Chapter V: Conclusion

How would one describe Mahasweta Devi as a writer? This was the question which the scholar tried to explore throughout the research. Writers are often cited as perspective and critical observers of the prevailing human conditions. Through their works of art, they hold up the mirror that reflects the picture of society. Some writers use the power of their written word to bring across struggle and sufferings of the exploited before a wider audience. A few sections of the writers, however, feel compelled to act as more than mere spectators and reporters of human condition. Mahasweta Devi belongs to such a category of writers whose activism and literature speak volumes about their concern for the society.

Mahasweta Devi occupies an important place as an Indian writer and is considered to be one of the boldest Bengali female writers since the late 1950s. She has not only made a significant contribution to Bengali literature but also to the Indian literature and the literature of the world at large. It is for this reason that one could opine that Devi’s writings cannot be stereotyped. The writer herself makes a confession that, as far as her own writings are concerned, be it literature, her activist writing and her active work for the poor, editing of journals and newspaper reports, all are inter- sustaining. Each bears an umbilical link with the other as all these co-exist and co-work, all the time.
Considering her multiple contributions to society in various ways, one could mention that her works are not to be pigeon-holed or categorized. She plays the diversified roles of a fiction writer, a vivid narrator, an interesting dramatist, a true historian and a dynamic social activist and has given voice to the underprivileged through her creative works, exposing diversified forms of exploitation prevailing in the country. She adopts literature as social criticism which attacks the social order where the predominant evils of society are embedded. As a critic, Devi is thoroughly justified in her moral protest against the dehumanized, oppressive world. To put it succinctly, it is the socially committed writer who can launch an impassioned literary crusade against the social evils. Nourished by the aesthetic faith, the writer assumes the role of a social prophet or the evangel of redemption.

Mahasweta Devi’s works have helped the emergence of crucial issues into public view. The writer’s work with the rights and empowerment of tribal and marginalized groups concerning their right to forest resources, cultural rights, environmental rights, governance is path-breaking; rightly so is her documentation of their struggle in her critically acclaimed works of fiction, plays and non-fiction. Her travels to the tribal areas define the entire purpose of her life and works.

Mahasweta Devi’s works are deeply rooted in her own experiences with the people about whom she writes and are woven
around the theme of subordination that is meted out to the underprivileged sections of India on the basis of ethnicity, gender and class. From her stories, novels, plays, interviews, reports, essays and articles, we learn how difficult it is for the deprived groups to gain the facilities and privileges taken for granted in the mainstream society. Her passionate espousal of causes related to the poorest in our society, and her belief in people’s movement being the path to social justice, have often brought her into conflict with governments and official machinery.

The concerns at the root of Mahasweta Devi’s writings indicate her concerns for the modern India and her problems. The development process in the modern India has brought about some progress in the productive forces after so many years of independence. However the social relations have basically remained unchanged. It has brought many gains for people living in cities who belong to the higher echelons, the privileged and the dominated category of people; but the cost of development is paid by the poor, subordinated and marginalized people. They are still denied even the basic necessities since development did not percolate to the underclass.

Provisions for mass education, health facilities, drinking water, preservation and protection of natural resources like rivers, forests, hills, flora and fauna, better roads in the rural areas have not occurred for the lower sections of the society. The deprivation of these facilities has
resulted in their oppression because they belong to the lower rank in the social, hierarchal structure and also because they are ignorant tribals.

It is these various levels of exploitation occurring in the name of caste, class and gender that forms the subject of this thesis. The concluding chapter makes an attempt to sum up and recapitulate the contents of the preceding chapters highlighting Mahasweta Devi’s views on class, caste and gender and her outlook on the patterns of oppression that occur in different ways. It reiterates the arguments put forth in the entire thesis and also discusses the researcher’s conclusions on this topic of research. Finally it views the potential areas of research on Mahasweta Devi that do not lie in the purview of this research topic.

The introductory chapter proposed the general introduction to the concept of oppression, aiming to understand oppression in the context of different notions, theories and beliefs on the issue of inequality and oppression. Then it examined the reflections of oppression in literature, particularly the Indian. It briefly studied the social and political movements against oppression and then highlighted the ways in which Mahasweta Devi’s treatment of the subject was different from that of other writers and argued that her perspective was unique. Then the chapter briefly underlined details of Mahasweta Devi’s life, career, activism, literary and activist works, her critics and translators and her use of drama as a tool to reach out to people, also offering a critical
introduction to her seminal works. It briefly discussed the chapter organization, the layout for the thesis and also the research objectives.

The second chapter attempted to study the history of class and caste oppression, the origin and characteristics of caste, and tried to view oppression in general through the prism of Iris Young’s views on oppression in relation to Mahasweta Devi’s works, and also through the representations of oppression in Indian literature. It tried to describe the underprivileged and indigenous people, known by various names in various societies, as the most deprived, misunderstood and exploited lot. Colonial rulers, while extracting native species from their ecological contexts, also considered them as uncivilized and increasingly imposed criminal forms of law upon them and treated traditional law as primitive.

These were the key factors Mahasweta Devi’s works perceive to understand their oppression. The origin of caste was seen in the Indian traditional system of hierarchy and stratified classes and the characteristics of caste were seen in the following – restrictions on food habits and the segmental division of society based on the individual’s birth and the unequal distribution of privileges.

Further, the chapter attempts to study newer dimensions of caste and class oppression as represented by Mahasweta Devi. This can be seen in her portrayal of slavery and bonded labour, in her depiction of the ignorance of people, supremacy of landlords, etc. Devi’s use of irony
and symbolism also depicts an interesting manner of highlighting oppression. All these grosser issues form the basis of the second chapter.

To reiterate the arguments of the chapter, one could proceed in the following manner. The onset of freedom in many colonized countries coupled with the birth of post modern and post colonial literature has resulted in a group of writers like Chinua Achebe, Ruby Wiebe, and Alex Hailey, who resurrected the past histories of the indigenous people, exposed the problems faced by them and helped them recover their rich heritage and culture. Like the writers mentioned above, Mahasweta Devi also writes with similar intention. She gives an insider’s view of the dynamics of caste and class in contemporary India. She firmly believes that India and the Indians were not allowed to grow naturally because they are totally divided by caste and class system.

Devi believes that caste is always identified with class but at the same time, makes a plea to her readers not to think in the way she thinks but find it on their own. She has chosen to keep certain social, economic, political and psychological realities at the centre of her creative vision. She does not propose a direct solution by playing the advocate for any cause; rather what she does is to bear witness through the environment of her story, which is an inseparable part of her activism.

The novels, plays and short stories of Mahasweta Devi recapture the rich history and culture of the indigenous people and those belonging
to the lower classes and castes. Her endeavour is to show how people are trampled down in the name of caste and class and how they are neglected in the mainstream. She exposes the conditions of exploitation prevalent even today with men and women living on the fringes of society and debarred from visiting temples, using public wells and ponds, children deprived of education and used as manual labourers by the upper classes due to their poverty and ignorance.

A preponderance of women’s issues is stronger in her novels and short stories reflecting/focusing on Mahasweta Devi’s portrayal of problems of women at various levels—familial, social, cultural, economic and political levels. Mahasweta Devi’s representation of women was viewed as belonging to three categories - strong women who emerge unpetrified, even at the face of hard and severe oppression. They would rather choose to fight; there are women who are silent and stoic during moments of untold miseries but choose not to fight; and thirdly women as victims who succumb to gender, caste and class oppression.

The third chapter attempted a critical insight into the notions of gender and gender oppression in general and also in Mahasweta Devi’s works through the following: a feminist view of the concept of gender; viewing gender in relation to ‘sex’; origin and roots of gender oppression in various religions and significant representations of gender oppression as seen in films and literature. Further, the chapter discussed
Mahasweta Devi’s a-feminist approach to gender oppression evident from her literary texts.

The arguments on gender oppression put forth by the activist author in her various works could be summarized thus. The land where religious and mythical characters like Sita, Savitri, Sarada Devi, Parvati and Durga are worshipped, women are still exploited, oppressed and sometimes killed for dowry, or for being born as the girl child of the family. A woman’s needs and desires are always secondary and ignored by society.

Restrictions on women are still implemented with regards to their clothing, movement, jobs, relationships, education and free expression. Sexual and mental exploitation on women belonging to all classes still continues today, be it in the family or outside the family circle. In remote areas of the country, underprivileged tribal women are still deprived of education and looked upon as objects of lust. They continue to work as daily labourers and abused by the upper classes. Even women of lower middle classes are not spared as they also go through a lot of emotional turmoil.

The author draws an excellent portrayal of the character of women, the manner in which they are exploited, how they struggle in the hands of the male folk, at the mercy of the cultures and rituals followed blindly by the people, which lead to their doom in the end. They are
portrayed as characters who struggle for identity in the face of oppression. These are reflected in many of her works and even in her minor works like the short story anthology *Till Death Do Us Part*.

While the three previous chapters discussed the diversified forms of oppression, the fourth chapter attempted to discuss the consequences of oppression as seen in the resistance and rebellion staged by the oppressed. It offered various perceptions on the general notions of resistance and rebellion seen in the history of oppression from colonial times, along with the discussion of relevant social and political protest movements namely, the Naxalite Movement, the Women’s Movement, the Dalit Movement, as the consequence of continuous oppression inflicted on the underprivileged.

The chapter also looked at the various representations of resistance in literature and particularly in Mahasweta Devi. The chapter argued that Mahasweta Devi portrays rebel characters, who stage various modes of resistance to their oppression, as it was observed in their spirit of survival, skill and practical wisdom, protest, violence, rejection and silence. The chapter also discussed resistance as a dominant subject in her works, through a discussion of Devi’s use of titles that image or signify the idea of resistance and rebellion.

The arguments that the thesis proposed in general about Mahasweta Devi and her aesthetic critique of oppression, is discussed
briefly. A critical exploration of Mahasweta Devi’s writings on the underprivileged with its milieu in the colonial and post-independence India reveals her key argument that the face of exploitation of the underprivileged repeats itself at all times and in all power structures, whether colonial or postcolonial. Her works depict again and again, the casual way in which the entire democratic apparatus, including the judiciary has neglected the exploited classes.

Mahasweta Devi’s creative output throws light on these social and political realities of independent India. Her works are a telling criticism on the great Indian paradox that despite Indian independence, the country still victimizes the ‘others’ to such an extent that they cease to be human beings. This proves the following facts - that Mahasweta Devi is a champion of the oppressed, that her works make a constant effort to provide literary space for the oppressed and their traumatic lives and they also attempt to celebrate their transformation that culminates in their acts of resistance and rebellion.

What is common about most of Devi’s works is the manner in which she deals with various forms of exploitation and the way in which she highlights them in her works. Her ideas on exploitation and various forms of resistance through the use of colloquial language show her anger and dislike of everything unfair. Her colloquial speaking style of writing that expresses the native tribal idioms depicts her desire to give
voice to the underprivileged and fight against the darkness and exploitation prevalent in the semi colonial and semi feudal Indian society. She firmly stands against the orthodox customs of religion, oppression of women both in the family and society and the hypocrisy of the upper class, since these oppressive situations result in building barriers amidst people. Therefore, she could be considered as a writer with a purpose, in her role as activist, leader and torch-bearer and crusader of the marginalized class.

The most important factor about Devi’s works that distinguishes her from her contemporaries and other authors dealing with varied forms of oppression is what is stated below: Most of the writers discussed in the thesis use writing to generate awareness about oppression in general. The major characteristic features of Devi’s writing is the portrayal of intrinsic details in her creative works like folklore, legends, myths and songs, which reflect her vast knowledge, her experience as activist / journalist / traveler / teacher, and also her wisdom as a writer. It is the above multitudinous dimensions of her life and experience that has augmented her understanding of the problems of the underclass and has enriched her works.

One could sum up the content of her writings in a nutshell, in order to give a holistic purpose of her aim as a writer. Devi’s works find its roots in history and provide vivid portrayals of the rural underclass,
particularly in areas like Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh.

Here the researcher would like to emphasize on her words once again, since they effectively bring out Devi’s philosophy as a writer: “I have always believed that the real history is made by the ordinary people. I constantly come across the reappearance, in various forms of folklore, ballads, myths and legends, carried by ordinary people across generations. The reason and inspiration for my writing are those people who are exploited and used, and yet do not accept defeat. For me, the endless source of ingredients for writing is in these amazingly noble, suffering human beings. Why should I look for my raw materials elsewhere, once I have started knowing them? Sometimes it seems to me that my writing is really their doing” (Bandyopadhyay, “About this Collection” N. pag.).

The history written till now seems to be one-sided, partial and not showing the true picture of low level group in society. A group of people are deprived of proper position and representation. A great man or intellectual group cannot create history because true history is not of superior group but is shaped from the group of common people. The credit of a victory in a battle is not only that of the king or the leaders but also of those soldiers fighting in the battlefield and food suppliers who have a lion’s share in it. All the events and incidents should be
recorded in history like this. But till now, they are considered ‘common’ and not recorded in history.

First of all, there are four perspectives of Mahasweta Devi’s works. Her literary works become socially significant related to her activist writings. Secondly, Devi’s writings hold the entire upper strata of society directly responsible for the unspeakable conditions of the oppressed. Thirdly they express a belief that unless people unite in groups, assess their own situation or bring pressure on the authorities in a united manner, no meaningful social change would be possible. Fourthly, her works deny any one sided critical perception of her writings. For she is not only a creative writer, but also a social activist, reporter, teacher, editor and organizer of people’s groups at the grass root level. Each of the above mentioned roles depict an honest but nevertheless unique personality. All these facets of her personality considered together sharply distinguish her from her contemporaries, not merely in Bengal but also in the rest of the country.

The research has also drawn the conclusion that Mahasweta Devi’s works highlight two major aspects of the writer’s social criticism; on the one hand, it shows Devi’s total distrust of the privileged classes and upper castes which totally ignore the underprivileged as well as the harsh rural realities. This is probably why her writings gradually began to reflect the subtlety of the so called city-bred intellectuals who
are deliberately ignorant about the lower classes of society. On the other hand, the writer expresses her deep respect for the poor, oppressed and the lower castes that struggle and attempt to come out of centuries of oppression. She salutes their spirit of resistance and rebellion through her writings. These binary oppositions exist throughout her novels, essays, plays and short stories.

Thirdly, the research on Mahasweta Devi intends to view caste and class as inseparable, since her texts very often treat the situations of caste and class as inevitably linked with each other. However, there are occasions when the author views the complexity of caste and class and the problematic in clubbing caste and class together. For instance, the story “Breast Giver” no more views the marginalization of the lower castes and lower class individual but rather explores the marginalization of an upper caste poor Brahmin. From such an alternative viewing of caste and class, it can be concluded that Mahasweta Devi’s treatment and exploration of caste, class and gender oppression reveals a system unique to Indian subcontinent.

Besides these the research addresses the issue of whether an upper class and upper caste writer like Devi is eligible to represent the oppression of the marginalized. Here the researcher is of the opinion that to write about the marginalized if one should belong to the marginalized
group, writers like Premchand, Mulk Raj Anand and Rabindranath Tagore would not have emerged.

Similarly the researcher is of the opinion that one cannot discredit the genuine concern of activist writers like Mahasweta Devi, since her writings emerged from the following: involvement with the marginalized; her wide travel by foot to reach out to the marginalized; witnessing the savage impact of absentee landlordism, despoiled environment, Indian freedom movement, Naxalite movement, Bengal famine and state neglect of the indigenous people.

Devi’s writings subvert the authority of the phallagocentric, caste and class- ridden society. Her activist aesthetics further dismantles the mainstream and the anti- feminist. The author’s texts break thematic taboos and expand the conformist, confrontationist gender concerns in order to put forth a holistic perspective where the issue of gender co-extends with the larger ideo- political issues of postcoloniality, nationality and history.

The researcher is also of the opinion that Mahasweta Devi’s unique aesthetics requires alternative reading paradigms for a comprehensive and cohesive appreciation of her works. For her radical aesthetics displaces gender- biased critical stance of male writer through her invention of idiom and technique that forces the current theoretical
assumptions and critical perceptions to undergo a revision and re-definition.

Next, what emerges as the most interesting question out of this research, is the subject of the writer and her social vision. Mahasweta Devi’s aesthetics is a combination of interesting pluralities that blend the vision of a student of history, an activist, crusader, journalist, teacher and writer. Hence what emerges as her aesthetic/social vision is an art form that attempts a realistic approach to caste, class and gender oppressions. Such a vision leads to the emergence of an authorial voice that strives to liberate the marginalized from the orthodox beliefs of caste, class and gender, which it considers to be the root cause of all social evils and oppressions.

Then what is interesting about such an approach of Mahasweta Devi on caste and class oppression is that she sketches her oppressed characters not only in the Marxian landscape, but also in a post Marxian landscape whereby she reveals the history of their oppression and their reduction to subaltern individuals. With the idea of subaltern, one understands how Mahasweta Devi’s approach to caste and class oppression attains a multitudinous vision.

Can Mahasweta Devi be called a feminist? Do the writer’s works echo a feminist perception? Examining Mahasweta Devi’s writings from this aspect, the research concludes that Mahasweta Devi’s prime focus is
more on the exploited classes, marginalized and the underprivileged castes and tribes rather than the feminist exclusion of women’s oppression. Therefore the researcher infers that oppression as portrayed in Mahasweta Devi’s works is seen not just as a feminist’s woe, but as something that goes beyond feminist view of oppression towards historicizing oppression in general. Oppression in Mahasweta Devi is seen as a continuous and cyclic process that occurs due to the following reasons: undue suppression by the establishment and also lack of opportunity to those born as a low caste/untouchable/poor/illiterate that denies them access to the basic needs of an individual, and prevents them from breaking free of the age old conventions of society.

It is a fact that leading scholars consider Mahasweta Devi’s powerful tales of exploitation and struggle as rich sites of feminist discourse. Though Mahasweta Devi understands the problems that women encounter and acknowledge that women are more vulnerable to exploitation, she still does not write for women alone. She takes a general stand for all the people who are marginalized, exploited and oppressed, whether men or women, privileged class or deprived class, upper caste or lower caste. She looks at all people as one category- the oppressed. Hence the researcher considers Mahasweta Devi’s writings as afeminist rather than feminist.
Although the research focused largely on the social, political and gender dimensions of oppression and also revealed Mahasweta Devi’s political/social commitment to the marginalized, one cannot ignore the fact that her works are grounded on the literary and the aesthetic. The researcher’s exploration of Mahasweta Devi reveals a very interesting blend of her activism and aesthetics. The thesis identifies an exciting balance the writer strikes between aesthetics and activism.

Unlike the common critical belief that a writer with a propaganda and political aim compromises with aesthetic quality for the sake of privileging political intentions, Mahasweta’s art defers such a belief because she balances both politics and aesthetics very deftly and blends them together revealing two facets: that the literary and artistic is dominant over the propagandist and her activist experiences only help catalyze and crystallize her aesthetic experiences. This can be identified in Mahasweta Devi’s play *Mother of 1084*, where the aesthetic emphasis falls on Sujata’s understanding of Naxalite Movement through her son Brati and not really exclusively on the movement itself. Hence the story here is not that of the Naxalite’s, or not even the Naxalite son, but the mother’s understanding of the Naxalite Movement.

Fifthly, Mahasweta Devi’s aesthetics is also a relevant point for discussion and could be explored from the following: her narrative management, literary style, use of irony, myths, history, legends and
folklores. On a careful reading of her works, one finds that her narrative management makes a recurrent use of third person narrations. Devi does not individualize or glorify oppression but rather, through the third person narration, gives a globalized, universal vision of the concept of oppression. The third person’s narrator’s presence helps an objective vision of oppression that oppression is universal and not unique to particular class or caste and also that the situation of the oppressed can be changed only when the oppressed are prepared for the struggle against oppression. Devi does not sympathize with her subaltern and oppressed characters. Instead, she helps them take a stand against the situation.

Mahasweta Devi’s use of dramatic devices like role transformation also reveals her narrative management. In the play *Aajir*, Paatan the bonded slave and his master Golak Kura are played by actors who always play the roles of their ancestors. Such a device helps Mahasweta Devi to reveal the endless repetition of the master-slave lines through history.

A similar deft handling of literary styles reveals Mahasweta Devi’s skill as a novelist and dramatist as seen in the use of colloquialisms and unconventional diction. Unlike other dramatists and writers, Mahasweta Devi employs crude, simple and abrasive language seen in words like ‘bastard’, ‘Government’s son-in-law’, and
‘motherfucker’ as well as tribal terms like *ulgulan* (meaning revolution in Mundari language), *ghato* (grass rice), *haramasul* (God, Creator), *hul* (meaning revolution in Santhali), *Ma-ho* (a battle cry of the Santhal tribes of Maldah) and many others add to the localization of language.

Use of tribal names like Dopdi and Dulna Mejhen as well as their ululating song “*Samaray hijulennako mar goekope, and Hende rambra keche keche Pundi rambra keche keche*” (translation not known) reflect the writer’s closeness and association with the underclass, her emotional attachment towards the underprivileged and her wide knowledge about the lower sections of society. Very often the use of dialects or specific idioms enriches language as the realistic mode of expression of the ordinary people and an expression of relationships among people of different groups within the village community.

Such a use of local idioms also serves as an effective tool to reach out to the marginalized caste/class. This unique style of Mahasweta Devi brings to the fore her concern for the marginalized. Hence, one could conclude that her lucid, colloquial styles as well as the use of gestures, mimes, songs, humour and simple structures in her plays are revolutionary and a deliberate attempt to accommodate the marginalized’s interests.

Mahasweta Devi’s style can be summed up in characteristics like the visionary, utopian, or myth-creating impulse that acts as a counter-
balance to her dystopian, ‘forensic’, critical perspective on the contemporary world (Chakravarty 69). Her use of Purulia of Santhal myths, epics, legends and also tradition-bound characters should not mislead one into thinking that Devi’s characters are bestowed with the legacy of tradition. Her texts present a reading of the mythical discourse blended with irony. For example, in the stories *Breast Giver* and *Draupadi*, Devi rewrites the spirit of the epics with the creation of characters like Jashoda and Dopdi who, unlike the mythical, legendary upper class women, are subject to exploitation because of their subaltern origin. More significant is Devi’s ironic exposure of the exploitative conspiracy of the religious and textual authority against the subaltern. For instance, Maghai Dome, the traditional water diviner’s re-enactment of the tale of the legendary Bhagirath (who had brought the divine Ganges down from the locks of Lord Shiva to the earth in the *puranic* [legendary] tale but is ironically deprived of water).

Similarly, the play *Bayen* traces the roots of the Domes and Chandals to the line of the Gangaputras and Gangadasis who are basically a race of cremation attendants that inhabited the banks of Ganges and were believed to be gifted by the legendary king Harish Chandra all the graveyards of the world since they had provided him with shelter when he lost his kingdom. Mahasweta Devi’s use of irony is once again observed in how she locates the legend of Aagaria tribes, the
cursed inhabitants of Lohri ("Little Ones") in the demonic asura clan whose profession was to mine iron and forge iron implements and who also were supposed to eat flames and bathe in the rivers of fire.

Such use of Purulia or Santhal tribal legends discussed above reveal how Mahasweta Devi’s tribal clans in general defy the Brahminical hierarchy of gods by adopting the Asur-Lohasur, Koilasur and Agaiyasur (who are established as evil powers in the elite mythology) as their gods. This inversion of the dominant narrative is an important strategy employed by Mahasweta Devi to deconstruct the mainstream cultural history. It is from these myths, legends and oral tradition that one can trace the original occupation of the tribals who appear to be asurs and demons to the mainstream.

What is the author’s contribution to Indian literary world particularly in her exploration of oppression? Mahasweta Devi’s literary canvas encompasses her efforts to remap the lives, cultures and traditions of the margins and thereby subverts the cultural hierarchies that existed between the centre and the margins. Devi’s canvas from pre-independence to post- independence India represents their rich history and culture that so far remained obscure to the mainstream society.

The canvas thus presented reveals tribal lives to be much richer than those of Brahminical or class-driven societies. For instance, in most tribal societies in India, women’s position is relatively considered
better than in Hindu caste society. Rape, torture and forced prostitution have never been the ways of the tribals. It is important to note that for most tribals, pre-marital sex and remarriage are socially acceptable. Women also enjoy a share of the family property and to a certain extent, have a voice of their own.

Mahasweta Devi’s efforts have been to bring forth the tribal history to the mainstream society by re-mapping the margins, revising the mainstream history and foregrounding the ‘un-historical’. Mahasweta Devi reveals that the entire tribal world in general is a great continent that has been handed over to the humanity. Their rich culture, sophistication, social norms and social codes observed in social practices like acceptance of divorce, non recognition of dowry, widow remarriages and choice of live- in partners are cultural practices that serve as interesting points of discussion against those of male chauvinistic, caste- dominated Indian societies.

Mahasweta Devi’s role as the spokesperson of the marginalized and the oppressed is noteworthy. She can be called as ‘the Champion of the Downtrodden’, a ‘crusader’ and ‘torch bearer’ of the oppressed whose works deal with the socio-economic analysis of the rural Indian society and also with an examination of the lives and problems of the marginalized. Her anger and protest on behalf of the dispossessed and her derision directed against the complacent materialism of the
Bourgeois feature in her works. Hence, the researcher considers Devi as a rebel at heart. Her spirit of rebellion is evident from the various tools with which she equips her characters and the manner in which they use them. The modes of resistance and rebellion used by characters like Dopdi and Douloti show the rebellious spirit engraved in the writer.

Mahasweta Devi is distinctly a subaltern writer, who has succeeded in drawing both political as well as critical attention. The sense of the subaltern is seen in her commitment to the cause of the subaltern, in her portrayal of the subaltern lives, in her act of inversion of hierarchies between the subaltern and the dominant classes etc. The discussions and conclusions that have been drawn above lead the researcher to identify a few valid but unexplored areas of study on Mahasweta Devi. Though these issues do not fall into the purview of this thesis are however worth mentioning.

At the outset, the researcher would like to mention the subaltern perspective that is dominant in Mahasweta Devi’s works. Most of the characters created by Devi are subaltern men and women subject to various forms of oppression because of the dominance of the hegemonic structures of society. The term ‘subaltern’ connotes ways in which the socially dominant seeks to maintain power over those without it and deny those subordinated groups the opportunity to participate in structures of power.
In recent years, the term has come to be associated with the work of postcolonial critics. Ranajit Guha and the Subaltern Studies Groups, use the term to conceptualize subordinated people in India living in the post-imperial era. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her analysis of subaltern women in India in the post-independence context problematizes the general notion of the colonial subject and subaltern whereby oppression is no more an exercise of a monolithic colonizing power but that of the Indian ruling subject brought up with a colonizing vision.

What the subaltern perspective reveals about Mahasweta Devi is that, it is not only ‘the relationship between the three domination systems (class, racial/ethnic, and sex/gender) that is ‘dialectical’ but that in the theatres of decolonization, the relationship between indigenous and impartial systems of domination are also ‘dialectical’, even when they are variously related to Big Three Systems cited above (Spivak 251).

The second crucial issue addresses this question thus, is Mahasweta Devi a postcolonial writer? The main objective of postcolonialism is to resist and deconstruct the imperialist ideology of the British. It is both a historical and an epistemological category. It is interesting to note that Mahasweta Devi traces the roots of oppression not only from the ancient, pre-independence period but which continued
and culminated during the imperial rule and continues even after India’s independence.

Thirdly, the researcher identifies a cyclic pattern which provides a wider scope for archetypal approach. This can be seen from her abundant use of myths that provide both an alternative and a subaltern vision. Hence any research on the feminist perspective of Mahasweta Devi’s works needs to focus on her use of myths. For an instance, it would be interesting to attempt a mythical- feminist study of her works relating them to the re-reading of myths by Indian women writers.

Fourthly, translation studies on her works are particularly relevant. Mahasweta Devi is originally a vernacular/cultural/ regional writer who writes mainly in Bengali. Many of her works have been translated into English and many other languages. The linguistic/ stylistic transitions and transactions from the source language (Bengali) to the target language (English etc) in Mahasweta Devi’s original texts and their translated texts need to be studied in order to understand them in the proper cultural and also transactional perspective.

Mahasweta Devi’s works bring a sense of understanding and rationality to the marginalized section of India. She translates her perception of society through the lives of her characters as they journey through the harshness of lives. In her trenchant, powerful and satiric fiction she has carved a niche for herself as a long time champion for the
political and economic advancement of the poor and the marginalized. The author has earned the reputation of being ‘the champion of the downtrodden’ and always focuses on class and caste consciousnesses.

Then, the thesis has dealt with three tropes of oppression, namely caste, class and gender oppression. However the researcher identifies another trope of oppression viz. human oppression versus the environment. Mahasweta Devi’s concern for the human world and ecological environment forms an important issue of discussion.

Her love and responsibility for the protection of environment is reflected in her works like *Aranyer Adhikar, Chotti Munda and his Arrow* and short stories like “Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pritha” and “Arjun”. The author says that this concern is a result of her school life experiences in Shantiniketan where Tagore’s direct influence was prevalent. He taught the students to take care of nature by planting trees, watering the saplings and digging ponds in the nearby tribal areas. She marks her stance as an environmental crusader in India by voicing her support for the restoration of forests as well as land and forest rights to the original inhabitants of India, the *Adivasis*.

There are various Indian and foreign writers who deal with specific and single subject of class, caste and gender oppression. What differentiates Devi from them is her extensive dealing with all these forms of oppression in a unique manner. Her relentless battle for the
homeless and the tortured is not just confined to fiction writing but finds expression in other genres of non-fiction writing that has created a great impact in the national sphere.

To conclude, Mahasweta Devi is not merely a champion of the underprivileged and a successful creative writer but an honest and tirelessly narrator of the world of the exploited. What makes her a distinct writer is her power to mix realism with melodrama, irony with difference and the documentary with creativity to produce a wonderful and unusual blend that defies any accepted model.