Chapter IV: Resistance and Rebellion in Devi’s Works

To define the concept of rebellion, one could begin with the traditional definition that a rebellion is an act of violent and open resistance to an established government or ruler. It usually involves action in the form of violence. Resistance, on the other hand is comparatively passive by nature. It is a tacit refusal to comply with the rule or law that is issued by an authoritative figure. Resistance is born from unceasing oppression and is often the precursor to a rebellion.

A rebel renounces resists and breaks free from the social code of conduct and norms through the use of force and also assumes a hostile attitude towards the authority demanding obedience. Critics like Samik Bandyopadhyay and Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak trace the root causes of rebellion as sparked by an individual’s discontent with a corrupt and insensitive establishment. (Introduction, “Bashai Tudu”, vii).

The individual or the group’s discontent and dissatisfaction with the establishment give rise to resistance and protest against it. The seeds of resistance and rebellion are sown in history and the manner in which the oppressed became victims of various forms of exploitation. The multiple exploitative strategies used by the oppressors on the oppressed also lead to protests. These can be traced back to the caste system, class discrimination and gender oppression that have been discussed in the earlier chapters.
The history of resistance and rebellion traces a parallel history of oppression. The roots of resistance and rebellion can be seen in the context of movements by social reformers. It is believed that protest movements in India began from the awareness spread by the social reformists in the last century. Social reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Behramji Malbari and Jyotirao Phule raised their voices against the prevailing religious and social customs that led to the subjugation of the oppressed group. Their influence encouraged the British Government to enact certain laws to abolish sati, child marriage, female infanticide, and discrimination on the basis of caste. Those laws encouraged widow remarriage and tried to provide educational opportunities to everyone. The privileged sections on the other hand, opposed to such laws as they saw this as a threat to their social status and prevailing customs through which the underprivileged groups were kept under their thumb.

The marginalized believed that organized campaigns were the only way for them to get what is due to them as citizens of this country. This belief catalyzed by acts of regular exploitation caused them to resist oppression in many ways.

Some of the protest movements that are relevant to study Mahasweta Devi’s works would be discussed here. The most important of protest movements in relation to her works are the Dalit and Adivasis
Movement, and to some extent, also the anti-Brahminical Movements. These movements began with the motive to emancipate and escape the social stigma and injustices associated with the caste system. The term ‘Dalit’, was derived from the context of the Dalits’ attempt at a cohesive identity of those termed as untouchables. The Dalits expressed resistance through their anger and frustration at the failure of policies to eliminate acts of violence against Dalits by the upper castes and they intended to ignite a burning spirit of rebellion in the hearts of the untouchables. To site an example from Mahasweta Devi’s work Water, the conversation of the three Naxalites with the young Dalit, Dhura shows how the government failed to implement the rules in different areas to protect the minorities:

DHURA: When we go to distribute the Prasad from the Dharma Puja, in the village they won’t let us stand under the ledges of their huts—we’re the untouchables.

ONE: We’ve gone over all that, Dhura. The castes, upper and lower, don’t mean a thing. They are labels designed by men. The Constitution’s clear on that. But who cares to uphold the Constitution? Try to bear in mind all that we’ve told you.

DHURA: Sure, but had someone stayed on with us, to show us the way and put courage into our hearts, only then we
could’ve…

ONE (with firm confidence): We’ll be back again.

DHURA (down to earth): No, the police kill you once they get you.

ONE: No. The police won’t have it their way every time.

(With a beatific smile) We’ll kill the police too (Water 96).

The Dalit movement began with Jyotirao Phule in the mid-nineteenth century aiming for education and upliftment of women, Sudras and Dalits, and finding a place for them within Hinduism. Phule also worked to abolish the idea of untouchability which meant getting rid of restrictions on entry into temples and fighting for a place for Dalits within Hinduism. The Sudras and the untouchables joined Anti-Brahmanical Movements in order to take a stance against the discriminatory acts they were facing. These movements led to the refusal and protests of lower castes to pay taxes imposed by landlords and also oppose forced labour system. The opposition was also against the privileges of modern educational system and other opportunities provided by the British government which were only enjoyed by the upper castes. These movements can be classified into three types namely those led by upper non Brahmin castes against the orthodox system of the Brahmins as found in the Naxal participation of young upper caste
rebels in *Mother of 1084*, protests by the backward castes against the upper castes which is seen in *Water, Draupadi* and other works, and finally the tribal movements’ demand for their rights and fight against the upper castes/ classes and those in power. These movements were important milestones in colonial and post colonial India to challenge the Brahminical hegemony and struggle for decolonization.

Non-violence and silence as acts of resistance is seen in Gandhi’s silent and non-violent struggle for eradicating the evil customs of the Indian caste system. He opposed the differences that existed in the caste hierarchy and aimed to remove these disparities. The Indian freedom movement provided a platform for him to bring together members of various castes to join in the fight for independence and encouraged incorporation of Dalits as part of reformed Hinduism. He used the independence movement as a means and method to unite and eliminate the orthodox beliefs that exists among various castes and opposed the use of the term ‘untouchables’. Instead, he called them ‘Harijans’ (God’s people). It was also an effort to bring women out of their kitchens and stressing on their education, awareness and social position. In 1935, before India gained independence, the British Government came up with a list of four hundred groups who were considered untouchables. The list also included many tribal groups that were accorded special privileges in
order to overcome deprivation and discrimination who were termed as the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.

Besides the social reform movements and political protest movements, there have also been other movements like Naxalite Movement, Women’s Movements and various Tribal Rebel Movements. These will be briefly introduced here.

The violent resistance of the tribes to colonial expansion into their forest world began with the revolt of Pahariya Sirdars of Bihar in 1778. With the Assam adivasis’ revolt of 1816-24, the British approach towards the tribals changed and they began recognizing them as a separate entity. The Santhal revolt of 1855 was another such landmark, which led to the commissioning of a number of agendas in producing and reproducing a tribal society.

The various tribal uprisings namely Pame Revolts of 1820, Kul Resurrection (1831-33), Santal Insurrection (1855), Birsa Munda Revolt (1889-99), Tana Bhaga’s Movement and leaders like Dulchand, Tudu, Jayaram Murmu, Raghu Murmu, Ganpat Mahato, Birsa Munda, Lakshman Naik and Alluri Sitarama Raju are unknown to the mainstream even after independence.

Then came the Santal Rebellion directed against the money-lenders, landlords, police, state and other exploiters. This rebellion was first started by Baba Tirka Majih that continued from the years 1780 to
1785. This rebellion does not feature in the official histories but serves as an emblem of tribal rebellion.

The Naxalite Uprising of May, 1967 is a peasant movement led by Kanu Sanyal and Charu Majumdar against the violence meted out to a tribal youth. The youth was empowered with the judicial order to plough his land but was attacked by the ‘goons’ of the local landlords.

Mahasweta Devi’s works also dramatize/fictionalize some relevant Naxalite, Tribal, Peasant and Women’s Movements which symbolize rebellion of the marginalized as a political act. Her award-winning novel *Mother of 1084* fictionalizes the rebellion in the background of the Naxalite Movement. The novel presents a situation where the ‘goons’ attack young men supporting the Naxalite movement and kill them ruthlessly. This rebellious movement assumed larger dimension with the other states taking active part in the struggle. Across the states, the tribals and peasants fought for their land and acquired them by force from the landlords. Later on, educated elites and young students were also inspired by this movement which reached them through the writings of Majumdar. They joined the struggle when many colleges became hotbeds of Naxalite activism. The lower castes and the women folk became active participants of the movement having lost their lands to the privileged sections.
In order to trace the origin and root of women’s oppression, one needs to refer to the Hindu mythology. It is said that Brahma had first created man and in his generosity, had desired to give man a companion. This primeval myth carries an unambiguous implication of woman’s secondary image in life and literature for centuries. It is the same belief and its propagation of woman’s inferiority that feminism chooses to contest.

The popular feminist Gail Omvedt classifies women’s movement into two types - women’s equality movements and women’s liberation movements. While the former aims to attain an equal place for women in society by abolishing the remnants of feudal patriarchy, the latter challenges the gender based division of labour.

The feminist Jana Everett’s demand for equal rights of women is apt for discussion. According to her, men and women should be treated equally and no discrimination should be made with respect to an individual being born as a female. She identifies five factors which shaped and resulted in the reformist Indian women’s movements namely the hierarchical caste system, the Hindu religion, the joint family system, the Islamic rule and British colonialism.

Not only social/political movements, but also literature, through its representation of resistance and rebellion gives voice to the voiceless. Particularly the representation of women of colour, immigrants,
transgenders, the working class and lower castes who have been exiled from dominant discourse at various times and has become the subject of contemporary and postcolonial writings. Contemporary writings provide a medium through which an individual or members of the marginalized groups voice their feelings and demand a presence in the national consciousness. For example, Toni Morrison’s first novel *The Bluest Eye* narrates the story of Pecola Breedlove, a young African American girl in poor small town Ohio, and her fight for an identity in the face of racism. Similarly, Leslie Feinherg’s *Stone Butch Blues* tells the stunning and heartrending story of the transgendered journey of Jess.

A reading of Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* raises not only the issue of victimization of workers by the capitalists but also forces the readers to introspect the death of countless pensioners who have died due to non-payment of their pensions. Similarly, Chinua Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease* depicts the emergence of corruptive African administrative class in postcolonial Africa. Again, Wole Soyinka’s *The Trial of Brother Jero* attempts a mockery of the religious charlatanism and presents a microcosm of distorted pseudo religiousness in the African environment. All these texts manifest the experience of individuals, whose racial, class, gendered and sexual identities render them invisible to mainstream culture.
When the notions of resistance and rebellion take shape in literature, readers viscerally experience their stories in ways that can be transformative, enabling alternative and more progressive meanings into these literary texts. The act of resistance and rebellion could be identified in acts of violent self expression and also through those acts that render the invisible visible. Similarly, literary texts that perform acts of resistance are forms of activism that tackle hotbed political issues in society. Some examples of such literary texts are Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Harriet Jacob’s poetry and Frederick Douglass’ memoir, which present the abolitionist view of slavery in America, with the last two texts presenting a gendered perspective and protest against slavery.

Literary texts as discussed above and their acts of rebellion become the centre of the activist platform to address various issues of oppression, marginalization etc. The civil rights movements, the anti-war movements, and the feminist movements all relied on literary texts like those mentioned above as one key venue through which to articulate their respective manifestos for social justice.

If literary texts become inspiration for social activism as discussed above, sometimes they can also become themselves, sites of activism. For instance, when writers address oppression by using literary texts as sites of social change and resistance, then they become activist writings.
Post-colonial texts like that of Mahasweta Devi and Arundhati Roy address political and social issues like cultural autonomy, gender identity, and caste/class politics, and thereby enhance the experience of social justice activism.

It is in the above context of literature as reflection of activism, resistance and rebellion that Mahasweta Devi’s works become crucial. For Mahasweta Devi’s creed is clearly one of marked social activism and committed agendas against the falsehood of politics, society, religious and orthodox beliefs. It is often said that potpourri of such issues do not make for good creative writing. But for Mahasweta Devi, there has never been a conflict of interest. A firm believer of documentation, Mahasweta Devi has based her works on an extensive study of the history of rural Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and an understanding of the unfair social practices. Hence, Devi’s activist writings characterize the following: her distaste for the inequality and injustice prevalent in the country, her articulation of the voiceless and the marginalized, and her emphasis on the writer’s role as social and political activist.

It is the author’s attempt at reflecting rebellion to repression that forms the basis of discussion of the present chapter ‘Resistance and Rebellion in Devi’s Works’, which examines the articulation of
resistance and rebellion to oppression represented in Mahasweta Devi’s literary works.

Mahasweta Devi constructs a discourse on resistance and rebellion through the following finely laid arguments on class, caste and gender oppression—the past, present and bleak future of oppression in India; the colonial regime and its complication of the whole issue of oppression; her historical and contemporaneous rather than exotic presentation of oppression; and the shrewd and diplomatic ways of resistance by the oppressed. This can be viewed in her delineation of certain rebellious characters that evolve through their interactions with their contemporary society. It can also be seen in her vision that is not exotic but historical and contemporaneous. In fact, her vision of the oppressed and their instinct for rebellion is always trained on the realities of the present. In her novella *Rudali* for instance, a low caste minor character called Dulan narrates the history of oppression which people like Bikhni and Sanichari encounter today, where their oppression began when the Rajputs infiltrated the remote tribal lands and gradually took possession as masters of the land.

For an understanding of Mahasweta Devi’s notion of oppression, one needs to foreground the issue on the history of colonial regime. During the colonial rule, the British ignored the inalienable rights of the actual cultivators. They preferred to rather introduce intermediaries, who
were the non-cultivating sections with only a small share in the produce but who traditionally became the sole proprietors of the land. Such a practice completely changed dealings between the land owning peasants and tribes when the notion of individual property rights was introduced. The British reinforced the semi-feudal agrarian system of landlord and tenant which was earlier non-existent. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, land settlements were established to capitalize on the land, and a revenue system that ignored the traditional customs of the lower castes was set in motion. Exploitation coupled with famines and other man-made crisis intensified and pushed the tribes and indebted peasants of various castes into the ranks of landless labourers.

The introduction of railways, construction of roads in previously isolated regions, defence works, the colonial education system, the uniform civil and criminal law and colonial bureaucracy further affected the caste system and modified its role in society. In addition to the above crisis, majority of the jobs and educational opportunities went to the higher sections. This further deepened the crisis faced by the traditional caste-linked craftsmen who were already facing setback due to imported manufactured goods. Lack of occupation or setback in traditional family occupations coupled with their displacement from their traditionally owned lands culminated in their new roles as bonded servants and landless labourers.
Such a foregrounding of colonial rule helps one to understand Mahasweta Devi’s approach to the issue of displacement of the oppressed. It is this issue of displacement which completely changed the Adivasis’ relationship with the land when there was the introduction of the concept of individual property rights, thereby putting an end to their sustainable lifestyles. In several works like “Shishu” (“Little Ones”) and “Draupadi”, Mahasweta Devi foregrounds the notion of oppression of the tribals through their displacement made possible through certain governmental rules.

The two Indian Forest Acts of 1865 and 1878 of the British during colonial period facilitated the British control over forests, where the Adivasis originally had the ancestral rights to hunt and gather livelihoods.

Hence Mahasweta Devi shows the Adivasis’ displacement as the root cause of their dissent. Their further subjugation of the upper class led to their aggression and violence. This resistance turned into rebellion in the form of various movements to overthrow the establishment. Such a turmoil that began from pre-independence period and continued through the post-independence years, as presented in her works, help to understand the historical foregrounding of oppression and rebellion that is integral to her works.
One such rebellion features in Devi’s short story “Shishu” (“Little Ones”). The Aagariya tribes of Kuva village kill government officials in order to safeguard their land from becoming an industrial iron ore zone. The author adopts a unique discourse of resistance when these tribes display their naked, malnourished bodies and breasts through a primitive dance that symbolizes their act of protest against the government and their act of staging their life and its adverse conditions.

Mahasweta Devi’s representation of resistance and rebellion is not exotic, in the sense that she makes no thesis of propaganda or proclamation of tribal heroism through rebellion. But rather she makes a contemporaneous and realistic portrayal of an oppressed individual seen in the context of the oppression of his or her community along with the context of political, communal and social forces of oppression. Such a foregrounding of oppression and rebellion is seen in the way the author foregrounds the history of oppression from the pre-colonial, colonial to the postcolonial times.

Mahasweta Devi’s works present the argument that despite the Indian Independence from colonial rule, exploitation and rebellion without any reprieve still continue to this day. For instance, the process of land alienation, dispossession, and exploitation is still a harsh reality for the tribals even after the independence. The post-independence thirst for the rapid development and industrialization of India displaced
millions of tribals from their land without offering them adequate compensation, drowned forest and arable land, and contributed to the growing gap between rich and poor and the pauperization of the tribes.

These multiple factors resulted in the migration of the marginalized to the cities to work as casual labourers. Adapting to city life became difficult for these simple people and the employers exploited them to the fullest. Many migrants fell into debt, or became bonded labourers. Those who chose not to migrate to cities had to turn nomadic and search for forest cover to carry on their traditional occupations. This brought them into conflict with the landowners, the police and the forest officials. Many felt hunted and victimized in their own country. Such a historical background of migration and displacement is indispensable to an understanding of Mahasweta Devi’s stand on tribal oppression.

It is in the background of the realistic, historical and futuristic presentation of oppression that Mahasweta Devi approaches the subject of resistance and rebellion. As stated earlier, her oppressed characters stage multiple ways of resisting oppression. This reveals that her oppressed characters are not passive victims, but prove what Shashi Deshpande mentions that “The weak have their weapons too” (*Roots and Shadows* 6). Even the report by World Health Organization report on violence that most of the abused are not passive victims- corroborates the above mentioned point. The social, cultural, religious, educational
and economic restrictions faced by the oppressors for a fairly long period of time made them resist to oppression in various ways. Some resist oppression through violent outburst, a few choose to protect their dignity by ending their lives, some through flight while others use silence as a tool to survive amidst stark conditions. Judicious silence may not change conditions overnight, but is a key survival strategy in a dangerously brutal world.

Devi’s rebel characters both male and female are seen to rise into consciousness and participate in a ‘revolutionary movement’ for a transformation in their condition as well as in society’s. A noteworthy parallel to the above situation is what Simone de Beauvoir calls ‘a new and transformed possibility- the movement from passivity into freedom’ (Sheila Rowbotham, Woman’s Consciousness, Man’s World 28).

A similar revolutionary fervour aimed at social parity is echoed in the writings of Mahasweta Devi and is awakened among the Dalits by the school teacher Jiten in the social play of Mahasweta Devi called Water. Jiten rouses the villagers with the necessity of education and construction of dams. Hence his entry into the village effects awareness, inspiration and transformation among the deprived and catalyzes them to protest against the cruelty and corruption of the landlord Santosh Pujari. This situation reminds one of the entry of Gandhi and the poet Iqbal Nath Sarshar into the village at the close of Mulk Raj Anand’s novel,
Untouchable. The novel speaks of the need to rise above caste and inequalities and provide equal rights, privileges and opportunities to the Dalits. This spirit of protest is also aroused through the actions of Dopdi, Dulna Mehjen and other tribals who jointly counter the upper class landlords for demands of higher wages for their labour. This echoes the 1780’s Tribal/Santal rebellion directed against the money lenders, landlords, police, state and other exploiters.

Mahasweta Devi’s novels Operation Bashai Tudu and Chotti Munda and his Arrow mirror resistance and rebellion. Here also, the heroes become beacons, setting a radical pattern of defiance in the teeth of oppression. Devi’s works “Draupadi” and Titu Mir reflect tribal movements where tribal rebels like Dopdi and Dulna Mehjen, their leader Bashai Tudu, Titu Mir resort to revolutionary activities directed against the establishment in their struggle against criminalization of politics, inhuman torture and oppression of the marginalized. Such rebellious actions were collectively carried out by the subaltern Munda, Oraon and other Hindu outcastes and they include theft of relief materials provided by the government for the underprivileged, threats and demands made to the government for rightful wages, adequate food and free use of public wells without caste discrimination, plotting against those in power, instigation of new rebels to join the movement as well as murder and elimination of upper castes.
Her approach to rebels as characters singles her out as a writer because she is able to capture the transition of the marginalized from the pathetically abused state to angry rebels. Such a transition is not problematized by Mahasweta Devi but seen as a natural end result of upper class continued injustice and torment. In “Draupadi”, the protagonist and her husband initially work as farmhands for Surya Sahu but gradually become the chief instigators in the murder of their landowner and his son.

During a period of severe drought, Surya Sahu enjoys the privilege of having two tube wells and three wells dug within his compound but do not allow others to make use of them. Instead, he forces free labour out of them. The calamity of drought tests the patience of Santal tribes beyond endurance and leads them to aggressive rebellion. Hence rebels like Dopdi murder the landlord. Dopdi in particular has a reason to do so because ‘his mouth watered’ when he looked at her (“Draupadi” The Inner Courtyard 99). Other reasons for rebellion are because of the lack of facilities like village children’s education and also lack of access to public wells, free movement within the village, relief materials coming from the government.

The Naxalite Movement gains support in Mother of 1084 from the upper, educated caste/class, low class, tribal leaders as well as women. Nandini Mitra and Brati Chatterji are few such characters. Similarly,
Peasant Rebellion becomes the dominant subject of Devi’s short story “Seeds” where the harijan labourers and adivasis like Karan Dushad, Asrafi Mahato, Mohor Karan, Dhatua and other villagers form an organization to demand higher wages.

Resistance and rebellious action do not take place only at social, religious, cultural and political level. It grows from within the family where women face constraints with regard to decision making, education and financial independence. Women oppose gender discrimination and violence by social forces that suppress women’s freedom.

Mahasweta Devi is scrupulous in her consideration towards women and documents moments of the collective struggle in which men and women join together when “their condition of work or education suffer from gender or class discrimination. In other words, she does not regard women as a separate entity but treats their subordination as linked to the oppositions of class and caste” (Chakravorty 150). Her women are stronger personages as compared to men, who appear to be lacking in insight into what is happening to their being, and remain, for a moment, passive spectators as their counterparts pass through the trying situations created by an equally indifferent establishment. The men, however, moulded and matured by their community’s collective experience of suffering, eventually transform themselves into militants.
At one level, the manner of resisting oppression by men and women vary because the manner of exploitation faced by women is of a different kind. For instance, if women are oppressed by males, there is resistance and protest for equal rights and identity. However, if one views oppression from another level, their resistance and rebellion are seen to fuse together when it comes to opposition for a common cause. Women battle oppression at the familial level in protest of their conservative roles as wives, mothers and daughters. At the social level, they oppose to the societal rules of patriarchy and restriction on moving out of home. At the political level, they demand equal rights as men and wish to voice out their opinion in public. They resist to these forms of social evils by breaking their silence and coming out of their homes.

Discussing women’s rebellion and feminist movement, it can be stated that women’s resistance to oppression occurs due to the following factors: male dominance and patrilineal practices, lack of equal rights within and outside the household, female segregation in domestic spheres, sexual discrimination, gender-role restrictions and women’s physical and sexual abuse. The above factors are indispensible to understand female/feminist resistance and rebellion.

The social perspective of oppression in females can also be traced back to the study of Indian history of the medieval period where women’s position started deteriorating. The Muslim conquest in the
Indian subcontinent brought the purdah system and jauhar into practice. In Muslim families, women were confined to specific areas of the house prohibiting their moving out of homes for communication in society and public participation. With the passing of time, certain relaxations were given although oppression on women continued in some form or the other. This was prevalent both among the Hindus as well as the Muslims. Women had to cover their heads and faces before outsiders and elders.

The rebellious spirit in the oppressors as mentioned above culminates in various movements that arise as a result of the oppressors’ awareness of exploitation. This consciousness for the need of rebellion arises when one is awakened about its needs and necessity. After the introduction of Western education that came in the wake of colonialism in India, followed by the positivity of the reformists’ movements, promotion of women’s institutions, the freedom movement and so on, life had begun to change once more for the better. In post-independence India, with the education of the poor and especially women, there was a new emergence. Education had inculcated a sense of individuality among the deprived sections and had aroused an interest in their human rights. The oppressed could free themselves from the clutches of the oppressors by developing a critical perspective towards all things to understand the diverse strategies used by the oppressors. Friere calls this
awareness and process of gaining critical consciousness as conscientization (“Five Faces of Oppression”, *Oppression, Privilege and Resistance*).

Mahasweta Devi’s characters rebel and resist oppression when their situations of oppression cross all levels of endurance and inculcate in them a desire to break free from all bondages of confinement. Devi’s characters are seen to become ‘coherent and self critical’ when their ‘version of the world becomes clear not simply within itself’ but when they know themselves ‘in relation to what has been created’ out of their world to which they are subjected. When they look back at themselves out of their own cultural creations, their actions, ideas, history, pamphlets, organization, as well as their theory, they gradually begin ‘to integrate a new reality’. As they begin to understand themselves in relation to one another, they start understanding their movement of rebellion ‘in relation to the world outside’ so that they can use their self consciousness strategically and see what they could not see before (“Through the Looking Glass” *The Second Sex* 28).

A similar idea is also shared by P.H.Collins who believes that self evaluation and self definition are two ways of resisting oppression. This self awareness comes with one realizing one’s potential, strength and inner capabilities to resort to resistance and protest. This idea of self evaluation goes hand in hand with the idea of Brazilian philosopher
Paulo Freire who speaks of resisting powerlessness and oppression by gaining a greater consciousness. Throughout history, victims of oppression have gained an understanding and have become conscious of themselves and their situation through education, literacy and introspection. Freire uses the term conscientization for the process of gaining critical consciousness which comes through firm refusal to submit to oppression. It helps to preserve the self esteem of an individual or a group that is being exploited and help them avoid any dehumanizing outside influences (Learning From the Outside Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought, Social Problems 18).

This realization empowers Phulmani to rebel (Water). Her effort to protect her family’s dignity by resorting to the dehumanizing attitude of Santosh Pujari makes her boldly remark against his atrocities on the Dalits and the other lower classes in demand for their rights. She is aware of the Constitutional rights provided to the Dalits in drawing water from the same wells as the upper castes which is awakened by a Dalit man, Jiten. This gives her spontaneity and courage to voice out the suffering of women due to the non-availability of water:

These two hands of mine are full of sores, Santosh, all from scratching about the sands of Charsa for water… “This year we demand a well for our use. We’ll draw [water] from our Panchayat well, we’ll not let your cattle be washed there”… “We
die without water, our little ones go thirsty, our women dig at the sands of the river for a cupful of water. Who’d play such a cruel game with the water that we need to quench our thirst? (Water 103-4).

She resembles a modern, emancipated woman who as Simone de Beauvoir describes as wanting ‘to be active, a taker, and refuses the passivity’ which Santosh and Maghai desire to impose on her. A woman of strength, Phulmani ‘prides herself on thinking, taking action, working, creating, on the same terms as men; instead of seeking to disparage them, she declares herself their equal (The Second Sex 37). Her individuality and dauntless pride is clearly highlighted in her challenging declaration to Santosh:

I have seen you as a kid, you can’t scare me. This husband of mine is a water-diviner; he worships the water, draws out the hidden water. But I’ve never sung to his tune…It’s no use begging for relief. This man here will run to the town and tell the police that the lower castes of Charsa have all turned Naxals (Water 103).

In India, it was only from the times of the British rule that women’s education was encouraged. Particularly the upper class women enjoyed this freedom while the lower class had no access to it. This form of upper class women’s freedom is seen in Mahasweta Devi’s characters
Sujata Chatterji (from the novel/play *Mother of 1084*), Pallavi and also the daughters in law of the Haldar family (in the novel *The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh*). While Sujata is an educated woman enjoying financial independence and free movement out of her house, Pallavi participates in social welfare activities and various educational programmes, in an attempt to bring about transformation in the condition of underprivileged rural women. In the same novel, the daughters in law break the bondages of family tradition and enjoy better economic independence than the working class women.

In Mahasweta Devi’s works, the rebels are found to be victims of continuous suffering and torture at the initial stage but they do not remain purely inert or inactive. Awareness and urge to retaliate help them protect their dignity, self-respect, place and position in society with the realization that life does not end with becoming good and obedient workers, peasants and labourers, ‘good wives’, ‘good mothers’ and ‘good daughters’. The victims no longer desire to remain a subaltern as Spivak calls them, belonging to “inferior rank and station” be it in terms of ‘race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and religion’, be differentiated ‘from the privileged, enfranchised elite,’ nor ‘a disenfranchised individual lacking social agency and “voice” but rather ‘demands’ to be ‘treated as a man’ (Landry and Maclean, *The Spivak Reader* 24).
Devi’s characters mentioned above aspire to become ‘useful’ members of the body politic of a civilized community breaking boundaries in search of self identity. In fact, Martin Heidegger’s definition of the term ‘boundary’ in his essay ‘Building, Dwelling, Thinking’ on *The God of Small Things* is a fitting description of the strength and ability of the suppressed. It says that boundary ‘is not that at which something stops’ but from which ‘something begins its presence.’ This realization leads to a new beginning in their lives, a phase where they try to assert their basic rights and begin to question patriarchal cultural constructs. In such cases of upper class women, the key to female resistance and rebellion lies in their education and the awareness which emboldens them to deal with the different ways of oppression.

Besides the upper class women’s social and political awakening, Mahasweta Devi significantly deals with the awakening of the downtrodden women. Devi’s characters resist oppression using various means. One finds that Devi’s protagonists resist oppression at various levels- class, caste and gender- and this resistance takes place in a number of ways.

Resistance to class oppression can be seen in its political dimension in the furious aggression of activists like Nandini Mitra and Brati Chatterji (in *Mother of 1084*), Dopdi and Dulna Mehjen
(“Draupadi”). Their rebellion is against the government that deprived them of their rights in a democratic country. The strong rebellious spirit inherent in the activists is seen at its best in Nandini’s refusal to adjust with Sujata’s ‘all right with the world, let’s go on nicely’. Nandini’s words- ‘But I’ll never come back to the so-called tidy life. Some day you’ll learn that I’ve been arrested again’ (26) indicate that she has no desire to give up her revolutionary activities, despite imprisonment and police tortures. The same spirit is seen in the tribal woman Dopdi (“Draupadi”) who remains loyal to the cause of the Naxalite movement which is directed against the government even after being brutally exploited.

Resistance to caste oppression is seen in numerous characters of Mahasweta Devi’s works. Particularly interesting is *Rudali* where the untouchables like Sanichari and the prostitutes oppressed by the landlords become ‘rudalis’, the professional mourners for the dead in the landlord’s families. Sanichari in her role as a rudali puts an end to the several dilemmas within and outside her and transform those dilemmas into economic sustainability. For example, she initially has no tears to shed for her dead mother- in- law and husband. She is unhappy with her runaway daughter- in- law turned prostitute. She is dependent on her friend Bikhni to conduct her life and her home. But once she is forced to take up the profession of rudali after Bikhni’s death, she transforms
these dilemmas of an untouchable woman into harbingers of resistance in joining hands with the oppressed prostitutes and extracting money from the upper caste landlords in their new roles as rudalis. Therefore rudali symbolizes resistance to caste oppression by the oppressed who rebel against the oppressor not through protest or violence but through taking advantage of the oppressor’s weakness for maintaining caste orthodoxy and peace.

Resistance to gender oppression in Mahasweta Devi’s characters takes place in several forms as protest to marital oppression, sexual exploitation, discrimination etc. In Aajir and The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh, this resistance can be seen in the form of marital betrayal, extra-marital relations and honour killing. The desire of the mistress to break free from the monotony and limitations of the marital bindings (Aajir) represents women’s resistance to gender oppression. Deprived of marital bliss, she seeks pleasure in her relation with the slave Paatan. Her lust for physical pleasure and her decision to elope with Paatan arise due to marital rejection and loneliness. Similar pattern of resistance is manifested in The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh in Rukmani’s aborting the child and her suicide after her experiences of sexual exploitation.

Resistance to prostitution is another way in which the woman character counters gender oppression. Even though the prostitutes in Rudali were created because of the sexual exploitation of the Rajput...
landlords, they are never looked after but ignored as untouchables. However these victims including Sanichari’s daughter- in- law Parbatia decide to survive and refuse to circum to oppression. The will of the prostitutes to survive through resistance and rebellion is unique and interesting. Hence feminists consider prostitution as a form of protest where the client is economically and sexually exploited by a prostitute since the prostitute makes a mockery of the hypocrisy of the privileged class that seeks secret pleasure in the company of a “fallen” woman but wish to keep up their class image in public.

There are various other ways of resistance to gender oppression. Rejection or corruption of motherhood is one. Studying Mahasweta Devi’s works from this point of view, one finds women questioning and resisting their social roles. In the women of the higher classes of Haldar family for instance (in the story Breast Giver), resistance to gender oppression is seen in their act of breaking the traditional customs of giving birth to many children and refusal to remain within the confines of the household. The radical feminist view on motherhood tends to view female subjugation of patriarchy by perpetuating them in various roles such as mother, daughter, wife etc.

Motherhood not only forces women to be mothers but also determines the conditions of their motherhood, creating masculine and feminine characteristics, strengthening the divide between public and
private, restricting women’s mobility and reinforcing male dominance. Hence, radical feminists view motherhood as the perpetuation of patriarchy that needs to be rejected. The rejection of motherhood occurs in *The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh* in the actions of Mori and Rukmani and is expressed in the following lines:

> In the family the custom was to have a second wedding if a couple could produce twenty children. But the daughters-in-law called a halt at twelve-thirteen-fourteen. By evil counsel they were able to explain to their husbands and make arrangements at the hospital. All this was the bad result of the new wind….It was always the sixteenth century in the Haldar household…The most objectionable thing was that in the matter of motherhood, the old lady’s granddaughters-in-law had breathed a completely different air before they crossed their threshold…The old man had dreamed of filling half Calcutta with Haldars. The granddaughters-in-law were unwilling. Defying the old lady’s tongue, they took off to their husbands’ places of work (*Breast Stories* 55-6).

Besides the discussion of resistance to class/ caste/ gender oppression, resistance of Mahasweta’s characters is also seen at a socio-cultural level in the resistance of the oppressed to break free from blind superstitions, slavery and superficial customs of the people.
Rebellion at the social level occurs when one challenges the irrational customs, beliefs and conventions of society and tries to break free from its bondages. This is seen in the social play Bayen in the act of Bhagirath, discarding and defying the age old constraints and societal norms to pay a visit to Chandidasi in the village outskirts whom the world brands as a ‘bayen’. He discards the bayen’s statement: ‘there’s poison in the air into which I breathe, there’s poison in my touch’ (88). This extends to the latter part of the play when he breaks all manmade barriers, as he comes forward to acknowledge the dead as his mother, making an open declaration of her heroism and commitment towards her profession and the greater cause of humanity.

These inhuman customs reminds one of the tribal women Birubala Rabha of Thakurbilla village of Assam who fights against witchcraft and witch hunting after being ostracized and threatened by the villagers and was even nominated for the Nobel Prize in 2005.

Resistance to blind superstitions forms a part of the play Urvashi and Johnny. The vain attempt of Johnny’s friends to cure him from cancer is evident in Ramanna’s visit to ‘the lame one’ to give her ‘good biris and the pillow of a woman who died with her husband alive’ so that she could perform a few rituals and cure Johnny. This attempt is made as a method to survive and fight the disease instead of giving way to suffering and death.
Rebellion to break free from perpetual slavery is cited in the play *Aajir* in Paatan’s ardent desire to attain freedom which urge him to steal his master’s wealth, his dream of marrying, to have a family of his own and look upon the face of his own son’ and his declaration of tearing the aajir’s bond to pieces. Then I’ll be a man. I’ll marry Bhumidasi. Bhumidasi! I’ll be an aajir no longer. (4). One notices his aggression and anger in the murder of the mistress when he refuses to believe that the aajir’s bond has been turned to dust.

The titles of Mahasweta Devi’s works largely symbolize resistance to oppression. For example, the title *Draupadi* makes a deliberate use of an epic character and thereby reflects the strength and capability of Dopdi as a female character, who has the potential of the beacon of a protest movement. The title of Devi’s short story “The Hunt” reflects the potential for violence in a simple woman. The ‘hunt’ denotes not the hunter but a woman’s act of resistance to hunt down the rapist. Devi’s other work “Seeds” symbolically bring out the seeds of rebellion aroused among the underprivileged class/ caste and becomes a metaphor of the mushrooming rebellion that is yet to come. This fire of rebellion is expressed in the narrative thus:

For a few days, Dulan clears the undergrowth. Prepares the land. Then he fetches the seed and says- These seeds are not for eating. I’ll sow them on the land. Scattering seeds on the
land, he chants, like a mantra- I won’t let you be just aloe and putush. Dhatua? I’ll turn you into paddy (“Seeds” 51).

Mahasweta Devi’s characters resist oppression using a number of methods. These different modes of resisting oppression bear mention because they are closely related to her works. Such methods of resistance and rebellion reveal various strategies and tools of the rebel-skill and practical wisdom, spirit of survival, protest, violence, rejection, silence and self-negligence. They stage their rebellion in the form of vocal protests, through passive actions, sometimes with undaunted bravery, aggression and sacrifice; or in certain cases through acts of rejection and violence.

One such means is the use of skill and practical wisdom. The oppressed characters’ transformation from innocence to wisdom through employment of his/her skills is also evident in Mahasweta Devi’s subaltern characters. In Rudali, Dulan’s resistant will, sharp intelligence, irreverence, cynicism and subaltern cunning help in the transformation of Sanichari from an innocent Ganju woman to a resisting one. It is Dulan’s skill and practical wisdom, which he imparts to Sanichari that help Sanichari escape exploitation and even transform the adversity of oppression into empowerment of the oppressed. This transformation of the oppressed can be experienced in Sanichari’s employment in the repairing of the railway line and her formation of a union of rudalis with
the prostitutes of Tohri. Hence Sanichari evolves into a strong and powerful matriarch, the pillar and decision-maker of her home:

Tell your friend to keep her ears open in her trips to the market. All the shops belong to the landlords and money-lenders. Tell her to find out who’s ill, who’s dying… otherwise we won’t get information in time. And she should tell them that she can arrange for more rudalis. How? Go to Tohri. The randi bazaar.

My God!
Dulan said, do you think we always had so many whores?
It’s these Rajput malik-mahajans who have created so many randis (*Rudali* 72).

The above lines throw light on his immense skill and ability to see through the corrupt, greedy and hypocritical nature of the ‘malik-mahajans’. Dulan’s craftiness is highlighted from the following lines of the text:

Dulan said, As long as there’s a way of earning, why should anyone die of starvation? What kind of earning?
Budhuli’s mother! Do readymade ways of earning exist?
They may exist for malik-mahajans, but do they exist for dushads and ganjus? We have to make our own
opportunities. How much money did your friend bring with her?

Twenty rupees.

Tw-en-ty whole rupees!

Yes. We’ve spent eighteen rupees on food (*Rudali* 68).

Dulan tells the women the manner in which he deceived Lachman Singh’s mother, who suffers from reumatism by pocketing her money:

Well, she gave me ten rupees to bring her some holy oil from Chas. I didn’t even go to Chas, just took her some oil from home after a few days. And it wasn’t trickery, because I didn’t consider it to be… Look here, Budhua’s ma, there’s no bigger god than one’s belly.’ For the belly’s sake everything is permissible (*Rudali* 69).

This is a fact that Anjum Katyal establishes and rightly affirms as the issue of survival in *Rudali*. ‘Rudali is about… “how to survive”… “bread and mouth” (*Rudali* from fiction to performance “Metamorphosis of Rudali” 9).

Devi intertwines the character of Dulan appearing in *Rudali* with that of “Seeds” who reappears with his ‘complicated and incomprehensible’ ways (*Rudali* 24) of befooling the government into giving him seeds every year for his barren land, collecting and selling government fertilizers, extracting money by masquerading Pahaan’s
plough and buffalo as his own, poisoning the buffaloes of the Rajput landlord and selling off their skins- all these he claims to be a means of living.

Mahasweta Devi creates Dulan not merely as a fictional character, but one who has prototypes existing outside the story as well. In an interview on 26/5/93, Mahasweta Devi states about her report written in *Aajkal* where she writes about this character called Dulan ganju:

For example you have Dulan ganju. His son gets killed. I have written a report in *Aajkal*. I am yet to write the last story. Then this Dulan episode will be complete. Dhatua’s son is killed by the landlord. He gets married and his landlord wants to have his wife on the first night. This story is based on a real incident. He was burnt to death. He was burnt to death... In my story Dulan receives books from someone. But since he cannot read he keeps the books aside. His grandson asks him, ‘What are you keeping there?’ The grandson and his wife have learnt reading and writing. Now this grandson gets killed. The wife is rescued. Dulan goes back to his books. Towards the end of the story Dulan takes the books with him and joins the adult literacy class. Now he has to learn the alphabet. He wants to read what is written there. The story ends here. So the Dulan you have seen in *Rudali* or in
Bichan, has become contemporary. He reaches the present, 1993…

This interview is an indication of Devi’s wisdom and foresighted vision in creating her oppressed characters that learn the ways and means to resist oppression through skilful methods and deceive their shrewd masters.

To illustrate, the act of stealing food by the poor Brahmin Kangali Charan from the rich household to meet the demand of his family is a method of survival. The breaking up of the upper class Haldar family is also a survival strategy used to escape bearing all expenses of the household and shoulder other responsibilities by individual members (‘Breast Giver”). The urge for survival also shows in Devi’s short story “Shishu”, in the actions of the stunted Aagariya tribals who opts to stealing relief materials to make both ends meet.

In The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh, Medini Singh’s bonded labourer Haroa plans to make a hut with kitchen and garden and cultivate his own land. His optimism and spirit to survive is metaphorically shown in his act of planting trees which signal his hope of arrival of joyful days to come in the future.

The strength of survival is seen in Johnny’s filmy song (Urvashi and Johnny) which highlights positive attitude towards life. Similarly, in the same play, Moti’s courage to survive in the slums and her desire to
help one’s fellow-mates amidst stark poverty indicates the oppressed’ strength for survival. Sometimes, the spirit for survival culminates in what Mahasweta Devi calls as the ‘betrayal for survival, i.e, the Santhal fighting another Santhal for food. Mahasweta Devi picturizes such a scene of beggary in the streets of Calcutta in the dialogue below:

RAMANNA  No, tonight the lame one’s gang will fight with Magandas’s gang for their rights over the little heap. These are bad days, Johnny. When you see the beggars betraying their faith, that’s a sign that the times have come to a monstrous state. The city belongs to the beggars. It’s all been divided up. The lame one will pick up all the litter in the heap on the right, Magandas has the right to the heap on the left. But trust Magandas the bastard, he sneaks into the lame one’s territory every day. He hasn’t had a taste of the lame one’s guts. Tonight the lame one will fight for her rights. Betrayal for survival is also evident in the treachery of Shomai and Budhna who secure their lives of insufficiency in exchange for small amount of money and food by betraying their Santhal brethren (100).

If skill, practical wisdom and spirit of survival reveal subtle forms of resistance in certain characters, in certain other characters of Mahasweta Devi, protest, both silent and heroic become indispensable
elements of resistance and rebellion. Chandidasi (*Bayen*) is one such character who stages a heroic protest as seen in her brave act of jumping before a running train to avert an accident and saves people’s lives proving thereby her humane qualities. Chandidasi’s case is an example of resistance through protest as well as sacrifice to redeem her label untouchable or witch, since martyrdom helps her to efface the tag of a ‘bayen’ from her name.

Heroic sacrifice is also highlighted in the willful resignation of life by Dulna Mehjen, Brati and his Naxalite friends towards a social cause. Upin’s suicide arise as a result of the voice of his conscience, an act of protest directed against those who make women victims of their lust (“*Behind the Bodice*”) and the authority who fails to provide a secure and respectable means of living to underprivileged women. Devi’s *Titu Mir* also deals with the powerful protest by Titu Mir, the heroic peasant leader, protest against the mighty zamindars and the colonial rulers and also his right for the welfare of the rural people and his eventual death.

Heroism very often culminates in not only sacrifice but also in the refusal to surrender as a rebel. The low caste Dome, Maghai takes a firm stand against those in power in order to protect the dam construction. He exclaims angrily to ‘hold the Great Mother’s pole in our hands, we’ll crush the bastards with this pole’ (145) but falls a prey to the bullets of
the police and yet, showing strong protest and refusal to surrender. This is staged thus:

Maghai enters the stage, tottering, one hand on his bleeding chest.

MAGHAI Give me the Mother’s pole. I’ll die, but not before I’ve killed. Come, come, come to me. (Vomits blood) Santosh! After all the water I’ve divined for you, you had to get me killed!

Aah, my eyes are going blind... It’s the Bhagirath of the nether Ganga here, wife. I can’t let them carry me as a corpse into their bloody morgue. My last journey will be with the water… (The Police Officer enters and shoots at Maghai who is hit and backs out of the stage, tottering)

(Water 145-6).

In the context of a protest that ends in sacrifice and heroism, violence as another tool of resistance becomes inevitable. Hence very often we find the staging of resistance and rebellion of oppression leading to extreme forms of resistance- that is seen in Mahasweta Devi’s violent characters like Chandidasi (Bayen) and Dopdi (“Draupadi”). Mahasweta Devi’s Dopdi rebels violently by throwing away her clothes which is a mark of civilized society. The protest is against the insult
meted out to women in the patriarchal culture which entertain subordination and sexual exploitation of a woman. This rebellion is evident in her attitude after the multiple rape takes place:

The guard pushes the water forward. Draupadi stands up. She pours the water down on the ground. Tears her piece of cloth with her teeth…Senanayak walks out surprised and sees Draupadi, naked walking towards him in the bright sunlight with her head high. The nervous guards trail behind…Draupadi stands before him, naked. Thigh and pubic hair matted with dry blood. Two breasts, two wounds.’ She comes closer and pushes ‘Senanayak with her two mangled breasts (“Draupadi” *The Inner Courtyard* 103-4).

Her challenge is thrown to all to behold the atrocity committed by them:

What’s the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man? ...There isn’t a man here that I should be ashamed. I will not let you put my cloth on me. What more can you do? Come on, counter me? (“Draupadi,” *The Inner Courtyard* 104).
It is not always that protest takes an infinite and positive path. Sometimes protest can also end in the act of rejection and disgust. In the play *Urvashi and Johnny*, Moti’s act of protest occurs in the form of self rejection that finds its origin from Johnny’s rejection of her and in her extreme conditions of living - ‘twelve families clustering in the slum, with a single washroom! They let their children shit right on the doorstep. A real hell’ (65). Self rejection in the rebel could be traced to societal rejection, poverty and discrimination. Moti’s songs of agony symbolize societal rejection, self rejection and spirit of resistance. Self rejection is seen in Johnny’s ignorance of throat cancer, his obsession for his marionette Urvashi, his drinking habits and his ventriloquism. His refusal for treatment and continuation with his profession reflect his bitterness. Both Moti and Johnny’s act of rejection find expression in Moti’s words thus:

Aunt once asked Johnny to marry me. (She shakes her head sadly). He wouldn’t hear of it. Two of them ran away.

(To Urvashi) They travelled through so many lands before they reached Bombay where they bought you off Hamid.

And ever since he has been your slave. Eventually I became a whore, then I became old, and now I’m a slum owner

(65).
Resistance through silence occurs when one is discontent with the present system and finds transformation a remote possibility. Looking into the world’s most prehistoric character of Sita in the epic *Ramayana*, one sees the manner in which she uses the tool of silence to absorb all harshly imposed desolation and mortification of the male ego, by accepting, accommodating and withdrawing.

An individual’s discourse of equality and empowerment very often depend on one’s ability to make choices, to speak out openly and to challenge established hierarchies. These are survival strategies to fight oppression. Silence is also one such strategy. Dissatisfaction leads the victims to cut off social ties and use silence as a tool to express disapproval. This form of protest is noticed in Sujata and Brati Chatterji’s discontent with the glittering rich family lifestyle. Silence in Sujata occurs as a result of her dilemma as sympathetic mother and silent protestor against the double standards of family members. Sujata’s silent rebellion makes her remain indifferent during her daughter’s engagement and also align herself with the Naxalite friends of her son Brati to the chagrin of her family members.

Chandidasi’s dilemma between her role as a mother and the low caste gravedigger is evident in her silence. However much she maintains an uncomfortable silence over the suppression of her motherhood and
her reluctance towards burying dead children, she still performs both the roles with a sense of social responsibility.

Silent rebellion is also seen in the short story “Seeds” where Dulan’s silent act of sowing paddy seeds in the land where dead bodies of the rebels were originally buried signifies the infinite nature of protest and rebellion.

From the above discussion of oppression and the consequent resistance and rebellion staged by Mahasweta Devi’s characters in myriad ways, the research arrives at a statement that the oppressed could be likened to a phoenix rising from the ashes of class, caste and gender restriction. When the phoenix bird is burnt, the same bird rises from its own ashes. Mahasweta Devi’s characters have ‘reentered’ themselves by bringing their ‘sense’ and their ‘self’ together, shedding ‘their silence and repression” and “write her [their] self” to assert “… her [their] own rights, in every symbolic terms, in every political processes”. The rebel in them crushes the submissive ‘false’ self which has been enforced on her [him]” (Helen Cixous “The Laugh of the Medusa” (347).

Devi’s rebel thus, sheds his/her fears, isolation and insecurity to realize his/her strength. He spends all his energy to rise ‘from the flames’ and ‘felt that he was neither a Harijan nor a Koeri but a man’ though ‘he has only been humiliated, whipped and slain, denied the status of a man; his wife treated as a prostitute’, as seen in Draupadi and
The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh. Devi’s male protagonist has gained experience from the exploitation meted out to them and ‘risen from his grave; he seems to have gone berserk’ to chop ‘the branches of feudalism’ (Dalits and the Democratic Revolution, Introduction, 11). Brati’s awareness of the economic deprivation and exploitation present in the social system makes him revolt against the senseless ethics of institutions with the desire to bring in a “new era” by emancipating mankind from the clutches of the hydra-headed exploitative mechanism and powerful Establishment. He is an ideal rebel like Ahmed of Inquilab, a work of Asif Currimbhoy, one who shows total commitment towards revolution.

Gail Omvedt’s ideas of the power of revolution explain the zeal of such an ideal rebel thus: The power of revolution ‘reached the lowest classes, so that a power of thought was created among them, to be able to throw away the injustice present in society’ (Introduction to Dalits and the Democratic Revolution 11-2). Such zeal arises with a realization and ‘a will to act against exploitation, a rise from oppression, from death to life, from darkness to light’.

Devi explores not only the causes for the eternal sufferings of the marginalized sections but also a sketch the oppressed’s powers for revolution. Consequently she suggests a solution to the problem of oppression which, according to her, “lies in the hands of the oppressed.
When they rise, and fight back, only then history can be changed” (Sen 23). Her assertion of collective ‘rise’ and strength of the oppressed to fight for their self respect, dignity and rights is relevant to understand her emphasis on resistance and rebellion.