CHAPTER THREE

EVOLUTION

It [Subjectivity] is a process of individualization, where the judgment is based on individual personal impressions and feelings and opinions rather than external facts. The experiences of the subject make up subjectivity. The subjectivity undergoes changes with the passage of time as the subject continuously interacts with the external world.

(Introduction of the Thesis)

Thus to locate the theoretical paradigms of subjectivity in a particular culture and society it is imperative to document the evolution of the individual subjects in the contexts of the identity formation juxtaposed with some power-structures. The power structures like society, caste, genders and nation perpetuate coercion in disturbed and dismantled times. Mahasweta Devi’s *Mother of 1084* circumvents the Naxalbari Movement of 1960s and 70s in the process of evolution of the identity formation of the subjects while resisting the power-structures in the wake of the political and social dismantling of the peasant uprising in 1967.

Almost all of Mahasweta Devi’s writings are inspired from political realities, and the turbulent history of Naxalbari movement of late 1960s and 70s is a vital background of the novel *Mother of 1084*. Naxalbari is the name of a village in Northern part of the state of West Bengal in India. Naxalbari became famous for the
peasants uprising in 1967. The peasants uprising were against the Zamindari system which was exploitative and suppressive for the peasants. In Zamindari system the peasants had no rights on the land and had to work as a sharecropper. On May 25th, 1967 a group of peasants were demanding their right to the crops on a particular piece of land, but the police opened fire and eleven people were killed. This incident triggered a widespread movement against the jotedars and the landlords. The peasants and the tribals were supported by the intellectual students who were inspired by the communist ideology. The Naxalite movement spread to other parts of India as well. With all these happening, there was also an uprising to free East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) from Pakistan. The intellectual Naxalites of India formed political alliances with the freedom fighters of East Pakistan in the effort of their freedom struggle. However, when the Indian army joined hands with Bangladesh against Pakistan, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi took this opportunity to end all possible Naxalite revolts. While Naxalites can be seen by historians as ruthless terrorists, Devi’s focus is on the young intellectuals who were drawn to the cause because of their idealism, and on peasants and tribals who were drawn to it because they were victims of centuries-old oppression.

Mahasweta Devi’s novel Mother of 1084 is set against this backdrop. In the novel Mother of 1084 a young, idealistic student intellectual, Brati Chatterjee, is treacherously betrayed to fall into the hands of the police by a mole in his revolutionary group. Brati is identified only as Corpse Number 1084. His father bribes the police and hushes up the death from the media, unwilling to be associated with the revolutionaries; the novel is the story of his mother’s reconstruction of Brati’s other life, his true life. The entire story takes place on the second anniversary of his death,
which is also the day of her daughter's engagement to a socialite Tony Kapadia, because Tony's mother's guru (who lived in the United States) had said that was the most auspicious date. As the mother, Sujata, relives her son's life, we are also given a taste of Mahasweta Devi's satire, as in the reference to the cultism that has vitiated religion and elitism.

The mother spends the day visiting and revisiting: the mother of another young man killed by the police, Brati's girlfriend Nandini, the places Brati was wont to visit, and memories of what he had done and said and what others had said and done, especially in the last few months of his life. She understands what happened, is happening, will continue to happen, beyond her sheltered upper-middle-class world of superficialities. In her gradual comprehension, we see one mother's grief reaching out to so many other mothers' grief, and we see the human aspect of a chapter of Indian history, irrespective of one's loyalty to two sides of the politics of the issue.

The novel *Mother of 1084 (Hajar Churashir Ma)* was first written as a periodical *Prasad* in 1973; it was later revised and enlarged into a book form by Mahasweta Devi in 1974.

The novel is the story of Sujata who was born into a conservative, affluent family. Sujata was allowed to do her B.A. so that it helps her marriage prospects, but was ultimately married off to Divyanath Chatterjee, a Chartered Accountant, despite the fact that his financial situation was far from encouraging. In thirty-four years of their married life, Sujata gives birth to four children, two sons (Jyoti and Brati) and two daughters (Nipa and Tuli). When the novel opens, two of her children are already married, Jyoti to Bina and Nipa to Amrit. In the eyes of the world, all of them were
leading perfectly happy and settled lives, but as Sujata goes on to discover later, this happiness is only skin-deep. Significantly, Sujata makes this and several other such discoveries only after the sudden and mysterious death of Brati, her younger son, with whom she had always shared a very special relationship. For instance, she discovers that all of thirty-four years of her married life, she has been living a lie as her husband, being an incurrigible philanderer, always cheated on her with his mother's and worse still, his children's tacit approval.

The novel starts on the second death anniversary of Brati. Sujata was dreaming of the day when her dearest son Brati was born i.e. twenty two years ago. It was in the morning when she first felt the pain. She had herself packed everything to go the hospital for the delivery of the baby. Her husband Dibyanath was then in Kanpur for business. It is said that he never made any arrangements at such time. 'She went to the nursing home all by herself' (Devi 2). This is the very first instance in the novel where we come to know how her life must have been like throughout. She never complained of the suppression she faced. She was just bearing it all silently:

'Dibyanath never came with her, never accompanied her when it was time. He slept in a room on the second floor lest the cries of the newborn disturbed his sleep. He would never come down to ask about the children when they were ill. But he noticed things, he notices Sujata, he had to be sure that Sujata was fit enough to bear a child again. (3)

This shows Dibyanath's attitude towards his wife Sujata. For Dibyanath, Sujata was just an object of his lust. It shows Dibyanath's negligence towards his wife. Dibyanath was not interested in other important aspect of the duties of a
husband except sex. He was willing to impregnate her with child after child, but was never around to own up responsibility for her. The marital relationship has been seen as a central aspect of sexuality in India. Indian feminists have tended to make a stronger link between marriage and sexuality. As Jyoti Puri has argued in her book *Woman, Body, Desire in Post-colonial India* (1999), ‘if marriage is where women are able to be sexual persons, then it is probable that sexuality would be seen as a central aspect of the marital relationship’ (116). So, it is quite common in Indian context that Sujata like other women is subject of sexual oppression. It is like getting married is to get a license to have legalized sex for the males, with or without the consent of wife. And in India, Hindu women are enjoined in numerous myths and legends to serve their husbands like gods, and that their devotion to their husbands should also extend to their in-laws. Sujata is no exception, as she too has been taught and trained throughout her life the same thing. *Manusmriti* is explicit on this point: ‘A virtuous wife should constantly serve her husband like a god, even if he behaves badly, freely indulges his lust, and is devoid of any good qualities’ (*The Laws of Manu* 5.154, qtd. in Vatsyayana: 2003, p. xxxii). Suma Chitnis explains that:

> [the] term *pativrata* (literally translated as ‘one who is vowed to her husband’) connotes a wife who has accepted service and devotion to her husband, and his family, as her ultimate religion and duty. The ideal of the *pativrata* is romanticised through legend, folklore and folksong, and reaffirmed through ceremonies of different kinds. (Chitnis 90)

The ultimate *pativrata* or the ideal woman in Hindu culture is personified by Sita, the heroine of the epic *Ramayana*. According to Sudhir Kakar, ‘the ideal of
womanhood incorporated by Sita is one of chastity, purity, gentle tenderness and a singular faithfulness which cannot be destroyed or even disturbed by her husband’s rejections, slights or thoughtlessness’ (Kakar 66). In this case Dibyanath, of course not like Ram was a sex addict who indulges in extra marital affair with a female typist in his office, and Sujata knowing all these submits herself again and again silently to her husband. And in this regard Feminists have attacked the double standard of morality which has historically entitled men to sexual freedoms but denied the same to women. Indian patriarchy emphasizes on the control of women’s sexuality which further helps in the maintenance of it. Jyoti Puri, another feminist has examined the notion of sexual respectability which, when internalized by women can become ‘an instrument of social control over their gendered bodies and sexualities’ (Puri 115). Vrinda Nabar and others have also noted that in India the honour of the family is centrally located in the behaviour of women: ‘Izzat [family honour] seems to be a female-linked commodity. Its preservation is incumbent upon women’s behaviour alone’. (Nabar 115)

Sujata was remembering the day when ‘the faceless, disembodied voice’ informed Sujata through telephone to come to police morgue, Kantapukur, to identify the body of her son Brati. And to this news Dibyanath’s first reaction and concern was how he could keep this news off from his acquaintances. ‘Jyoti’s father had had to pull so many strings to hush up the news that his son had died such a scandalous death’ (7). It was scandalous because Brati was involved with the Naxalite movement. Brati was one of the core members of the group, and Dibyanath did not approve of his associations. He felt it was not good for his reputations, if the news comes out of his son’s involvement with the Naxals. It would have been harmful for his business. Not
only does Dibyanath refused to go, but he also forbids other family members from doing so. Outraged at the manner in which his associates, his immediate family and the state have abandoned the dead Brati, his mother, Sujata along with Tuli decided to go, throwing all pretensions to false social respectability and the fear of public censure to winds. He even didn’t allow Sujata to take the family car lest anyone spots it in the police station. He was concerned about his material gains and was least worried of his son’s death. ‘That day, with Brati’s death, Brati’s father also died for Sujata’ (7). Sujata’s disgust was very much clear through it. Sujata did not complain of her oppressions as long as her son was alive, but when she saw people around her trying to wipe out the traces of Brati too, she could not withstand. It was also not the matter of a single moment; it was the repression of thirty long years which sowed the seed, which made Sujata to think beyond the bonds of thin relationships, to think about her ‘self’ and ‘subjectivity’.

Sujata’s mother in law too never liked her as ‘She had lost her husband after her first son. She could not stand Sujata having her children, she looked at her with withering hatred. When the time of childbirth approached, she would leave the house to go and live with her sister. She refused to stand by Sujata’ (2). Her mother in law was the epitome of patriarchy. It is typical of an Indian family where the mother-in-law is gradually overtakes as a patriarchal head of the family as if to achieve an endorsement from the patriarchy of which she herself has been a victim ever since the arrival in the household as a young bride, then dutiful daughter-in-law, docile companion in bed, affectionate mother and the keeper of the izzat. Deniz Kandyoti argues that different forms of patriarchy present women with distinct ‘rules of the game’ and call for different strategies with varying potential for active and passive
resistance in the face of oppression. For example, the traditional Hindu joint family is a form of 'classic patriarchy' in which 'girls are given away in marriage at a very young age into households headed by their husband's father. There, they are subordinate not only to all the men but also to the more senior women, especially their mother-in-law' (Kandyoti 278). As long as her mother in law was alive 'Sujata had never had the right to buy sari of her choice. The house was a prison to her, and that is the reason 'it was so important for Sujata to have a life of her own, going to office and coming back on her own. She would not think of giving up her job' (24). Sujata had to take up the job of the bank when the firm of Dibyanath was in a financial crisis. During the time everyone supported her to take up the job, but when his firm recovered, Dibyanath and his mother insisted upon giving up the job. 'Her [Tuli's] father and grandmother had resented Sujata's decision to stick to her job. Mother and son go on complaining that Sujata wanted to be independent, that she did not like to share the responsibilities of running the household or bringing up children' (24). The situation reminds of the uprising of feminism in the west. During the World War II, young men were sent to the war field, which resulted in deficiency of labour force in factories and offices. Women were for the first time asked to come out of their daily household chores and join the factories and offices. 'In Britain and the US, women's war work and the labors of home-front living had expanded responsibilities and freedoms, but at the war's end, government propaganda expected women to return to their prewar roles – roles which were increasingly seen as confining' (Ryan 597). It can also be noted that our patriarchal system is set up in such a way that paid employment has been constructed as a gendered (male) form of work. Myra Ferree,
another feminist, has pointed out that in the majority of two-earner households, wives are supplemental earners rather than 'co-providers' in their own and others' eyes:

But when only husbands are seen as providers, only husbands are entitled to the support that this role presumes. Sharing the provider role can be threatening to men who have constructed their ideal of masculinity on this economic ground, so that even women who are providers lack the support systems at home for this role. (Ferec 874)

So, in a way Sujata's working woman status disturbed Dibyanath's male psyche. But nobody had cared to understand why Sujata wanted to work, why she had made all the enquiries herself and found a job for herself. This job gave her existence a meaning. 'Dibyanath and his mother constituted the centre of attraction at home. Sujata had a shadowy existence. She was subservient, silent, faithful and without an existence of her own' (9). At the beginning of the novel we get the taste of Sujata's oppression in the family.

Sujata's experience was that of a typical Indian woman, whose existence is always at stake as said earlier. When in a patriarchal set up, things do not turn around as the 'law of the father' suggests, it has always been the weaker sex who has to suffer. Here in this instance in *Mother of 1084*, all the members of Chatterjee family grew in accordance of the father. If there was someone who has dared to be different, it was Brati. Sullenly rebellious, right from his childhood Brati has made no secret of his disregard, even contempt, for his familial code and value-system. So it was Brati who was from different camp and so was Sujata for her inclination towards Brati:
Sujata belonged to the other camp, the camp of the enemy. For Sujata was the only one who had never blamed Brati for messing up her neatly organized life. She had never blamed Brati...Sujata could sense how they had put Brati into the other camp from the time Brati had begun changing. Brati would not act the way they acted. Brati would not follow in their footsteps even when he grew older, that they knew. And so Brati belonged to other camp...Sujata herself had never been unhappy in particular, with her children, her son-in-law, her husband—all behaving the same way. She had been taught by life to take things as they came. She had never thought of asking questions. She never knew that she had the right to ask questions. She had been hurt at times. Hurt badly. (30-31)

Sujata always tried to identify herself with her son. She could see her other 'self' in her son, as stated, 'Brati became for her the only legitimate excuse for going on living' (31). The meaningless life which she was leading in this particular bourgeois set up was a torture for her. Brati was the only member of the family who questioned the other members for their material attitude towards the world. For him, they were living like dead, without feelings emotions, without any concern of the world, with a fake existence, existence that has no meaning. Brati was the only one who was worried and concerned of her mother’s oppression.

Tuli and Neepa, the two daughters of Sujata, were like their grand-mother, and never complained as long as their means were taken care of. Jyoti, elder brother of Brati, was the embodiment of his father, and always stood by his father, purely obedient. Brati was the only one different from the others, for Dibyanath, he was
disobedient and unworthy to be his son. Brati dedicated his life for a cause, for a difference, and when that cause is being effaced, Sujata repelled.

The novel is written through Sujata's point of view. What she sees, what she feels and perceives, her emotions, her reactions, her inner thoughts are well documented throughout the novel.

In the second chapter of the novel Sujata goes to visit Somu's mother. Somu happened to be the friend and associate of Brati in the revolutionary movement he was involved in. Sujata goes there every year on 17th of January, which are both coincidentally birth and death anniversary of Brati. It was here in this house where Brati spent his last night and was murdered brutally along with his friends by the government organized goons. It was the same house where Brati had come on that fateful night to warn his friends about the people who were against their cause. Brati and his groups were betrayed by one of their own people who was bought off by the state. While Somu's mother was explaining about the incident, Sujata looked around the house to find traces of his son. Brati after his death was coming back to her. While inquiring about his death Sujata was knowing her son in a new way, in a way she never knew while he was alive. She felt Somu's mother knew Brati better than her, as this is the place where Brati frequently visited, had tea and food, chatted with them and spent most of his time. Brati's death is a moment in time and space which brings for Sujata an encounter with herself. She assembles the pieces of her identity while on the quest to locate her son's life in the domineering power-structures present in the political unrest as well as hegemonic domesticity. The subjectivity that she is a sufferer of gets a concrete shape while Sujata arranges her bits of identity through

78
recollections and memories stirred by the death of her son. Sujata came to know Brati’s surroundings and the society all the more in her quest. Brati died while trusting others. Now according to Sujata they did not know that the system against which Brati was fighting had the capacity to tempt the trusted people also with offers. ‘They had not realized that the system against which they fought had the capacity to contaminate even the child in the womb’. (40)

Brati was the only reason Sujata was living ignoring her subjectivity. She never questioned for a space for her ‘self’. What she is subject to and subject of. Brati’s death brought in her the ability to question as well as to resist the way she was living all those days. She always goes back and forth the days when Brati was alive. Through this she tried to fix the dilemma of the reason of his death. She tried to find out who was responsible for her son’s death, what made him choose that dangerous path? Brati while alive did not like his father and his family members for their meaningless existence. Brati was all the more upset as his father Dibyanath was having an affair with the typist of his office, as it was hurting her mother, and Sujata was very passive about all this. Dibyanath never allowed Sujata her rights. She was humiliated through the ways her husband treated her:

With her pride and strong sense of dignity, Sujata had realized soon after her marriage, that the more she kept herself aloof from the household, the more satisfied the others were. Dibyanath and her mother-in-law were the ‘others’. Jyoti, Tuli and Neepa had always known their mother in a subsidiary role. They had never had to take account of her. In Sujata’s mind, one day they had joined the ranks of others. (45)
In the same way Sujata was other for them. Dibyanath never tried to probe about these wounds. According to him it was a wife’s duty to love, respect and obey her husband. He was not required to do anything to win his wife’s respect, love and loyalty. It was within his right to do anything which he feels right in this strong patriarchal set up. It was not that Dibyanath was not inconsiderate. He once asked Sujata to give up the job the moment he found his firm was paying well, but she stuck to her job. This is stated in rather ironical manner in the novel. As stated earlier this is quite typical of patriarchal system as it was hurting ego of the patriarchal head that cannot bear the fact that Sujata is a working woman. In the novel it is stated that Sujata rebelled twice, the first instance was when Sujata refused to be mother for the fifth time after Brati’s birth and the second was when she refused to give up the job. When Sujata refused to be a mother:

Dibyanath exploded. He had said, Once they marry, a husband and a wife have duties to each other. I don’t see any reason why you should object.

No.

Sujata had refused firmly.

You are denying my right.

You have never depended on me alone for your fulfillment.

What do you mean?

You and I both know what I mean.
All the time that Sujata had gone on submitting to Dibyanath, bearing his children, Dibyanath had gone on sleeping with other women. After Sujata’s refusal, his sex life outside the house became more active. If that was a snare to make Sujata feel guilty, she did not fall for it. (46-47)

This shows Sujata’s attitude towards her husband who only used her as a toy. Sujata had a strong sense of dignity and when she felt it is violated she rebelled in her own way.

Sujata and her son Brati had a strong and special connection. That is the reason they were very caring toward each other unlike the other members of the family. She remembered how Brati would rush back from his games when he was only ten when she was sick. Dibyanath never really liked Brati. ‘Dibyanath called him a milkshop. Mother’s boy. No manliness’ (47). It was only after Brati’s death that Sujata realized why everyone didn’t like him. He was fighting against the very system of which his father and his brother, Jyoti, were members.

Sujata was back again down in the memory lane, in those days when youths were not allowed to move from one neighbourhood to other, as according to the government, youths were threat to the system. Thousands of young boys were hunted and killed but the city of Calcutta posed as if everything is normal. The writers, artists and intellectuals of Calcutta were then turning West Bengal upside down out of sympathy and support for the cause of Bangladesh (reference to the war of independence of Bangladesh, 1971). But they remained silent about what was happening in this side of the border. It was only Sujata and thousands of mothers like her who were haunted by these traumas of their sons death. ‘Who is Sujata? Only a
mother. Who are those hundreds of thousands whose hearts, even now are being gnawed by questions? Only mothers’. (51)

While Sujata goes to Somu’s mother with the specific aim of retrieving the memories of Brati’s last few hours, it turned out to be her entry and then initiation into another world altogether, which simply was not within the range of her conception or comprehension. It was the of world of primitive squalor, filth, poverty, degradation and sub-human existence that only hovers tentatively on the margins of bhadrakal’s consciousness. Breaking the glass ceiling of her cloistered, though unprotected existence in a false, hypocritical world of bhadrakals, Sujata enters into the little known world of slum dwellers. The sight of Somu’s ageing mother, her disgruntled daughter and that of their ramshackle tenement with a straw roof is enough to complete the rituals of initiation. Sujata identifies herself with Somu’s mother as one as Somu’s mother ‘with her little learning, her limited intelligence and her inability to put her ideas into words, thought the same thoughts as she with all her learning, clarity of vision and competence in articulating ideas’ (53-54). And above all they both were mothers. The plight of women in the patriarchal system also resounds in the words of Somu’s mother while remembering their sons, ‘A woman’s life is like a tortoise’s. She’ll find peace only if she dies’ (56). While talking with Somu’s mother, Sujata remembered having seen many dead bodies in the morgue, men and women lamenting over them. ‘At the time she had not understood how those corpses, those griefsticken men and women, were connected, were one with her. Now she realized that Brati had belonged with them not only with death, but also in life’ (57). It was after visiting Somu’s mother Sujata came to know that she never knew the other half of Brati, and after his death in her quest to know her son better, she
realized that Brati had not after all abandoned her to the desolation of a private grief. He had bound her to others like her, given her altogether a new family. Across the class and the caste divide, a strange bond develops between two suffering mothers, enabling Sujata to see the chaotic nature of her personal loss, suffering and grief within a much wider framework of social and historical injustice and denial. Recovering from her over-romanticized, narcissistic notions of self-pity and grief, Sujata suffers the reality assault, internalizes the sufferings of those less privileged than her, and thus heals herself, at least partly, through gestures of empathy and compassion. ‘But how could Sujata find her liberation in the midst of all those people? She was rich and belonged to another class. Why should they accept her as one of them?’ (58). This was again very clear through the attitude of Somu’s elder sister towards Sujata. The grief which brought them closer, the class distinctions separated them. Why not? Somu’s elder sister was bearing the brunt of being Somu’s sister, as she would never get a job for being so. Sujata cannot withstand the fact that the families of the youths who defied the system were still suffering and in a way being hunted and poisoned to a slow death and still the state was running as normal. This normaley, this wiping out of the existence of thousands of youths was frightening for Sujata, as if the state has plotted to wipe out the existence of their families too. For Somu’s mother Sujata can survive as she had connections and she was rich, and that is the point where Sujata suffered the most. No one can understand her grief:

If Sujata had told her that she lived in a shiftless, rootless, lifeless society where the naked body caused no embarrassment, but natural emotions did; if she had told her that mothers and sons, fathers and sons, husbands and wives
never hit one another even when relationships stood irremediably poisoned, never wept aloud, showed their best manners to everyone, Somu’s mother would not have made any sense of it all. The language would be Bengali, but the sense of the words would escape Somu’s mother.

If Sujata told her that she came here to know Brati, her dead son, better, Somu’s mother would not understand. If Sujata had told her that when Brati began to change it was not due only to books or political lectures; that Brati had felt the anguish of men like Somu, son of poor parents, or those like Laltu, humiliated by fate and life, and other men like them, as keenly as if it was his own, and that had caused him to change. Life itself had forced him to change. He gave up the life he was born to. (68)

Thus Somu’s mother would never know that Sujata as a mother lay defeated to several thousands of mothers, for she had never known what Brati was up to. At this point it was only Sujata who was suffering lonely in her solitary cell.

It was in the third chapter when Sujata goes to visit Nandini, the young girl with whom Brati was in love with; she comes to know more about Brati and his associates. It’s Nandini who reconstructs for Sujata all the events leading up to Brati’s betrayal and murder. In the process, she also initiates Sujata into the little known world of the underground movement, explaining to her the logic for an organized rebellion, giving her firsthand account of state repression and its multiple failures. Through Nandini, Sujata came to know more about Brati’s cause, about the corrupt system, which was still running in the same way, still killings and arrests were going on, nothing has stopped. It’s through Nandini that Sujata was finally able to
understand the reasons for Brati’s political convictions and his rejection of the bourgeoisie code. All this leaves her so completely bewildered but Sujata listened to Nandini in awe and compassion. Mahasweta Devi has captured the impact of Sujata’s meeting with Nandini in very poetic terms. Commenting upon it, she says:

But time past is time lost. Time is a ruthless killer, as cruel as destiny. Time is the river Ganga, with grief for its banks. The tide of time carries alluvium in to cover up grief. And then fresh sprouts of greenery break through, reaching fingers to the sky, young shoots of hope and pain and joy and ecstasy. (76)

Her journey towards enlightenment is possible only because the dynamics of grief, loss and pain is finally understood and accepted by Sujata. It was from Nandini she came to know about Anindya who betrayed Brati and his group, and about Nitu. It was Nitu who recruited Anindya in the group, so no one was suspicious about him, as Nitu was Brati’s friend and comrade. Nitu was also killed brutally in front of the police station in his locality. Nandini was then arrested in the morning after the murder of Brati and his friends. She was put in a solitary cell and tortured by the police. She was made to sit in front of a thousand-watt lamp. She was given cigarette burns by the police while interrogation. She was released from the prison on the pretext of medical treatment. Due to the exposure to the glare of lamp for a long period of time Nandini’s optical nerves were damaged and her right eye was totally blind.

Nandini’s experience gives Sujata a new knowledge of the world, which she was all these times unaware of. Brati came more close to Sujata through the experiences of Nandini. Brati loved her mother immensely and also very much
protective about her, that is why he did not like his father and other members of the family. He didn’t consider them as human. He wanted to take away his mother from that house. Brati was supposed to leave for the base on 15th but he postponed it to 19th only for his mother, so that she could celebrate his birthday. Sujata came to know all these from Nandini. All these made Sujata feel as if her love was responsible for his death. ‘Was Sujata’s hungry, clinging love then indirectly responsible for Brati’s death? Brati had stayed on in Calcutta on that fateful day only to avoid hurting her. Otherwise he would left for the base’. (83)

For Sujata grief was the only companion and it was same with Somu’s mother and Nandini. This was the reason she find herself very close to them, close to her heart. They were all tied with a single thread, i.e. Brati. So when she finds out that she would never meet again with them, she foresees her solitary cell:

Sujata could well envisage the solitary cell that her existence would be from now on, with Dibyanath, Jyoti, Neepa, Tuli, Bini, and the colleagues in the banks; all outside; and within, Brati, only Brati, but why just Brati, also Somu’s mother, Nandini, the grief of separation from everyone of them held within her. From now on she would be alone, totally alone. No one would again throw open the doors of her solitary cell, to bring her out and ask—Are you Brati Chatterjee’s mother? (79)

But Sujata was no more ignorant. She was more enlightened with the pain and grief inside.
Sujata identifies herself with Nandini’s grief. In the whole novel, Mahasweta Devi has presented Nandini as the only woman who stands erect for what she thinks is right. She is unbreakable, unbendable, uncompromising with her cause. She is the only woman who defies everything and stands tall in every circumstance. Nandini will not stop working for the cause. She would not let go vain the death of Brati, Laltu, Somu, Partha and others, she was determined about it. She will start afresh in a new way. The police torture, the jail, cigarette burns, thousand-watt glare of the lamp, all these things could not shake the determination of Nandini. She is the modern girl presented by Mahasweta Devi, who doesn’t want to marry Sandip, as she thinks it is fashionable for men like him to marry women like hers. It was Nandini who helped in the evolution of Sujata’s self all the more. She finds herself in the new light after visiting Nandini.

Sujata returned to her home after the visit from Nandini. The day was 17th of January, it was the day of Tuli’s engagement with Tony Kapadia, and it was also the birthday of Brati. Sujata did not want Tuli’s engagement to be on this day. But nobody had cared to ask her opinion. It was Tony’s mother’s guru, Swamiji, who lived in America, had fixed the date. The whole house is decorated for this occasion. Flowers, foods and sweets are ordered specially from outside for this occasion. But there are no traces of Brati, which Sujata tried to search in every corner of the house:

Sujata was late for the evening. She was confronted by Dibyanath, and he was rather angry

What could you be thinking of? Didn’t you know there’d be fifty guests tonight?
Of course I knew.

What was the idea then?

All the arrangements had been made. Neepa’s already here. You were at home. When everything’s organized, don’t make a fuss.

Make a fuss? Do you know what you’re saying?

If...you...don’t leave...this room...at once, I’ll...leave...this house...and never come back again.

Sujata spoke cuttingly, pausing before each word. She hates, detests the man. Dibyanath and the typist. Dibyanath and a distant cousin. Dibyanath and his cousin’s wife.

For Dibyanath it was a slap on the face. In the thirty-four years of married life, Sujata had never spoken to him in that tone.

Don’t I have right to ask you where you’ve been all day?

No.

What?

Two years ago, for thirty-two, I never asked you where you spent your evenings, or who accompanied you for the past ten years, or why you paid the house rent for your ex-typist. You are never to ask me a thing. Never. (92-93)
This passage is very important; because this is the first time she rebels against the patriarchal oppression. We meet a transformed Sujata, one who is more self-assured, morally confident and politically sensitive. She decides to leave the house in which Brati never felt at home, where he wasn’t valued while he was alive, nor his memory respected after his death. Now having known Brati so closely, she turns her back on Divyanath and his decadent value-system. She finds her voice, in a way she regains her dignity in protesting against the very oppression she was subject to all those years. Sujata repents for being submissive and unprotesting while Brati was alive. She thinks situation may have been different if she would have found her voice before. But ‘Brati would never know now that Sujata had suffered all the indignities only for his sake, so that he could finish his studies and take up a job. She had had plans to leave home with Brati once Brati was settled’ (97-98). This shows not her submissiveness but rather a mother’s sacrifice for her son:

Women have gone along with their wisely role less wholeheartedly, but have justified it as being necessary for various reasons, including ‘for the children’s sake’. Still others have been quite antagonistic to their husbands, but they have reached a compromise and done their domestic duty because of their (real or perceived) lack of attractive alternatives. (Jackson 113)

Sujata was not ready for the evening. She could not bear the pain, a severe pain of appendix. She delayed the operation and planned it to have after Tuli’s wedding. Well why not she? The pain is nothing compared to the pain she was going through all these years. The pain of the fact, that Brati is no more. Yet she was with Brati the whole day. Now as she was at home she could feel the coldness of Brati’s body. Her
mind was not willing to be there but she was bound by obligations. It was her solitary cell. 'Sujata had let each one of them know that they could go there respective ways, but she would stick to her duties. She had sentenced herself to imprisonment. How could she break through the bars she herself had built?' (102). Her duties are now prison and she had confined herself to it. She remembers when Brati used to ask about how she can go on with her duty. But that was how she had been trained from her childhood, to be eternally dutiful.

That was how she had been trained. And she kept herself under the strictest control. But now it feels as if everything, everything, has been such a waste. She had wasted herself. 'Has she been any good to anybody? Dibyanath? Neepa? Tuli? No one'. (103)

She was like drowning in an abyss as the evening was drawing. She knows she would never visit Nandini and Somu's mother again. So now where she would go in search of her lost son? Or, she would stop searching for him? After Brati's death she did not shed any tears. Dibyanath accused her of being unnatural for that. But how can she cry when Brati is still living in her memories. Brati is still living immured within her inconsolable grief.

Lost in her thoughts Sujata comes out wearing a dhakai sari\(^3\) and a white shawl to attend the engagement party, but it was hard for her to go down the stairs. Her 'self' was not willing to. 'She longed to say—You would always tell me how

\(^3\) Sari is a traditional cloth for women of South Asia. The name Dhakai comes from Dhaka city, capital of Bangladesh, where this type of sari is usually made.
difficult to be oneself. Brati, if only I could be myself today, and act as my heart
dictated'. But it was a duty, 'to do what one hated to do was duty. Was there,
somewhere inside her, a sense of pride at being so dutiful?' (104)

She came down in the drawing room. She saw people around talking and
laughing. But she saw only dead people in them. 'The dead that ate, quarreled and
lived in a frenzy of lust and greed' (107). The dead, against whom Brati lost all
respect. The dead who are incapable of love.

Mrs. Kapadia was talking of her Guru, Neepa playing hide and seek with her
husband, Amit's cousin, Nargis, Tony's sister was dancing and talking to someone
over her shoulder. Bini, Tuli, Balai Dutt, Jishu Mitter and his wife Molly,
Lakshmishwar Mishra... everyone was present, all dead, drinking, dancing and
chatting.

She was in pain. Bini informs her that a special friend of Tony is waiting
outside and he was in hurry so he cannot come inside. Sujata and Bini go outside to
call him. He was DCDD [Deputy Commissioner, Detective Department], Saroj Pal,
sitting in the police van. He was the same man who hunted down the youth like
Bratis. He was the same officer who was handling and inquiring the case of Brati.
Here now facing the mother of 1084 (Brati Chatterjee). He knew he couldn't face her
so he hadn't wanted to come. He didn't get down. He was in duty so he left starting
the car. This again reminded her of the situations of hunting down and killing of the
youths by the police.
Sujata again gets lost in her flow of thoughts. She calls upon Brati not to run anymore. She pleads Brati to come back home. There are no places for the people like Brati to hide as long as likes of Saroj Pal are there to hunt them down. She was again in pain. Everything was swinging around her, as if all the dead corpses are dancing around her. She could not withstand the fact that these decomposed smelling dead corpses are enjoying the world. She could not bear the fact that Brati’s death has gone in vain. Everything goes dark around her. She heaves a cry shouting out the name of Brati and collapse on the ground. ‘It was a cry that smelt of blood, protest, grief’. Dibyanath then screams, ‘The appendix has burst!’ (127). The burst of her appendix signifies her outburst of anger against the system and society. She could not submit herself to this world. The world, which have no places for Bratis and Nandins. She was helpless and her helplessness was torturing her from inside. Sujata being physically weak and fragile, and traumatized by her younger son’s death and subsequent repression of grief, she simply gives up on life. When she screams and collapses into a heap, her husband is quick to speculate that her ‘appendix’ has burst. Whatever the symbolic overtones of his statement, she certainly succumbs to the slow process of inner and outer rot and decay. Sujata recovers her humanity, but loses her will to live and survive.

*Mother of 1084* is a story of Sujata’s multiple oppressions within a stifling, familial, patriarchal and feudal order. However, it could also be read as a story of how Sujata moves out of her cocoon of social respectability and civilized facade, only to discover the little known, primitive, underground world of the Naxalites or that of her son, about whom she knew very little while he was alive. Going beyond, it’s also a story of how an “apolitical mother,” ultimately pushed over the threshold, is
compelled to recognize the basic human need to formulate or re-formulate her moral, political or ideological position in a crass narcissistic, utterly commercial world of ‘bhadraloks’ such as Chatterjees. It’s only in the process of formulating or defining one’s moral, political, ideological position that an individual could possibly hope to heal several inflictions of oppression, or prepare herself to fight the mechanics of ‘oppression’ at personal or collective level, thus paving the way for self-liberation.

It’s important to point out here that this particular work of Mahasweta does stand apart from the rest of her oeuvre, in more ways than one. Unlike some of her earlier short narratives such as “Breast-Giver” (Standayini), “Draupadi” and “Behind The Bodice” (Choli Ke Piche), which are focalized around the tribal women, this particular novel is centered on an upper middle-class, bourgeoisie, “apolitical” woman, as Mahasweta Devi herself explains:

Sujata in Mother of 1084, is essentially apolitical Yet as she reaches towards an explanation of the death of her son killed in the seventies, she too finds the entire social system cadaverous, and as she takes a closer look to the society, she finds no legitimacy for her death. (viii)

Moreover, unlike so many of her stories, which by virtue of their location in the oral or folk tradition often betray stark simplicity of the folk narrative, Mother of 1084 possesses a rare sophistication in its handling of the temporal and spatial design as well as in the complex structuration of the events and situations. Conceived on the lines of Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway, the entire action of this narrative, too, is confined to a single day. And if the comparison is extended a little further, it also makes use of “stream of consciousness” technique the way Virginia Woolf often does.
The only difference is that Mahasweta has schematically divided the entire span of twenty-four hours into four time frames viz., Morning, Afternoon, Late Afternoon and Evening, one succeeding the other. Superficially, it may even be seen as an oppressive, linear narrative that has been so designed as to project the multiple oppressions Sujata is made to suffer in the Chatterjee household. But a closer examination shows how the linearity is constantly ruptured and disrupted through a series of memory snapshots and flashbacks, which not only help Sujata in the reclaiming her personal memory, but also provide her the much-needed psychic healing.

Each of the four chapters in the narrative marks a new stage in the evolution of Sujata’s consciousness, as it enables her to re-order her fragmented and chaotic life in search of a cohesive identity. Each time she visits either her own past or that of Brati, Somu’s mother or Nandini, her long-suppressed personal loss and grief is slowly released into the ever-widening, eddying spirals of collective framework of betrayal, guilt and suffering. Now whether it’s a question of becoming acutely conscious of other people’s suffering or that of her own situation, or simply gaining a more enlightened understanding of the circumstances that compelled Brati to make the kind of choices he did, all of these do facilitate Sujata’s transformation. From a weak-willed, hopelessly dependent and a non-assertive moral coward, Sujata is transformed into a morally assertive, politically enlightened and a socially defiant individual.

Though the story revolves around Sujata mainly, the representation of other female characters is worth mentioning, mainly Somu’s mother and Nandini. As Samik Bandopadhay puts:
There are three homes in *Mother of 1084*—Sujata’s Somu’s mother’s and Nandini’s. It goes to the credit of Mahasweta’s penchant for realism that she is able to convey, with the utmost precision and economy of detail, the family structures and their economic implications as they go to define the individualities of the three women to the point of setting up a hierarchy of self-assertion/independence: from Somu’s mother at the lowest rung to Nandini at the highest, with Sujata at an intermediate level. (xvi)

Somu’s mother who belonged to the lower class, whose main concern being earning daily bread for the family remains ignorant of the fact as to why their only son joined the underground movement leaving them in utter poverty. Somu was the sole bread winner of the family; now that he is dead their fate remains shrouded and obscure. While Sujata is in a quest to know about her dead son Brati, she is actually in a journey in the process of ignorance to knowledge; Nandini is the one who is shown as thorough and complete as compared to Sujata. As to quote Samik Bandopadhay: ‘Nandini is the one who knows, and has decided, while Sujata in the throes of learning/knowing, and edging towards deciding’ (xvi). It is interesting to know that, only after the meeting with Nandini, Sujata finds her true voice. Nandini in a way completes her journey. It is Nandini who explains and clarifies the issues of rebellion, power betrayal and also revolutionary optimism to Sujata. Nandini’s subjectivity becomes the determining factor in the novel in the transformation of Sujata’s self.

Though Sujata at the end evolves to be more knowledgeable about her surroundings; Mahasweta’s intention is to transform the mainstream reader more than
her characters. Mahasweta is a social activist, who aspires to evolve the readers also through her writings. Radha Chakravarty writes

Not all her mother figures are powerful role models. Sometimes, the moral charge of the narrative is located in other textual features such as irony, a combination of realism and myth, an interplay of history and fiction, or the manipulation of different registers of language and reader becomes necessary participant in the process of reconstructing the value systems implicit in the text. In this sense, ‘feminism’ operates the process of signification and interpretation and not necessarily in the representation of female subjectivity within the text. If there is a transformative ethic in Mahasweta’s fiction, the target of that transformation is the reader, rather than any fictional character. (Chakravarty 97)

In the societal structure the evolution of new species is formed through the resistance against the torturer and oppressor whose sole purpose is to demolish the identity of the oppressed class so that any form of protests by the oppressed class can be pushed back in oblivion in its nascent stage. But the oppressed class after being subjugated through the various forms of patriarchal ideology, having lost its every single identity looks for a new beginning with the proper selection of time, place and situation that provides an impetus in their struggle to form a new identity and emerges as a new kind of subjectivity to gain its rightful place in the patriarchal structure and allow the other marginalized section to follow the suit. This evolutionary process of female subjectivity does not start with the long years of sufferings; rather it is a moment of epiphany which suffices for the realization of oppression of lost self and
identity and yearns for new construction of self and subjectivity. All of a sudden the oppressed woman longs for a protest to give a voice to her sufferings which in Indian societal structure is not an easy task as that moment of epiphany goes like a bubble but that moment acts as a catalyst and connects with the others like a strong wave and shakes the ideological system manipulated for their oppression. An evolution of female subjectivity comes from its earlier stage of endurance which is always present in female subjectivity which acts as fuel in the formation of female subjectivity to bring them at the center of identity discourse.
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