Chapter 1:

Introduction

I have always believed that the common man is the creator of history. That belief has always been with me, from the source to the river basin. The Seventies is still very important to me. Not naturally, but because of a serious hammering ... This traveller has never ignored the call of a new journey. But unless I travel all the way I won't reach my destination. I'm still walking.¹-Mahasweta Devi

A recipient of Magsaysay Award for literature in 1977, Sahitya Academy Award in 1979, Padma Shree in 1986, Jnanpith Award in 1996, Mahasweta Devi is the renowned literary figure who reverberates the painful echoes of her communities and surroundings. She is the most versatile, prolific and radical woman writer well-known for her fiction, short stories and plays. She is the voice of the voiceless downtrodden of the naxalites regions of West Bengal and North-Eastern states of India. Mahasweta Devi says that the common man is the creator of history. History is the record of past experiences of a nation. Nation provides the sense of belonging and ownership to the people. The history of a nation provides a sense of common origin and common past. The feeling of commonness connects people and the ‘common’ word involves all the people of a nation. But this feeling is unable to connect all the people and include limited powerful society. Mahasweta Devi also talks about a new journey. She discusses old traditions, values,
social systems and culture but describe them in a new way. Her journey for the freedom of tribes and poor is described in a new manner. She does not use the old pattern of writing the stories of poor. On the contrary, she re-writes in her own way of writing. Her voice is imbued with a desire of social justice and social change.

One of the most celebrated Bengali writers of recent times, Mahasweta Devi, whose name is sometimes transliterated as Mahasveta, was born in Dhaka (now in Bangladesh) in 1926 and grew up in West Bengal, India. She had a literary background. Her father, Manish Ghatak was a well-known Bengali literary figure whose stories present slum life and her mother, Dharitari Devi was a social worker as well as writer who worked to promote literacy among underprivileged children. Her family members had also joined Rammohan Roy’s reformation movement. So, she inherited the spirit to work for poor from her mother. As a child, her first schooling was in Dhaka. She joined the Vishvabharti University in Santiniketan founded by Rabindranath Tagore and finished B.A. (Hons) in English and then completed M.A. in English at Calcutta University. Her marriage took place with renowned playwright Bijon Bhattacharya who was one of the foundling fathers of Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA). Its goal was to bring cultural awareness among the Indian people. It was the cultural group of the communist party of India. Nabarun Bhattacharya, one of the leading novelists of India is the son of Mahasweta Devi.
In 1964, she started teaching at Bijoygarh College, which was an institution for working class women students. She also worked as a journalist and creative writer. She started her writing career with historical novel *Jhansir Rani*, her first book was published in 1956 which was the beginning point of a prolific literary career. Mahasveta has written about 100 books which have been translated into several national and international languages and some of them have been made into feature films. She has also been a regular contributor to several magazines such as *Bortika*, dedicated to the cause of oppressed communities within India. In 1984, she retired from her job of lecturer at the Calcutta University.

Mahasweta Devi is well known for her pro-maoist views and support the movement spearheaded by Left-Wing in Lalgarh in West Midnapore district. Recently, she is in news for her work related to the study of the ‘Lodhas’ and ‘Shabars’, the tribal community of West Bengal, women and dalits. She is a social activist who has devoted her entire life in the struggle for tribal people in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh. Even at the age of eighty five, she is unwary and uncompromising. In 2010, she has won Yashwantrao Chavan National Award presented by Sharad Pawar. Bangabibhushan is just another milestone in her long career. It is the highest civilian award from the government of West Bengal. The prize money as usual, will go to the Pashimbanga Kheriya Shabar Kalyan Samiti, a tribal welfare society. As she said, “I don’t have any private life! So many people turn up looking for some
relief, some sympathy, how can one turn them back? Please do all you can to help. It makes a difference.”

Even at the age of eighty five, she is fighting for the Denotified tribals and women. She, in her writing, speaks about the civilizational graces of the adivasis; how the society had mindlessly destroyed the culture of a great continent and how the innocents had been brutalised. In Charanagar, Gujrat, a library was established and she donated the award. “The Chara boys and girls, whose parents had been branded as thieves the rest of the world found in her a great pillar of support and strength.” They started calling her ‘Amma’ as thousands of adivasis in India had done. She helped the people of Gujrat in earthquake which hit on a Sunday morning in January 2001. She started writing public appeals for help and kept sending relief material for the earthquake victims. She is the eighty-five year old woman writer who has joined the protest against the treatment meted out to Anna Hazare. Recognizing her work as a writer and social activist, the Human Resource Development Ministry has appointed her as National Research Professor for a second term of five years from February 2011.

As a writer, she started her literary career with Jhansir Rani in 1956. “It was my feeble attempt to write a biography based on historical research.” But her interest in history is different from the conventional historians. She tries to examine the effect of history on
human beings. She examines that India has disastrous effects. Indians have learnt from the Britishers how to make profit by exploiting others. They have made a huge gulf between rich and poor, upper and lower and exploiters and exploited. Earlier, Indians had become outsiders in their own country during British Raj. Now, Indians have made their own people ‘others’ in their own land. She discusses all these issues in her work. She visualizes that the business and government authorities misuse their power and money to exploit their land, forest and human resources. She depicts the irremediable problem of naxalism which creates havoc in almost seven states of de-colonised India. The publication of *Hazar Churasir Maa* starts her journey which helped her to find herself and which established her figure as a novelist and as a social being. She dramatized the novel in 1972-73 when Asit Bose planned for its stage performance. After that, she has never stopped. She is travelling and travelling, writing and writing. *Aranyer Adhikar (The Right to Forest), Agnigarbha (Firewomb), Breast-stories, Imaginary Maps, Titu Mir, Chotti Munda and His Arrow, Outcast: Four Stories* and many more. “She laid bare the average Indian who was everywhere a victim of the embers of feudalism-landless farmlands, dispossessed tribal, the urban rootless, dying folk, artistes and artisans, bonded labour.”

The post-colonial theory “establishes intellectual spaces for the subaltern peoples to speak for themselves, in their own voices, and so produce cultural discourses, of philosophy and language, of
society an economy, which balance the imbalanced us and them binary power-relationship between the colonist and the colonial subject.”

“In a literary context, postcolonialism involves one or more of the following:

- Reading texts produced by writers from countries with a history of colonialism, primarily those texts concerned with the workings and legacy of colonialism in either the past or the present.
- Reading texts produced by those that have migrated from countries with a history of colonialism, or those descended from migrant families, which deal in the main with diaspora experiences and its many consequences.
- In the light of theories of colonial discourses, re-reading texts produced during colonialism; both those that directly address the experiences of Empire.”

Mahasweta Devi belongs to the first category and has become one of the most significant writers of the post colonial literature. Her writing shows the shadowy pictures of clashes and conflicts between different cultures and identity. She has raised the issues of national identity. It is found that “a radical questioning of a historical past that has created the internalized modes of division
and subordination is central to the poetics of post-colonialism.”

The postcolonial concepts of the construction of a national identity by the mainstream patriarchal leaders, the control of the national development and social reform by the dominant patriarchs, are being made to undergo a process of re-examination and re-evaluation by the feminist-subaltern studies.

“In current critical parleys, the mainstream history is seen as a large monolithic construct. This monolithic construct is being forced to open out into many histories to incorporate the marginalized, the minorities, and the sub-cultural groups.”

The suppression of subaltern’s experiences into silence and absolute devaluation by the national history is being contested and attention is being drawn towards the writers’ attempt to de(re) construct the nation and history. Mahasweta Devi breaks the traditional taboos and raises the ideo-political issues of postcoloniality, nationality and history.

“Mahasweta’s literature negotiates postcoloniality by questioning the textuality of fiction by way of problematizing the traditional textual authority, aesthetic autonomy and a unified, stable interpretation.” Her work contains several features that define “a radical engagement with post coloniality in creative literature.” As a post-colonial writer, she deals with the concept of ‘nation’ but in her writing, it is multi-dimensional. We believe that the idea of a nation “emerged with the growth of western capitalism and industrialisation and was a fundamental component
of imperialist expansion.” It is almost second nature these days to map the world as a collection of different nations, each separated from the other by a border. But borders between nations do not happen by accident. They are constructed, defended and (in too many tragic cases) bloodily contested by groups of people.

“Her texts aim to address a complexly striated audience that spans across the layers of castes and classes, illiteracy and education, urban and rural habitat. The challenge of communicating with such heterogenous populations can be met only by transgressing the norms of the purity of literary meaning.” Her texts realize their purpose and significance not in a single, stable interpretation but in dispersal of their messages and meanings.

She is the writer of the Third world. She never does any overt discussion of colonization or the movements for the independence of India. Still, it can be seen some occasional references of dates, eras, epochs in her text, just as found the description of Permanent Settlement system in India during the British rule in her Titu Mir or the reference of census 1961 in ‘Doulati the Bountiful’.

“A critical analysis of the processes of decolonialization, the reconstruction of the new nation-states, the communities and ethnic identities of their pople are the central concerns of the postcolonial theory.” The fragmentation of the newly formed nations which leads to an internal construction of the national identity, history, tradition and culture, is another area of interest under the
postcolonial studies. Postcolonial theory engages with and questions the larger ideological constructs, viz., nation, nationality and selfhood. As a post-colonial writer, she describes nation as a “single, monolithic entity and its history which is projected as a homogenous narrative to the total negligence of the marginal narratives.”\textsuperscript{15} She describes nation as a single but massive, having the sense of common origin. She believes that the nations have the same sense of belongings, ownership, origin and history. Nation is depicted in a general way and that’s why, their history, origin everything is neglected in the narration. It actually hides due to the common historical records of the common past of a collective people. Their individual characters, victories, loses, sacrifices have been neglected from the very beginning of the British period.

Mahasweta’s engagement with the issue of ‘nation’ in her writings is multi-dimensional. She critiques the ‘construction’ of the political as well as the socio-religious-economic constitution of the nation. “She critiques the political “Constitution of India” as it gives the marginals basic rights and representation only in law, not in application. There runs a simultaneous critique of constitution of the nation along its socio-religious-ethnic-economic stratifications that promote and privilege hierarchies.”\textsuperscript{16} Such a critique is apparent in Mahasweta’s foregrounding of specificities of her characters who are conspicuously absent in the imaginings of Indian nation.
Devi has been writing and speaking about the suppressed and depressed India in her texts and political activism. Her text raises those issues and problems with which poor Indian is living and suffering before and after independence. “Land, land is the root cause of it all. Give them land and everything will be alright.” Demand for land, a higher share of crop, minimum wages, roads, schools, drinking water are the hallmarks of her fiction. She also writes about struggles of everyday life which are not considered significant by mainstream media. Not only the immediate problems but long and past suffering diseases also get the place in her creations. Her stories constantly present the historical problems from the point of view of the subaltern, dalit and tribal. She constructs the stories and its events in her unique style and merges them with the history of everyday struggles of the subaltern which has lost its importance among the mainstream history. She raised the issue of feudal system connected to the land- the base of all; she raised her voice against bonded labour system, the hazardous issue of post-colonial India. She has replaced ‘Indian Nation’ in distinct bonded labour districts and her heroes or characters are bonded kamias and bonded prostitutes, rudalis, tribal and outcaste men and women who are ‘no’where in India. She intervenes the past history and historical events through historical figures such as in Aranyer Adhikar, Jhansir Rani, Titu Mir.

She also traces the past in Mother of 1084 and ‘Draupadi’, the naxalite movement and indirect references of other problems. She
explores the politics and describes the passion of the peasant-tribal revolt. Through Brati and Somu, she expresses “students’ revolt against Bourgeois values”18 ‘Draupadi’ also provides the history of peasant rebellion in the Naxalbari area. It also gives some references of partition of Punjab, Pakistan and West Bengal. The historical references of Left Front government and other facts are also found in this work. In her writing, she visualizes the tribal’s struggle for maintaining their ethnic identity, right to their land and freedom to choose their own way of life.

As a post-colonial writer, Mahasweta Devi condemns the system of independent India that keeps alive the colonial legacy of treatment with indigenous communities. “The British government of India had notified and described several tribes as criminals.”19 The inability to understand their lifestyle enters them into their suspicion. Now, in the post-Independent India, these communities are still considered as criminals and police catch them, torture them and kill them like a beast. In ‘Pterodactyle, Puran Sahay and Pirtha of Imaginary Maps, it is mentioned that “Parhalyas were designed as a ‘criminal tribe’ by the British and they are all bond slaves.”20

After Independence they are bonded slaves because the mainstream (educated, sophisticated) society never employs criminals. So they have a single option- to be a bond slave (kamiya), bonded labour (seokia), bonded workers (beth-begar). The incurable disease of bonded labour has its roots in the caste system
of pre-independence or pre-colonial India. The Indian society was divided into different castes before independence and the British designated high castes (Brahmans, Rajputs) had exploited the low caste. This system was prevalent all over the British India where kings and Brahmans exploited ‘the Shudras’ and named them ‘Untouchables’. The Britishers were the real exploiters of colonial India as they had killed the golden bird, India. The subaltern, dalits faced torture from two sides- at the hands of the Britishers and by the kings or upper caste. Now, the British has vanished as the rulers have gone but their place is taken over by the other rulers of our own country. They are torturing, exploiting, and killing our own people in the name of development and progress. The construction of roads, railroads, dams, bridge enters into tribal space and damage their ecology. “Their lives are forcibly changed for good”

In the words of Mahasweta Devi:

The road, the big road is the enemy. It will take away whatever crop he grows, whatever vegetable grows and in times of famine and natural disorders like rain failures or flood they will come in lorries and trucks and take away their children to be sold in other places as bonded labours.

The mainstream has given rise to the new society of bonded slaves: “in Andhra and Orissa, they are called Gothi; in Bihar, Kamiya/Seokiya; in Gujrat, Halpati; in Madhya Pradesh, Horoyaha; in Rajasthan, Sajri; in Tamilnadu, Bhumidases; in Uttar Pradesh,
Maat or Khanndit/Mundit or Sanjayat.” In *Imaginary Maps*, Mahasweta Devi said “Each tribe is like a continent.” It is true that the mainstream has converted them into a new continent of bondslaves. Mahasweta Devi shows again and again how in the name of democracy, development and modernism, the moneylenders, bondmasters, lumber contractors, development and relief workers, industrialist, government officials and religious authorities are constantly oppressed the ‘adivasis’.

Mahasweta’s oeuvre shows that she uses her ‘art for life’s sake’ in place of ‘art for art’s sake’. This way of writing has made her a responsible post-colonial writer who is depressed due to the terrible and horrified conditions of adivasis in the independent India. “After thirty-one years of Independence, I find my people still groaning under hunger, landlessness, indebtedness and bonded labour.” So her burning anger is directed against the present system which has failed to cure the problems of the people.

As a post-colonial writer of the Third World, Mahasweta Devi also visualizes the cultural clashes between the subaltern and the mainstream. The cultures of tribes are completely different from educated, sophisticated mainstream. Firstly, they believe in collective effort. “The tribal ritual Hunt is always an elaborate group activity and the tribal group is always accompanied by dogs. The gain of the Hunt is divided equally among all those who partake in ‘The Hunt’. The share of the dog is the same as of
anybody else.” But modern man believes in the exploitation of man/woman/children/animal. On the other hand, the tribal never exploits even the animal. Not only this, tribal languages do not contain the word for ‘exploitation’ or any other abusive term.

Secondly, land is not the individual property but a community resource. Their culture has communal character. Their political and economic structure is community based which is entirely different from that of the mainstream as these people have land as their individual property with formal written document of ownership. Her stories clearly reveal the ecological degradation and the exploitation. In the modern system of capital, the land is the major resource or a valuable asset. The control of land gives power to dominate and rule. But tribes never have control over land as individual property. They consider it a communal resource, source of life and livelihood. Their culture doesn’t have any exploitation, not even of land and forest. They preserve forests as a resource for their generations. They depend on forest for food, for their cattle and fodder, medicines, timber, for implements and houses, fences for their fields. So, the forest product is for local consumption, not for sale.

They also have different methods to protect forests by declaring some species sacred like Banyan and Peepal. In Orissa and Chattisgarh, the tribals declare Sal and Mahua sacred. Here, more than twenty-five species are considered sacred and so these
are protected. More than that, they have adopted many other methods of protecting trees, forests, and some endangered species. Forest, for them, is the place of life and mental peace. Mahasweta Devi’s stories clearly show the picture where tribal feels happiness and peace in the forest or nature’s lap. ‘Douloti the Bountiful’ reflects the soothing effects of even the imagination of trees or nature on tribal. Doulati wonders about her own place where “you can see trees and sky if you stand at its door.”27 Nature is their life. Mahasweta Devi depicts their life and also shows the conflicts in her writings.

They have also made a balance between human needs and environmental imperatives. Most tribals regret to cut trees for human use and they apologize for the sin of cutting forests because they have no other alternative. They put restrictions according to the seasons just as “the fisher folk banned fishing in the spawning season or the forest dwellers of Tehri-Garhwal in Uttarakhand allowed nakhdum (a tuberous plant) to be harvested only during the annual communal festival.”28 Most tribes of Eastern India and even those of the South have put a ban on the killing or hunting of any pregnant animal.

Thirdly, women play much bigger decision-making role in the family of their communities than in caste societies. Their culture provides them the facility of divorce, selection of a new partner and widow remarriage. Tribal economy is often referred as ‘female
economy’. Tribal women do not suffer from the restrictions on mobility that are imposed on the woman of upper caste. They are not allowed to converse with men who are stranger or unrelated to them. Tribal culture and their life moves around nature whereas the mainstream never cares for nature and this is the reason why we are facing the problems of pollution and global warming. The mainstream society has the culture of buildings, industries, facilities. For this, they have created the vibrant culture of exploitation of land, forest, man, woman, everyone and everything. Their exploitation is reaching to the tribal areas where people do not know the word ‘exploit’ in their language. They try to establish their own culture in tribal places by suppressing and destroying the traditions of tribe. In the creative writing of Mahasweta Devi, she has raised the issue of their conflict.

Mahasweta Devi in a post colonial manner tries to locate their identity. She believes that the tribal are marginalised since the very beginning. Their struggle story never found place in the historical records. As Mahasweta Devi tells in her interview:

I wrote that book on Birsa Munda (Aranyer Adhikar)...they said that for the first time, they got their place in history. Indian History did not recognize the tribal fights, tribal rebellions. Never recognized them. Never wrote about them. Never mentioned them.29
Titu Mir, Chotti Munda and the tribal heroes and freedom movements associated with tribes are made significant in the eyes of readers as they are the real preservers of the Mother Earth.

The history of their struggle is also found in their songs, folktales, dances passed from one generation to another. Mahasweta Devi gives a new breathe to the erased oral history of tribal “leaders/heroes/revolutionaries and thus makes an attempt to return to the subalterns their role models.”30 She makes an attempt at rewriting and re-inventing the historical events by depicting the struggles of the marginal against oppression and discrimination by the mainstream elite. She has presented Titu Mir, the rebellious spirit as a strong, powerful and assertive hero, not as a hero only but “uncrowned emperor” who never tolerated injustice. His real name was Syed Mir Nisar Ali who rebelled against the rich landlords and colonial British rulers to put up an impressive armed resistance. Devi has depicted his early days as a simple boy who never found interest in farming. Titu was born in 1770, the year of famine when fifteen million people died; in 1771, the tax was high; the Sanyasi Revolt had emerged and everyone participated in it. These consequences had possibly prepared his mind a revolutionary set up. He emerged not only as a hero but as the ‘messiah of common people’ who had suffered at the hands of zamindars, planters, government officers and then agents. Mahasweta draws the figure of a legend with an innate sense of justice and courage to fight for the rights of common man. With the
legendary story of Titu Mir, Devi also visualizes the historical aspects of the age. She discusses about the ‘permanent settlement of 1793’, ‘the famine of 1770’, Warren Hastings, translation of Ain-i-Akbari into English. Through her historical work, she puts before the readers the deplorable plight of common people because of the official ignorance.

Titu Mir and Chotti Munda discuss the post-colonial issues. Through their stories Devi has re-produced the fire among the readers. She wants to re-generate energy against injustice and indifference which Titu Mir, Chotti Munda, Birsa Munda possess. Her work creates new enemies for common man but a new revolutionary spirit may also emerge among common people. Her stories based on history show many untouched aspects of tribes such as the use of lathi. The use of lathi has become hierarchal property which should be transferred from one generation to another. The same is with the ‘Arrow’ which had made Chotti Munda a revolutionary figure. The ‘Arrow’ has become a symbol of continuity of the revolt/movement which Birsa had started. The revolt which was fired by Chotti Munda was not concentrated only to Munda but actually was the collective revolt of Oraon and other Hindu outcasts. Devi tells the legendary story of Chotti Munda and connects his story or life with the historical events just like Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children.
Mahasweta shows the legendary heroes in her writing that belonged to the untouched society. These heroes had remained untouched even in national movements. Not just this, but its aftereffects had badly infected their life for the sake of so called development. Their culture and their identity everything has transformed. Their natural surroundings has transformed into industrial and mechanical surroundings which increase the demand of labour, so the pattern has also changed. The torture, suppression, seduction, and oppression everything has come in their life as a bad omen. The new era of terror, torture, cruelty has started but “tribal do not accept defeat, they stand together”\textsuperscript{31} under the leadership of legendary heroes – Chotti Munda, Birsa Munda, Titu Mir and many unheard.

With great legends she has also used the mythical names and connected it with her stories of dalit. In \textit{Breast Stories}, she has used the mythical names such as Draupadi from great epic, Mahabharata; Jasoda, a foster mother of Lord Krishna. Draupadi was prevented by God from unclothing but here, in her story, her Dopdi was gang raped by the police and refused to be clothed by men. Jasoda, the foster mother of Lord Krishna here becomes the professional mother and feed almost fifty children. Both the characters show the cruelty and exploitation of a woman either of high or low caste. Jasoda was a Brahman but was cremated by an untouchable while Dopdi was a tribe, gang raped by the high
authorities. It discusses not only the problems of Naxalites and poverty but depicts the terrible plight of woman.

As a woman writer, she depicts the woman characters always in a deplorable condition but sometimes they emerge as ‘Durga’ or ‘Kali’. The first look on Mahasweta’s Outcast: Four Stories, creates a feeling of sympathy and sorrow for the misfortune of woman but in the very second moment, it lit fire burning inside for those who are responsible for such terrible condition of woman. So, it is observed that she has written about them because she wants some action should be taken by the readers to reform. In her stories, she has included every phase and status of woman whether young or old; of high caste or low; married or widow; a daughter or a prostitute.

In Outcast: Four Stories, she takes four women Dhouli, Shanchari, Chinta and Josmina. Dhouli, a widow, fall in love with a Brahman, become pregnant and then transformed into prostitute. She accepted her role for the livelihood of her mother and child; Josmina, a married woman, both husband and wife love each other truly but Josmina is raped by many people many times; Chinta, a Brahman was raped by a man and left rotten; Shanichari, a lovely young Oraon girl turned into ‘reja’.

In Imaginary Maps, she takes the issue of bonded labour and presents the woman’s condition as prostitute in ‘Doulati the Bountiful’. Sometimes her woman has become Jasoda of mankind, a
mother who struggles for her son’s real identity in **Hazaar Chaurasir Maa** but at the same time, her woman has become ‘kali’ or ‘durga’ just as ‘Dopdi’ and ‘Mary Oraon’ in Druapadi and The Hunt.

Mahasweta Devi never considers herself as a feminist writer. She writes about those people who live much below the poverty line. She said “women come to my stories naturally, she suffers because of her class, and she suffers because of her body.”32

Through her women characters, she raises the issue of prostitution. It has become an industry which produces nothing but brutality, sexual exploitation, crime and large group of neglected women in their old age. Devi’s stories shows women give in without resistance, at times get pregnant, and are often sold for money by their own fathers (Doulati and the daughters of Giribala) which is very popular during modern days and is well-known as human trafficking. Prostitution has become their means of livelihood. Few of the tribal women militantly fight back at the cost of their own criminalization.

Mahasweta deals with the reality and come forward before the readers as a truth-teller. She narrates the real stories with accuracy, sensitivity and ruthlessness. She never tries to romanticize the facts but she re-presents them as it is exposing the hidden and ugly facts behind the story. She has used the device of myth and history in her creations. She presents the value of nature and
identity in the life of tribes. Through her work, she raises many post-colonial issues of bonded labour, prostitution, corruption, poverty etc.

Her books are translated into Hindi, Assamese, Telegu, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Gujarati and Ho and Santhali tribal languages. She has also been translated into English, Italian, Japanese and French. The work of Mahasweta Devi is translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. She not only translated and introduced Mahasweta to the English speaking world, “she also produced readings on her stories in combination with deconstructionist versions of Marxism and feminism”33.

She also writes for newspapers and journals on wide range of topics. She takes this work so seriously that she moves from her college where she had been teaching since 1964 and joined Jugantar, a Bengali newspaper and wrote weekly columns regularly for two years. During this period, she came into contact with large number of people who became a part of her work, life and her mind. She also joined Bengali Daily Danik Basumati and Bartaman. Her writing for newspaper has made her popular in every house.

Bortika, a Bengali Quarterly was earlier edited by her father and after his death, she started working and changed the journal beyond expectations. The Bortika has become a forum where peasants, labourers, tribals, workers, everyone could write about their life and problems. It is the forum for young middle-class
people, activists, government people who write on wide subjects. The editor insists that the contribution must be based on facts, figures and surveys. The issues of the plight of workers in factories, land alienation among tribes, witch killing, labourers, peasants, bonded and contract labour are published in *Bortika*. People are invited to write about their own situations.

Mahasweta is also considered as a person resource centre for the distressed people. Everyday, lot of people come to her with their problems and has faith on her that she is one who’ll help, support and care them. She gives them a careful and patient hearing, asks questions, and gives them satisfactory answers. She writes all the letters by hand. The people who are suffered due to government norms, police atrocities, lack of drinking water, request for government recognition, Mahasweta Devi is always there to help and hear them. Not only tribals but non-tribals also get her support. An article by Mahasweta Devi against the injustice meted out to low-ranking policemen. She said that ‘ordinary policemen deserve basic amnetites’. She constantly pours her support to improve their situation. For this, she has been a regular feature at various handicraft exhibitions and sales in Calcutta, selling handicrafts made by tribals. She is constantly working to motivate them for their own development and preservation of their culture.

Though there are many articles which are based on the life of tribals, but it is Mahasweta Devi who raise her voice for them
initially. She has written uncounted articles focusing on bonded labour, caste system, environment, ethnicity etc. Her articles are not focused on their critical situation only but also on government ignorance and corruption, suppression faced by them. She never hesitates to raise her voice against powerful government. On the contrary, she gives her full support to the suppressed and suffered communities. She covers all the states where sub- altern are facing the government ignorance and exploitation. Not only men, but women are also sexually exploited by owners. In 1984, she published a special number of Bortika, to tell through a survey how the tribal women are exploited by brick-kiln owners. According to this survey, these women mostly come from Bihar and Orissa and are paid only 3 rupees 30 paisa to 4 rupees for carrying 1000 bricks. She also gives her views on ecological destruction due to opencast mining, industries, and cement factories in ‘A Countryside Slowly Dying’.

Her article ‘Eucalyptus, why?’ deals with the large scale of plantation of Eucalyptus under the social forestry programmes sponsored by the World Bank. She criticizes it as the high consumption of water which affects the level of ground water; it does not bear fruits, does not encourage wild life. It can only help certain industries with raw material. Sunderlal Bahuguna, the renowned environmentalist also supports the plantation of diverse range of trees that can provide food, fuel, fodder and many other things.
She raised the issue of displacement of tribals for the so-called industrial development. Over 20% tribals have become the easy prey of Central and State projects. The compensation means nothing for many tribals. ‘Land for land’, the basis of compensation is not accepted by state as well as central government. When jobs are offered to them, they must leave their family. The separation from their land and family breaks them emotionally and rootly. In India, it is a developmental process occurring everywhere (Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, Maharashtra, Gujrat and West Bengal). In Uttaranchal, we have the example of famous Chipko movement. It had a deep impact on the common people to conquer over the powerful authorities. It was started in 1973 where people hug the trees to protect them from cutting down. The case was that the forest department was engaged in the excessive cutting as it had given permission for making agricultural equipments but the fact came into light that forests were constantly cut for sports equipments, then people came together for saving trees, to provide a green future to their generation and at last the government accepted their plea and ordered to ban cutting for fifteen years.

Mahasweta Devi was in news for her work on ‘lodhas’ and ‘shabars’. In 1982, she published a special issue of Bortika on lodhas and their problems. She makes it clear that they are considered as criminals. She talks about their problems, lack of development and no opportunities of livelihood. But whenever they are in trouble Mahasweta come forward as ‘maseeha’ for them and
tackle the issues related to them. There is a story of Chuni Kotal, a poor girl of lodhas of Medinapore where starvation is the common feature. Chuni wrote her own life-story in Bortika in which she had described how she took herself up under the poor circumstances. She became the first female graduate among lodhas. But after getting a job she couldn’t bear the pressure and committed suicide in 1992. Her Bortika also contains the issues of superstition, Casteism and communalism among tribals and mainstream society. Witch-hunting is badly spread among tribes in which woman is killed after branding her as a witch. In her Bortika, she and other poets like Sardarprasad Kisku have discussed to prevent them from killing. Through her articles and special section in her Bortika she has given tribute to Asoka Bose.

Mahasweta Devi once told about the greatest happenings of her times ‘Tebhaga revolt of the Bengal peasants’ which framed her mind to write about socio-economic history of human development. All her stories, popular or unpopular show that exploitative system in India operate beyond the law and “with the tacit acquiescence of an exploited class held in thrall by a load of conventional role obligations.”

The sole purpose of my writing is to expose the many faces of the exploiting agencies...My experience keeps me perpetually angry and makes me ruthlessly
unforgiving towards the exploiters or the exploiting system...I believe in anger, in justified violence, and so peel the mask off the face of the India which is projected by the government, to expose its naked brutality, savagery, and caste and class exploitation.\textsuperscript{35}

The present thesis is an attempt at exploring all these issues which are related to our modern society and how they damage the life and culture of tribal communities.
REFERENCES


2. ibid.


5. “One of A Rare Tribe”, www.outlookindia.com

6. en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/postcolonialism


9. ibid.

10. Mahasweta Devi: Critical Reading, ibid, p.18

11. ibid, p.17

12. Beginning Postcolonialism, p.68

13. Mahasweta Devi: Critical Reading, p.18-19
14. ibid, p.30

15. ibid.

16. ibid, p.31

17. The Adivasi Mahasweta, p.7


19. Mahasweta Devi: Critical Reading, p. 84


21. Mahasweta Devi: Critical Reading, p. 33

22. ibid. p. 33-34

23. ibid, p. 94

24. ibid. p. 33

25. ibid. p. 121


27. Devi, Mahasweta, *Imaginary Maps*, p. 52


30. Mahasweta Devi: Critical Reading, p. 25

31. ibid. p. 63

32. ibid. p. 42

33. ibid. p. 21


35. Mahasweta Devi: Critical Reading, p. 29