CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Mahasweta Devi is one of the boldest Indian writers on the map of Indian literati. She uses her pen as not just as a proverbial sword but also as a real tool to shock, numb and awaken the readers and the oppressed to fight for the suppression of women. She observed that freedom and rights are myth to the marginalised even in the twentieth century. Though British rule is over but women remained subjected to double colonisation and their conditions remained unchanged. In the post colonial era they are treated as ‘second sex’ and often tagged as the ‘other’. In most of her stories, she artfully adds a feminist dimension, though time and again she has denied being associated with feminist school of thoughts. In her stories her sympathy grows for those women who are downtrodden, underprivileged, sexually harassed and oppressed. They are not treated separately by her rather she takes their case as “the oppressions of class and caste.” Sometimes she is more of a humanist than a feminist.

While talking about Mahasweta Devi’s writings, Maitreyea Ghata writes in the introduction to Dust on the Road, that:

Mahasweta has been criticized by the literary purists who feel that she is merely a chronicler of social reality. But even a superficial reading of her fiction will establish that this is unjustified. She transcends the boundaries of material concerns and highlights the value of universal consciousness of
exploitation and the strength to protest against it. Nelson Mandela, handing her the Jnanpith—the highest literary award—in Delhi, said that ‘she holds a mirror to the conditions of the world as we enter the new millennium’. (xi-xii)

Mahasweta Devi’s writings are to enlighten the mainstream society. Mahasweta Devi’s readers are the mainstream and the upper middle classes not the tribals and the marginalized she writes about. Her main intention is not to transform her characters but to transform the readers.

In her writings she points out the impossibility to break free from the so called bitter system of society. She throws light on the prevailing system of slavery among the tribal women in India. They have no rights and are victims to the social system. Devi, in her stories talks about all kinds of injustices done to them. The female body is subjected to all sorts of brutalities like rape, harassment, physical torture, domestic violence and so on. All her marginalised women are strugglers and fighters.

The thesis has explored all the aspects stated above in relation to female subjectivity. The chapter division is such that it shows four progressive stages in a woman’s struggles in life. The thesis showcases how different characters from Mahasweta Devi’s stories endure, evolves, resists and survives.

In the chapter Endurance, the three stories included are “Dhouli”, “Sanichari” and “The Fairytale of Rajabasha”. The protagonists of all these stories endure pain and trauma which exposes the evil side of the system and the society. They emerge as symbols of resistance in their own contexts:
In these stories, Mahasweta Devi actually envisages a three-tier hierarchical structure in the Indian social order composed of the rungs of the non-marginalized or the mainstream, the marginalized or the subordinated, and finally the outcast or the marginalized by the marginalized. (Chattopadhyay, 105)

Mahasweta Devi through these stories presents the existing social evils which are very much present in the modern India to the mainstream readers. In the progressive India, she exposes the harsh side of it. The burning issues of untouchability, bonded labours, slave trading, prostitution, economic exploitation of the poors are included. In the story “Dhouli”, it presents the sad plight of a dusad young widow who is seduced and impregnated by Misrilal, the son of a wealthy, upper-caste Brahman named Hanumanji Misra. Misrilal gets rid of the responsibility of the new born child and its mother by marrying another woman belonging to his own caste. Being beggared and destitute, Dhouli begins to sell her body in order to earn food for her son and for herself. Misrilal and his family outcasts her from the village and forces her to move to the city to become prostitute. In “Sanichari”, the young tribal Oraon girl is marginalized like Dhouli in her own society for coming back with diku’s child in her womb. A middle aged woman, Gohuman, sell Sanichari to a brick kiln owner at Barasat, West Bengal, where she faces economic and sexual exploitation leading to pregnancy. Subsequently, Sanichari is sent back to her native village, but only to face ostracism. In the story “Fairytale of Rajabasha”, the couple Josmina and Sarjom is duped and sold to a landlord in the state of Punjab. Josmina is subjected to rape number of times by different landlords under whom she works. She eventually manages to come back to her village and dreams to start a new life. Her
dreams shatter as she learns that she is pregnant, and the father is not her husband. In the end to save her husband from being ostracized from the community, she commits suicide. In this way through the pen of Devi, the protagonists, Dhouli, Sanichari and Josmina represent all Indian women who endure this kind of pain throughout their life.

In the chapter *Evolution*, the protagonist’s journey from innocence to knowledge is shown. The novel *Mother of 1084*, focuses on the psychological and emotional crisis of a mother who awakens one morning to the heart-rending news that her dear son is lying dead in the police morgue for his involvement with the Naxalites, and is demeaned to a mere numeral—corpse no. 1084. The chapter of the thesis examines how this emancipation leads her to a journey of discovery, in the course of which, struggling to understand her Naxalite son’s revolutionary commitment, she begins to recognise her own alienation, as a woman and wife, from the complacent hypocritical, bourgeois society her son rebelled against. After her son’s death, the mother Sujata journeys into the past and undergoes a process of introspection and wonders at herself and her family members, or at the society which is responsible for the death of her son, she too finds that the entire social system is cadaverous and as she takes a closer look at the society, she finds no legitimacy for his death. At the end she evolves to understand the hypocrisies surrounding her.

The next chapter *Resistance* deals with the characters which unable to endure the oppression meted to them thereby hitting back the patriarchal system of the society. The female subjectivity of the protagonists evolves to the point of resistance. In the story “The Hunt”, the female subaltern Mary is harassed and stalked by a male
logging contractor, Tehsildar who comes to her village to purchase logging rights. Mary resists Tehsildar’s sexual advances and eventually in an act of self-protection turns predator and kills him. This act of resistance frees Mary from the traditional female identity of the Indian society. In “Draupadi”, the character of Dopdi is drawn from Mahabharata by Mahasweta Devi. Dopdi is associated with the Naxalite Movement and is wanted by the state police. Dopdi is eventually captured and taken to a police camp where she is subjected to gang-rape by the police officials. Dodi rises to the occasion by her act of retaliation against her oppressors. She denies wearing clothes and comes out naked in the broad day light in a form of protest. Though her body is tattered, her oppressors could not subjugate her mind. Devi also defies shame which traditionally is related to the female body, through the character of Dopdi. Spivak writes, ‘the story insists that this is the place where the male leadership stops.’

(12)

The final stage is Survival, where the female subjectivity is shown to adapt the adverse conditions in the lower class Indian society to avenge and retort. Here the protagonist defies all the odds which are against her thereby finding a way to survive. In ‘Rudali’, almost all the people of Tahad village are victims of the malik-mahajans. They grab lands; make them bonded labour, forces young women to be their mistresses etc. It becomes hard to survive for them. Sanichari, the protagonist presents an interesting case of exploiting the existing system of rudali for survival. Rudalis are the professional women mourners, i.e. they cry for money, usually found in Rajasthan who are hired by the upper class people to cry at the death of their family members. Sanichari and her friend Bikhni, make use of this bizarre practice of commodifying grief by getting paid for ceremonial lamentation. When someone dies in malik-
mahajan household, for instance, the amount of money lavishly spent on funeral ceremonies raised the status of the family. The role of the rudalis thus becomes lucrative because they are hired to mourn the dead. Sanichari becomes a professional mourner and the head of the rudalis who starts extracting more and more money from the malik-mahajans. She uses it as a tool of survival and hits back at her oppressors at the same time.

Mahasweta Devi in her long career has written hundreds of stories, plays, novels, journalistic writing etc. committed to the cause of the subalterns. Being a Bengali writer, Mahasweta Devi's writings are still in the process of translation. The present thesis deals only with select translated fiction. Given a limited time frame it was not possible for the researcher to include many other important works like, "Douloti the Bountiful", "Breast-Giver", "Behind the Bodice", "Chinta", "Sindhubala", "Giribala", "Jamunabati's Mother", and many more which are equally important in the study of female subjectivity. Though various dimensions of the experiences of the female subjectivities are explored in the thesis, many more can be explored given a wide foray of writing by Mahasweta Devi.

Most of Mahasweta Devi's writings are flavoured with the local milieu of the state of West Bengal, Jharkhand, and Bihar, which are different from the rest of the India, the nation. In future more work can be done on the aspect of local milieu of these states. Further translations of her writings are highly recommended which for sure will open up new areas of research on Devi's writings.

Though Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has discussed Devi in the perspective of post-colonialism, Marxism, Deconstructive, feminism and to some extent psycho-
feminism, that has brought Devi into international literary arena for the discussion of third world feminism, but because of the stature of Spivak the discussion has been limited and focussed only in these areas. But Mahasweta Devi’s oeuvre includes more than that and literary scholars should endeavour to trace other perspectives in her works as her writings, besides all these above aspects, other social, cultural, economic and political aspects that need to be brought into light as she cannot be critiqued while remaining limited into few particular genres.

Since Mahasweta Devi writes in Bengali, a regional language of India, she has not gained much attention by the literary scholars of India. Despite the translations of her works in English, scholars still for some unknown reason cite the unavailability of text translated in English, and also for socio-cultural difference from the rest of the country, Devi has not been considered as the mainstream author in India. Thus research works are very limited on her works in Indian universities. She is in league with Kamal Das, Qurratulain Hyder, Amrita Pritam, and much deeper focus should be given to highlight the different aspects of Indian feminism found in her works. The thesis is thus a step in the right direction to establish and situate a space of ‘one’s own’ for the voices like Mahasweta Devi’s on the identity map of India the nation.
Works Cited:

