the downfall in her successful career. Her charming lifestyle, her stardom was snatched and chewed by Gemini Ganeshan. According to the critical point of view, if an individual considers Ganeshan's mindset and thoughts that he had towards his wife's stardom in those periods of 90s, a little jealousy was considerable since it was an era of patriarchy and male chauvinism which clearly states an extreme power in the hands of a man. Therefore, this sudden change in power could not be a matter of acceptance for a star. Savitri's complete breakdown led her life to a fatal end, her name into misery and the hope of living had died long back. Both in and out she was betrayed and ruined. Though Savitri was strong enough to deal with any circumstances, no matter how difficult it is, it's unimaginably difficult, if the person you love the most is ultimately not at your side. Every human needs emotional and psychological support. An individual dies within, when one is left alone rather entirely deserted.

Savitri was one of those victims who suffered, survived and took her last breath. To recall a mesmerising scene, one of the directors in Tollywood industry was seriously in need of an actress to be starred in one of the movies which was to be a hit. The requirement was the heroine should have the special quality or talent to show two different emotions from both of her eyes. One eye, showing ecstasy and the other one to focus on sadness, emotion and tears to be strictly rolled only from one of her eyes, which had the duty of showing emotion. It is said that things happen for good. Similarly, at this point of time the glycerine that acts proxy to the tears. Here Savitri confidently steps forward and assures she needs no glycerine or any such liquid to overshadow her talent. Trusting Savitri, the director agrees to the heap of the moment and splendidly nailed the requirements of the director and the movie. No doubt the movie reached its height and the name 'Savitri' all around. This is where she was globally known as *Mahanati Savitri*.

The dark end of the veteran actress is utterly vexed and no one would even like to talk about it. The objective of the movie 'Mahanati' is to portray Savitri's strength and not her weakness. The movie can be inspirational for the few and also disturbing for the other audience. Mostly view the story from the feminist point of view, whereas, few research as a film study. The movie filled with grief and sorrow, pain and agony to the last breath, she kept fighting against her physical and psychological throe. The blood in her heart became so thick and hard as a stone after she learns about Ganeshan's extramarital affair with a common lady in the state. Ganeshan's choice of marrying a common lady draws the conclusion that it is he who had the problem of woman climbing into power, success, fame and utmost love from the masses. After Savitri went to coma, there was only one generous woman, a journalist who strived hard to research the life of Savitri, through this particular journalist (a role played by Samanta Prabhu, the other veteran actress of Tollywood industry), along with her the other male journalist her co-partner, the popular actor in Tollywood i.e., Vijay Deverakonda in reel, who genuinely helped in her Savitri research. The life history of the legend had become widespread, the film was a masterstroke set forth from the point of view of a

journalist. Savitri's going to coma couldn't melt the heart of Ganeshan. It seems Savitri was still waiting for her spouse to come back with love and affection, hoping things would be alright once again. More than the body, consisting of all the functioning organs in proper order, stops functioning when hope dies in a person because hope is the last thing to die. Savitri dies in her house and her dead body is left just like a thing. Ganeshan did not visit Savitri even once when in coma for fourteen months, nor after her death.

According to Cambridge online dictionary Feminism is "the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power and opportunities as men and be treated in the same manner. Feminism itself is used to describe a cultural, political or economic movement aiming for equal rights for both women and men. Nonetheless, the terms feminism and 'feminist' did not gain widespread popularity until the 1970s when they started to be used in the public parlance more frequently. The feminist movement involves sociologically and political theories concerning gender differences issues. The movement has been going on for many decades, and women of Britain have started to advocate their thoughts about inequality and when the first suffragette movement emerged, women started stepping out accomplishing their goals to achieve equal rights and to have the same position in the society as men. Yet the first wave refers mainly to the women's suffrage movement in the 19th and early 20th centuries in the UK and in the US, focusing on women gaining the right to vote. "The first wave emphasized on the promotion of equality and property rights for women and the opposition to chattel marriage and ownership of married women and their children by their husbands" (Halířová 2016). Margaret Waters claims in her book called *Feminism: A very short Introduction*, "for a married woman, as everything in it, belongs to the husband, and of all fixtures the most abject is his breeding machine, the wife. Married women are in fact slaves, the men who acknowledge these beliefs are the ones who cannot accept the progress and development or any kind of fame of a woman. This is exactly what Savitri had been going through in her entire life after the marriage.

The movie is an idol to the legendary actor Savitri, the queen of Telugu and Tamil Cinema. Over three hundred films starred is commendable for any celebrity. It is mesmerising to see such a young director and the producer along with the cast have successfully produced the movie based on a life of an actress of 50s, 60s and 70s. On the other side they have also been well administered to impart the legitimate glimpses of substantial moments from "classic films such as *Mayabazar*, *Devadasu*, *Missamma*". (Kavirayani 2018) Savitri is praised whenever her name comes across and will be remembered forever. Savitri, an evergreen actor is excruciatingly depicted in silver screen by an adroit director, Nag Ashwin, who has brilliantly taken his audience to the journey of melancholy along with the actress.

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