“(Mahasweta Devi is) gripped by the individual in history and (her works are) history imagined into fiction”

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CHAPTER II

In the printed texts of national and colonial historical records, the image of Rani Laxmi Bai and Titu Mir occupy kaleidoscopic versions, saying which is not to be deemed as praise. When it comes to their representation, the intent of the chapter is to highlight the myriad depictions of these historic figures from scandalous to hyperbolic or mythicised, to folkloric as well as heroic depiction. Do these various representations serve as an agency for the subaltern to speak or disfigure the real identity of the individual thereby fabricating his/her real or subaltern history? In the chapter it is attested that such innumerable and rather contaminated representations which are far from the truth are damaging to the true essence of an individual, and with time establish themselves as the only legitimatised records to know the subaltern. To add more, when such an immutable legitimacy is provided to these records, it disallows any rectification of the same even if such representations are found to be one-sided, false or inadequate. The chapter in view of these arguments, examines Mahasweta Devi’s work *The Queen of Jhansi* (2000) and *Titu Mir* (2002) to highlight how these novels work as an intervention in creating a subaltern history of these figures vis-a-vis Orality. That is, what measure of intervention does Mahasweta Devi’s work serve as an investigation and rectification of the official records on Laxmi Bai and Titu Mir.

In investigating the modes of representation as outlined in Subaltern Studies, one discerns an association between subalternity and representation and can also observe the effect of each on the writing of an authentic history. It is certainly necessary to examine the ways representation - misrepresentation or underrepresentation in historical texts produce subalternity and how such a violent subversion of truth can be challenged. In the context of Laxmi Bai’s representation in the official histories of colonial as well as nationalist records, the chapter explores how Queen of Jhansi has been:

...variously represented as a heroic Aryan, a sexually promiscuous Indian whore, a Hindu goddess of nationalism and as a folk symbol of indigenous resistance...(the chapter also exposes the) monstrous rendering of the Rani which aided the British colonial project...(and how Indian nationalism) apotheosised her as a national symbol...Why is she reduced in magnitude,
to colonial and postcolonial concerns, when she ought to serve as the ordinary figure of her own story?...the details of her life remain ancillary (marginalised) to the dominant ideology of twentieth century colonials and twentieth century nationalism.

(The Rani of Jhansi 2-26)

In the above statements, it is evident that Rani Laxmi Bai has been drawn in diversified shades to serve as instrument of colonial as well as nationalistic agenda. In this propaganda, the true figure of Rani Laxmi Bai has been either lost or gravely mutilated that she is no longer a heroine of her own story but a mere puppet at the hands of power structures. Her gallant stature in the history has been propagated not to acknowledge her pioneering role in India’s freedom struggle or to present her as an individual fighting for her people and the nation, but to serve the colonial as well as nationalist agenda of self-aggrandizement. From colonial to postcolonial records of history, the real life history of Laxmi Bai hence has surrendered to the dominant ideologies of power. For this reason, be it colonial, or nationalist authority, the historically rendered “sexual, linguistic and caste-based formations of the Rani” have endured even today which hence attest to the emergency of scrutinizing “historical novels that purport to give accurate accounts, popular fictions that ride upon sensationalised memories of the historical events and cinematic representations to configure history through the screen” so that such distortion of history is apprehended and immediately rectified (The Rani of Jhansi 27).

While ascertaining the issues of representation, it can be further stated that firstly representation cannot recapture past in verbatim and secondly it is subject to change according to the historian who takes it up. It is a variable than a constant as history-writing is influenced by the objective of the historian - what has been the rationale of the historian? - His objective and what did s/he wish to gain, subvert, and achieve in the long run? His ideologies, his perceptions and emotional appeal towards a topic, are bound to interfere with the rule of writing history vis-a-vis impartiality and objectivity. In the chapter Mahasweta Devi, for instance, read the available histories on Laxmi Bai and finding the representation of the Queen as detached from the spirit of the person, she hence endeavoured to write a
personal history. In doing so, Devi has, owing to her objective, represented Queen as a multitasking woman with activities ranging from rearing her kids and fighting a war on the other side. Devi in her testament has declared, “I was interested in not only learning about her fight against the British and the facts of that war, but wanted to get under the skin of the person...interested me intrinsically (The Queen of Jhansi 317). In this assertion, it can be analysed that Devi moulded a representation that was based on what interested her about the character. Hence, her agenda is implicit in the representation of the Queen as a people’s queen. In saying this, it is clear, representation is contaminated, but in this case it is more in a positive sense as Devi has not slandered or criminalised the Queen but depicted a facet of hers that is generally not taken up by conventional historians.

So, whether it is a historian or a novelist, the nature of representation is bound to be contaminated. It can be intentional or unintentional, and it can also be a contamination that produces adverse results or produce positive results by acting as a creative venture (adding new meaning, perception or remodelling history to fit the present era or to make it comprehensible to the present times). It is due to these compelling factors, that a representation of the past is in itself an intervention - a subjective/creative imitation of the past which but adds new meaning based on what changes in the present are influencing the historian to write about an event that happened in the past – a different time entirely. For instance, one particular historian or a novelist represents past with emphasis on the social issues of say Victorian era, while another historian represents the same era with emphasis on scientific development. Hence, both representations serve as interventions, and in the present case, the intervention of Devi have been to highlight the people’s version of history than what an elite (be it colonial or the native elite) had to say about her.

In saying this, it hence can be reiterated that all representations which either distort or ostensibly create reality are interventions. This view is proposed under the assumption that reality of the past cannot be replicated such as it was due to innumerable factors as in change in ideologies, ruling class, contemporary social problems and etc. Hence, in analysing various representations, it is possible to identify change, the disjuncture between past and present and in this process , each serve to intervene in the production of knowledge. In keeping these issues in mind, the representation of Laxmi Bai by Devi has been highlighted as :firstly it
does not malign the figure as that would have been an ‘epistemic violence’; secondly after the careful scrutiny and verification of record and documents available, Devi has incorporated both oral and written sources to render this representation; thirdly she has not claimed to be telling the absolute truth, and has highlighted both sides of the story in that she has mentioned colonial version of Laxmi Bai as well as the nationalist versions; finally Devi has corroborated the same by tallying these version with the oral sources collected by her. The novel hence serves as a scaffold of popular talk vs officially sanctioned record of the past.

It is pertinent to note that while saying Devi’s rewriting of history serves as an intervention, it is but not to be taken as a universalised history of Laxmi Bai. In saying ‘a history of’ is what has been emphasised in the chapter while the notion of ‘the history’ is stringently negated. There can be no single history that claims to be the history of an event. It is this homogenisation, this universalization and to use Robert J.C. Young’s term “west’s greatest myth’ which he used for negating ‘the history’, that the chapter has examined Devi’s history as a history of the Laxmi Bai in the plethora of histories on her. The claim is not to signify it as the only history available, but to highlight how Devi’s intervention has produced a history that to a degree serves to tell the truth. It is hence ‘the truth’, or ‘the past’ which is represented in a history and histories – none being genuine but apparent.

Understanding that representations in a history cannot replicate the past, but they at least can take us closer to truth by a reasonable degree. How they fail, and what factors distort representation – it is intentional and unintentional as well. The academic discourse of Subalternal Studies identifies powers structures which distort representation and consequently cause subjugation of the marginalised sections of the society. Based on this tripartite enterprise of power, subalternty and representation, the chapter rests on the argument how representation leads to the condition of subordination which is subalternity. That is:

The term “subalternity” refers to a condition of subordination brought about by colonization or other forms of economic, social, racial, linguistic and/or cultural dominance. Subalternal Studies, is therefore a study of power... (while) Power is intimately related to question of
representation ... (The) provocative question (being): How can academic knowledge seek to represent the subaltern when that knowledge is itself implicated in the practices that construct the subaltern as such?

(Subalternity and Representation 2)

This statement as asserted above finds it echoes in Spivak’s claim that a subaltern is a subaltern as s/he has not been and cannot be adequately represented by academic knowledge; rather, academic knowledge is in truth a practice which produces subalternity. Academic knowledge as implied by Spivak refers to knowledge which is used as means rather a commodity to justify dominance. In India, this dominance, for instance, had been justified by the elite who reserved the knowledge of the Vedas and other Hindu texts to validate for instance Sati – the act of forcing women to die with her spouse on the burning pyre. Spivak, here, asserts that knowledge of sacred texts warranted this inhuman act as right and represented women as doing it out of their own free will! Spivak further attacks this power of knowledge, which firstly represents the women by speaking for them and secondly which justifies its dominion by exclusive control over the knowledge. Hence, knowledge in this context is a justifier of physical force imposed by the elite.

This forms the core of our argument as to how representation if is corrupted, it can serve to be a trigger for subalternity. Further, such a claim has been analysed in the case of Rani Laxmi Bai by examining various historical texts in the light of Mahasweta Devi’s work The Queen of Jhansi. The knowledge regarding Laxmi Bai as collected through historical records cannot be verified as carrying a kernel of truth as the same historical records have been, as stated above, abused as an instrument by the colonial/native elitist authority to serve its ulterior motives. If the same knowledge is involved in the “othering” of say Laxmi Bai vis-a-vis representation, how can one attest to it the principle of authenticity? John Beverley makes a pointed reference to Benjamin’s aphorism stating “Even the dead are not safe” suggesting that representation tends to cement itself over ages as an incorrigible tradition which hence makes it a matter of emergency to correct it by apprehending the agencies which produce it (Subalternity and Representation 79). This puts the entire conception of history at risk – if histories are affecting a representation than realizing the past, then what for to pursue
it? This question can be appraised by asking - first how representations can tell truth by approaching a higher degree of it; secondly writing history serves to expose the change in representation and hence the change between the past and the present; and third why there are countless representations of a same event?

First, the chapter answers the initial question – how representations can tell the truth? True, representations cannot exactly replicate the past, but by means of degrees, it can be calculated how far or near the past, does a history stand in its representation. The degree will be of higher value if the historian or the novelist has aimed to scrupulously record the past. And it will be below negative if the agenda has been to fabricate it and produce false epistemologies. However, it can be never zero as past cannot be represented in verbatim. Hence, an authentic depiction can be assigned to the representation which supersedes other models of history in terms of its degree of truth in a representation. This assumption can be further substantiated in noting how Spivak justified that literature also tells the truth like history but the difference between the two is a matter of degree. In her assertion, we can draw a corollary that though history cannot exactly capture the past, it can but in degrees. Spivak asserts:

That history deals with real events and literature with imagined ones may now be seen as a difference in degree rather than in kind now be seen as a difference in degree rather than in kind. The difference between cases of historical and literary events will always be there as a differential moment in terms of what is called “the effect of the real”. What is called history will always seem more real to us than what is called literature. Our vey uses of the two separate words guarantee that. This difference can never be exhaustively systematized.

(In the Other Worlds 335)
In these analyses, it can be proposed that the interpretation of truth which is being examined in the chapter is – to calculate it by means of degree than whether a text carries truth in verbatim. It is by means of how much a historical record is able to reproduce the past, the relevance and authenticity of the text can be estimated. In view of the discussion above, it is palpable that history cannot be a genuine representation of the past as narration is performed by representation which is in itself a method changeable from one historian to another. To further emphasize, a narration changes as does the meaning of sign, for some sign, say, an insurgent, carries reactions of mutiny, crime, and anti-nationalism, while to others it can imply freedom, justice, and independence from tyranny. Hence, representation as is dependent on the arbitrariness of the historian’s psyche, the narration of history cannot be what it must.

This discussion thus aims to contradict the assumption that, if history cannot create the past, then what it does is create a fairy tale or at the most an authentic fairy tale? This can be further challenged by examining this assumption in the case of Laxmi Bai. What is known about her – queen, freedom fighter, pioneer of India’s freedom struggle who died a martyr. How is she represented in consideration of this knowledge – either worshiped (to treat her as a goddess and undermine her human struggle), or scandalised (as a traitor who was complicit with the British). These are representational fairy tales wrought out of what is known about the past. In this scenario, what is an authentic history – one which exposes these fairy tales, rectifies it by rewriting a reasonable one from the vantage of a reasonable degree of truth. This history might still be condemned as a fairy tale, but in the light of the analyses rendered on representation and its degree of truth, it can be praised as a fairy tale for closer to truth than those histories which either deliberately or unintentionally stray away from it.

Now the argument reaches to the second question – why to write history which is but a contentious question. The historians have exerted many rationales, explanations and aims while writing or rewriting history, and in these answers lie the clues to why to re-write history. An elite who wishes to fortress his power, writes history that builds him a fort – a structure to induce fear in the ruled classes and subdue them to accept his impositions and diktats. A subaltern rewrites history to state his side of the story and manifest his subaltern consciousness – which being a reflection of his sufferings – finds articulation through history
or Orality for that matter. In these reasons, writing history is hence not a futile venture but a matter of power, an enforcement of identity, and other reasons which hence makes it a litmus test of what was the past, and how is the present influenced by it. Now whether history captures past or is unable to, history nonetheless acts as a yardstick of ruling ideologies and ruled ideologies. In being a gauge, history hence sensitises the masses to its pluralistic nature – there are a plethora of histories but none of them are to be taken as rigid and irrefutable gospel truths. In promoting this awareness that history is heterogeneous and includes a faithful and an infidel version, the public is apprised of informing their day-to-day decisions by reading histories than ‘the history’ and taking none on their face value. In further highlighting the usefulness of history, it can be said that it helps in identifying the ruled ideologies and ruling ideologies and hence becomes a window to the world of past. In this endevour, history if is produced to capture a good measure of truth will be useful to the present in productive ways; while as is evident of violent histories, truth which is fabricated or hijacked to serve criminal agendas and propagandas, the utility is gravely forsaken for disorder in the society. Hence, the endevour should be to ethically capture the truth than abuse it for detrimental purposes.

At this juncture, certain questions emerge as to how Mahasweta Devi has attempted to achieve a reasonable degree of truth while recording the past. The interpretation of truth that can be gathered from reading Devi’s works is the depiction of reality as perceived by the subaltem for the subaltem. During her survey of oral sources, Devi was flabbergasted that the people who were related to Devi were not given precedence and this activity is what she calls, a deliberate silencing of the truth (or a measure of it as the whole truth cannot be captured). Hence, the truth which the chapter intends to explore is the truth of Laxmi Bai heard from the people who lived and had an association with the character; but had not been allowed to speak, and if they were their reflections on Laxmi Bai were taken to be tenuous as they conflicted with the official version. It is due to this elision of the subaltem voices that Devi visited the birth place of Laxmi Bai and collected oral sources to substantiate her recordings of the past. One such episode which can attest to this official laxity is when the historians of India, R.C. Majumdar or Suren Sen, ignored the views of G.C. Tambe (grandson of the Queen) saying “He comes every year but how can we take him seriously when there is so much published material contrary to what he claims?’ What G.C. Tambe states about the Queen is a good measure of truth due to his proximity and nativity, and this
truth is what Devi has intended to discover and incorporate after meticulous scrutiny. Hence, to put it idiomatically, truth as examined in the chapter is what his heard from the horse’s mouth – the people of Queen’s birthplace, and others who knew her better than an outside third party.

Finally the third question – why there are so many representations of the same event or multiples of it? Past which is a collection of events or a singular event while history is a record of it. In recording, the historian ostensibly perceives s/he are reproducing the past but in fact, s/he are altering, interpolating or creating a version which either subdues the past or exaggerates it but is never the same. Hence, the reality that comes to pass, and which becomes our past cannot be furnished in its exact make. As recreating of reality or recording of it is invariably aligned and swayed by our psyche which is whimsical or changeable. Hence, how we know reality, changes with our perceptions, and the latter change with changing times. And, as these narratives pass through the filter of a historian’s ideologies, so the representations are hence are dyed in his perceptions, biases and prejudices which either consciously or unconsciously contaminate a history. Be that as it may, this should not serve as a discouragement to producing histories of the past, as in the case of Devi for instance, her work has yielded a new history which objects to conventional histories of Laxmi Bai even though her history is and cannot be a faithful replication of the past. Nevertheless, in her narrative representation of it, Devi has produced a history which if gauged by the degree of truth is a significant representation of the past.

In examining the issues and arguments vis-a-vis history, and its narrative representation it has been observed that historical figures, say Laxmi Bai, cannot be depicted in complete truth of their past, but this depiction can be brought closer to truth if gauged by degree than superimposition of history over past. As history cannot superimpose past, meaning it being a subjective (even when objective) telling of the past, history cannot become it. So instead of measuring the truth of history, the proposition should be can it imitate the truth by a reasonable degree. Hence, histories or representations can still be closer to truth (if ethically practiced) and farther from truth (if malpracticed) in terms of degree.
The impetus of Mahasweta Devi to rewrite history hence has been to attack this malpractice that has relegated the reasonable truth of her past to the margins. As proposed earlier, truth is something which the chapter aims to achieve by means of how much than all in all. That is, truth of history or historic figures, is agreed, cannot represent the past, but in measuring the degree of how much truth has been captured, the worth and therefore fidelity of history can be emphasised. In keeping with these assumption and propositions, the chapter now will attempt to highlight the gross misrepresentation of Rani Laxmi Bai.

The misrepresentation of Rani Ki Jhansi can be ascertained when Lakshmi Bai was accused of being an instigator in the infamous Jhansi Massacre. In analysing the British as well as Indian depiction of the event with respect to Laxmi Bai’s rule, one can witness that even today this topic remains an anathema which no historian wishes to research in an authentic light. Hence, this leaves Laxmi’s Bai representation an ambiguity – she is guilty or she is not guilty but at the end of the day, the allegations still manage to mar her image and lead to a crass misrepresentation. Tapti Roy in speaking about the event, remarks on the ambivalent and rather ambiguous approach taken up by the historians who have not been able to decisively put to rest the various interpretations of the event when he states:

To Indian scholars, it was Lakshmi Bai’s subsequent actions, her valiant resistance to British forces and her death fighting them created the image of undying heroine and a martyr. For the British biographers, her complicity or her innocence in the ghoulish act (The Jhansi Massacre) decided if she were to be compared to Joan of arc or Jezebel.

(Raj of the Rani 110)

While, examining Mahasweta Devi’s work, it was discernable how Devi, after having analysed the official sources (colonial and Indian) as well as oral sources, outrightly comments that Queen was not complicit in the massacre. Here, Devi attacks the historical work by Kayle and Malleson titled History of The Indian Mutiny for severely tarnishing the name of the Queen in relation to the massacre. To contradict this character assassination on
the Queen, the author cites letters from colonial officers namely Colonel Martin who in contradiction to the colonial verdict negated the same and confessed:

We have treated (Laxmi Bai) with extreme injustice and cruelty. Nobody knows the truth as much I do. That innocent women of a noble character was not in the least involved with the massacre of June 4, 1857....a single survivor of the massacre could have determined the truth.

(Queen of Jhansi 114)

This is one such instance that embodies the message of the novel - to rectify the errors in the representation of Laxmi Bai. On the similar vein, Mahasweta Devi has taken up scores of other such events after meticulously scrutinizing the colonial as well Indian sources to put forth a subaltern story of the queen.

While investigating the Victorian narratives about Laxmi Bai, Harleen Singh comments that mostly the colonial narratives depicted the Queen as a “disobedient subject”, “an unruly queen” and also “real life representation of the blood-thirsty Indian goddess Kali” which could be a sign of the anxiety faced by the British regarding their own female monarch (The Rani of Jhansi 4-11) Some of the colonial texts which perpetrate such disreputable representations are: Gillean’s The Rane: A Legend of the Indian Mutiny (1887), Hume Nesbit’s The Queen’ Desire (1893), Philip Cox’s play The Rani of Jhasni (1993) and George MacDonald Fraser’s Flashman in the Great Game (1975) depict Rani in derogatory and highly objectionable metaphors of erotic overtones (The Rani of Jhansi 25). In analysing her from the nationalist concerns, Singh further states that as Laxmi Bai has been consecrated as a divine figure, such a depiction has “relegated” her and other historical figures “to the space of myth and legend” which hence discounts “the political and military acumen of the national female leader... (And) do not extol women’s aptitude to lead” (The Rani of Jhansi 4). Singh also cites the Time magazine’s photographic montage of history’s ‘Top Ten bad- Ass Wives’ to show that though her story is being retold but such a retelling is taking place under the “crass metaphors of tabloid headlines (The Rani of Jhansi 17). Due to these contrasting and
polemical stances on the apparent history of Laxmi Bai, the provenance of Laxmi Bai has become a contentious subject.

While understanding the misrepresentation of Laxmi Bai especially by the colonial texts, one can approach how the imperial regime viewed the native women of India. The colonizers legitimatised their right to rule India based on the perception that, “British were saving Indian women from the barbarities of their archaic world... (and it) was built upon the perceived state of persecution faced by native women” (The Rani of Jhansi 17). Now if the native women of India were seen as damsels in distress and under such a milieu, there were to occur a rebellious woman who took it upon herself to fight the injustices, how will the coloniser recognize her then? In such a case, the imperial stratagem to enslave the country becomes redundant and almost collapses, as there is no need of their governance once the apparent victims are defending themselves on their own. Considering these observations, if Rani had been a victim of social exploitation, she would have cherished the commiseration of the British, but she rebelled as an “insurrectionary subaltern” against the regime and hence was seen as a threat that was therefore subdued through deliberate misrepresentation. It can be averred:

As an Indian woman relegated to a life of purdah, the Rani may have garnered sympathy, but as an Indian Queen who came out of the veil in rebellion against the British, she posed an interminable problem of representation and comprehension. And as an Indian widow who had become sati or shaved her head and dedicated herself to a life of hardship, she may have excited a chivalric response, but as a royal widow who commanded troops and took British lives, she defied both rescue and reform. ...(Rani hence) posed a real and symbolic threat to the nation, Britain, undermining both material and ideological foundations of the imperial project.

(The Rani of Jhansi 18)
In the Indian context, women are generally archetyped as “docile”, ‘self-sacrificing’ so much so that Mahatma Gandhi also highlighted this one-sided representation of women while completely disregarding the historical figures like Bhima Bai Holkar who fought against the British in 1817, or even Rani Chennamma who fought the East Indian Company in 1824. This grim picture reveals how women have been subalternized in the society due to their limited as well as provincial depiction by the masses as a whole. In these archetypes, the evidence of why a history gets contaminated or altered can be evidenced. It is by choosing in which type, should the historian dress history, that history is removed farther from truth. We know (are made to know) about women, as docile and subservient as that is how women are generalised and hence known in our society. Now in writing a history of say Laxmi Bai, the entrenched knowledge of this archetype will certainly interfere with the writing of history as it is through it the different shades of history will be stroked, Certainly then, if such had been the dominant themes of representation of women in India, the figure of Rani Laxmi Bai as a subaltern insurgent surely subverts and breaks the stereotypical images rendered as the only legitimate and accepted images (The Rani of Jhansi 20). The objective in discussing these archetypes of women in India is to emphasise on why Rani Laxmi Bai has been misrepresented both by nationalist and colonial powers and how Mahasweta Devi arrests these gendered metaphors to depict Laxmi Bai as a human in totality - freedom fighter, administrator, wife, mother, and a Queen. It is to be further emphasised that though Laxmi Bai was not a victim or subaltern, the question of subalternity that is being discussed here is in her representation. Her representation has been an aberration that has eclipsed the truth of her life, that is;

Neither entirely victim, nor agent, the Rani is objectified by colonial and nationalist discourse (which) necessitates a larger, multilevel project of representation...(there is no) paucity of narrative about her , but (the countless ways) in which she is textually articulated defy any attempt to uncover a singular historical archive or literary figure.

(The Rani of Jhansi 23)
Hence, Laxmi Bai does not embody a “lost voice” but exemplifies a “lost text” that “remains eclipsed, elided or erased within a prolific retelling” and due to this misrepresentation continues as a tradition without any scope left for correcting the same (The Rani of Jhansi 24). In analysing Laxmi Bai as a lost text than a lost voice, the impetus has been to suggest that Laxmi Bai was capable of speaking in that she was not a subaltern who could not speak or be heard. But the notion of subalternity that is observed in her is in the representation of her history. There have been, as the chapter has attested, histories on the life and struggle of Laxmi Bai; most are inaccurate, most exaggerated and glorifying while other pungent in reproach etc. One has to waddle through multitudes of texts to find the histories which are reasonably able to capture the truth of Laxmi Bai. Hence, it is like finding a needle in a haystack that Laxmi Bai is examined as a lost text than a lost voice.

In the novel Queen of Jhansi, Mahasweta has put forth a question, “What is history? What is history made of? If history is about people, then I would say that the history created on the roads of Jhansi that day was unparalleled...the history that was made that day by thousands of Indians is the real history of India” (Jhansi 209). The importance of history has been aptly enforced by Mahasweta Devi as it is through history the general public can recognize the subaltern or realize the true representation in the web of countless ones. It has been her attempt to unearth ‘the truth of history’ which she has found in ‘folk songs, rhymes, ballads and in various popular stories’ that form the rich oral repository of Bundelkhand (The Queen of Jhansi x). The novel Queen of Jhansi is a testament to the continual neglect of oral tradition that has been overlooked to canonize the published word. Mahasweta has ventured into the local terrains of Bundelkhand to know first-hand the Orality and accordingly integrate the written histories in search for a subaltern historiography. The author has built her novel with an aim to recover the oral history and examine the misrepresentation of history that surrounds Laxmi Bai. She has diligently scrutinized the available histories about Laxmi Bai, and instead of neglecting them, she has weighed both sides of the story.

The intent of Mahasweta Devi hence has been to write an authentic history of the Queen of Jhansi. What drove her on this objective was the dearth of written material available on the personal picture of the Rani of Jhansi, which the conventional historians had not been able to highlight. In the backdrop of 1857 rebellion, the novel explores written as well oral
sources to weave a biography which serves as a history that reclaims history and historiography at large. Mahasweta Devi has averred:

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\text{(When) I acquired...a consciousness of history, my curiosity about our national life increased and a wish arose to write an entire book about Queen of Jhansi...at the very beginning of the project I saw that our opportunities for learning about the revolt of 1857-58 were extremely limited. There was a complete absence of books based on factual evidence other than those by English historians...British authorities (to hide the truth) erased...history...seized all papers and documents related to the uprising in order to eradicate the direct evidence of its occurrence. It was also extremely difficult to obtain letters and other documents relevant to the topic. (Rather) There had been no notable attempt to write an authentic volume ...from the Indian point of view.}
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\text{(The Queen of Jhansi ix)}
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Mahasweta Devi when asserts ‘consciousness of history’ does not imply history as past but how she grew cognizant of its powerful ramifications such how history can serve to empower the subaltern either faithfully or overly; can also criminalise the subaltern; relegate him/her to the fringes while forgetting some altogether; and trivialise and over-commemorate the individual etc. It is this awareness of the powerful aspects of history that drove her to identify sources that could, for instance, narrate the story of the tribals as official history was on a strategic path to dump their existence in a stroke of amnesia.

An analysis of these statements highlights the urgency to rewrite and reclaim past of Jhansi ki Rani was mobilised by many serious factors. Firstly, limited research on the topic was a severe gaping hole in the story of the Queen vis-a-vis 1857 revolt. Secondly, the historical records and documents available for the general public were manufactured by the colonial historians hence begging a question on the Indian side of the story. Besides, the
English historians were naturally motivated to frame a history which would eclipse, discredit and even malign the role of the Indian rebels and the Queen while allowing a separatist version of their own interests to speak for history as universalised history. Thirdly, if at all the documents on topic were available, the sheer inaccessibility of the same further marred any hope of knowing the history in its true light. Finally, Mahasweta Devi asserts that barring Rajnikanta Gupta, there has been a wretched dearth of systematic and properly organised work on the history of the revolt. Mahasweta Devi in this regard indicts the history witting in India of being “guilty of unconscionable neglect” for not recognizing the immediate need to rectify this serious blunder. Realizing these polemical issues of fabricating history, Mahasweta Devi hence found the road to truth through Oral literature. In her words:

However the truth of history does not get lost so easily. I found evidence in folk songs, rhymes, ballads and in various popular stories of how local people viewed the rebellion in the places where it happened...No one will forget the Queen, even if there is a no worthy memorial raised to her.

(The Queen of Jhansi x-xvii)

Mahasweta Devi is not only critical of the English authorities but also the Indian elite who failed to resolve the offence played against the Queen of Jhansi and the revolt of 1857. Placing her attack on both sides of the power structures and how they have produced a representation which defies the truth of history, Mahasweta Devi exclaims:

...no measures have been taken yet by the Indian government to erect a memorial for the Indians who were slain (in the revolt)...Other than a statue, there is no monument to the Queen of Jhansi. And only a tiny memorial in Gwalior marks the place of her final rest.

(The Queen of Jhansi xi)

Similarly, attacking the colonial powers, she declares:
Those who usurped the throne also controlled the pen. So we have studied, learned and believed only what they write, what they taught us, in what manner it pleased them.

(The Queen of Jhansi xi)

It might be asked as to why in tracing an Indian history, an evaluation of colonial history is also found pertinent. Ranajit Guha also puts forth this question on the association of colonial history with Indian history and its ramifications. He questions, ‘Why, it may be asked, should this critique of Indian historiography require a critique of colonialist historiography as its preamble? …situating it (Indian history) in the relationship that bonds it to colonialism—a dominance without hegemony” (History and Power in Colonial India, 99). It is pertinent to observe that Indian history is intricately linked with colonialist history. In rewriting a subaltern history the focus has to be shifted to colonialist history as well. The novel taken in this chapter is an abiding proof to this strategic connection of history from Indian to colonist history in order to create a subaltern history. This connecting point attests to the interlocking of colonial life with Indian life, hence the amalgamation of history of both the nations.

As vital and imperative these issues, are, Mahasweta Devi realized the import of each to take a decisive step towards their exposition. She has explored the works of renowned Indian historians such as Sri Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, Sri Surendra Nath Sen, Sri Pratulchandra Gupta, Govindram Chintamanai Tambe and others who she is indebted to in providing authentic documents and research for the novel. She has also examined works by English historians as in: T.R. Holmes’ The History of the Indian Mutiny (1898), W.H. Sleeman’s Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official, Thomas Lowe’s Central India During the Rebellion of 1857 and 1858 (1860), Lt. Gen. James McLeod Innes’s The Sepoy Revolt (1897), and G.W. Forrest’s History of Indian Mutiny (1904) and so forth. In order to collect oral sources and corroborate the written ones, the author also met first-hand the surviving family of Laxmi Bai, Queen’s grandson, Sri Lakshman Rao Jhansi-wale and other residents of Jhansi to write a subaltern history of the Queen. Mahasweta Devi reiterates that the book is not to be considered as history per se as otherwise it would imply a collection of plain facts, prosaic detailing of past, record and chronicle of events etc, which it is not.
Rather, the book is a personal history – a biography of the Queen which serves as a history as well as personal statement to rectify the gross errors in the representation of Laxmi Bai in history.

While examining Mahasweta Devi’s work from other available histories of the Queen, it is observed that Devi has portrayed Queen as one with the common masses, that is as people’s Queen. To put it emphatically, it has rather been an objective of the author to “explore people’s version of history” hence highlighting how her work is indeed a representation of Queen from people’s point of view as after all Laxmi Bai was people’s Queen (*The Queen of Jhansi* 320). The ordinary people of Jhansi remember her as Queen of the masses irrespective of caste or creed, and the same representation Devi has weaved in the novel. What made the Queen so beloved by the masses, it was her unbiased approach towards the people. As Devi writes, “I suppose the fact that the Rani motivated people from all walks of life to rise in revolt against the British, that she earned the respect and support of the people and led a major rebellion in central India” (*The Queen of Jhansi* 316). In saying facts, Devi proclaims that events as revolt of 1987 occurred and further it is also a fact that Rani Laxmi Bai played a role – now whether her role was significant, trivial, treasonous etc is where fact is further narrated, explained and observed in history. The fact of 1857 and role of Laxmi Bai is explained to be either exaggerated or understated or criminalised. Questions based on this fact are raised like - Was she a pioneer, did she side with the natives or the British, and other explanations over the fact.

Laxmi Bai is further represented as an “expression of what India (as a whole) felt...And as a (harbinger) of the first conscious rebellion taking place against the stranglehold of foreign rule (*The Queen of Jhansi* xvii). To establish Queen as the pioneer of the first revolt against the British, Devi writes how the Queen’s decisive rejection of colonial authority was the first ever stance taken by the Indians against the colonizers:

Meri Jhanis doongi nahin (I will not give up my Jhansi) It was historical utterance, because it was the first only protest during a time when rulers of Indian kingdoms...never offered any resistance at all...The first
conscious uprising against the English, and India’s first struggle for freedom...Why is there no evidence or witness of this event available when it is possible to look up facts of much earlier times?

(The Queen of Jhansi 68-92)

The significance of this statement from historical point of view is to show that Laxmi Bai’s role in the history of India’s independence is blatantly lacking and unrecognized which reinforces the need to reclaim history. Why is there such a shameless erasure of history? Why a single-sided or lopsided depiction of events? Though Laxmi Bai has been felicitated and even deified, her pioneering role in the Independence struggle is not acknowledged. Mahasweta Devi hence visited “the memories of Indians” that is the oral sources to find an answer and reach for a history that resolves these brazen discrepancies.

The importance of this fact is suggested when the country was embroiled in the domestic rivalries of local kings and lords, Laxmi Bai united the masses to usher in a national attack on the colonizers. It will be pertinent to note the feudal cum castiest hierarchy of India during those times, as in doing so the role of Rani Laxmi Bai can be evidenced. In the novel, the author represents the Queen as a unifying force who despite the prevailing scourge of caste in the society made every effort to unite the masses under a nationalist banner. In the novel, Mahasweta exposes the selfish interest of some of local rulers who did not align with the queen, rather led by their partisan and parochial interests fought amongst each other, and decided to fight Laxmi Bai instead of the foreign invaders. Mahasweta notes this sorry state of affairs and writes, “...they had no qualms about attacking Jhansi time and again...they almost forgot about the English rule in India...so it is clear that right upto the time of her struggle with the English, she was preoccupied with this internal strife” (The Queen of Jhansi 115-134). The reasoning behind this mutual rivalry between an Indian and an Indian was as highlighted in the novel - racism. The Shudra could not trust the Brahman and the latter would not fight with him even for the sake of national freedom. As Devi writes, “This utter disregard stemming out of a vainglorious racism towards the natives, was becoming clearly evident...” (The Queen of Jhansi 84). Mahasweta further charts the fallouts of this disunited national struggle:
In the first place the leaders of the struggle for independence of 1857 were feudalistic. These feudal leaders had no vision or strategy of mobilizing the anti-British Indians, who had protested though fragmented rebellions everywhere in north and central India.

(The Queen of Jhansi 173)

Prosecuting the zamindari or feudal system of India, Devi in the novel has satirised the feudal cum religious ideology of elitist India. In the novel, Devi has satirised the systems of oppression as in feudalism and religion by incorporating history to substantiate her claim as to how they oppressed the subaltern. It is the discriminatory tradition and exploitative measures of this ideology that she has exposed to set the need for subaltern identity. In doing so, Mahasweta has also depicted the internal rivalry among the native elites to snatch power from each other and win favour with the British. It is an established fact that the British consolidated the rivalry of caste to perpetuate their economic profits and territorial annexation. To this effect, Mahasweta has meticulously depicted the elitist manoeuvring of power by the colonials as well as the native landlords and how the subaltern became a doubly oppressed community. Ranajit Guha has opined over this doubly articulated colonialism in India when declares:

Dominance in colonial India was doubly articulated. It stood on the one hand for Britain’s power to rule over its South Asian subjects, and on the other, for the power exercised by the indigenous elite over the subaltern amongst the subject exploitation itself…the alien moment of colonist dominance was matched thus by an indigenous moment within the general configuration of power.

(Dominance without Hegemony 100)
Consequently, there comes across a cycle of discrimination which is passed from one authority to another. In the pre-colonial times, the landlords discriminated against the peasants, the tribals, and other communities due to the ideology of racism. While in the British era, this racism was practised by the colonialist against the Indian masses as a whole. Mahasweta Devi has apprehended the clash of races in the novel, which propagated the germ of subaltern exploitation. In response to this subaltern exploitation, the leaders as Laxmi Bai rose to unite the masses in a collective action against the native elites and the colonial elites. This collective action became what we know as the Great rebellion of 1857. In observing the rigid social stratification of the Indian society and the consolidation of the same by the British, the role of Rani Laxmi Bai hence becomes most significant. Yet as Devi notes, this very role played by the Queen in the national freedom has been forgotten in the annals of time. Queen’s role was indispensable as she “had not taken to fighting motivated by a desire for her own personal success...the uprising against the British was transformed under the Queen’s leadership into a genuine struggle for independence.” ([The Queen of Jhansi](#)) 175. To add more, such was her espirit-de-cors that Hindus and Muslims, united to attack the imperial regime, yet there lays a gaping hole as discussed in the bountiful but shallow and superficial representation of the Queen. In the mire of these crises, internal and foreign, Mahasweta has hence represented the life of Laxmi Bai. She wishes to convey that Laxmi Bai had an identity which was:

…different from that of a vegetarian woman preoccupied with religious duties, who was overflowing with gratitude at the mercy of the English and was only an unworthy representative of an eroding feudal system.

([The Queen of Jhansi](#)) 88

Here, Mahasweta creates a subaltern history of Laxmi Bai emphatically that brings out the essence of the woman unlike the stereotypical version she has been portrayed in. It was with this aim, Mahasweta had initiated her novel by saying, ‘it is a humble effort to write a biography of the Queen’ ([The Queen of Jhansi](#)) xi ii. It has to be noted, that in her works Mahasweta historicizes the individual and “along with this agenda of historicization runs a harsh, powerful critique of an exploitative and repressive socio-economic and religious system…with her insider knowledge and subalternized perception of power structures and the
corrupt ways of the socially and economically dominant classes (Anthology 42). That is, in ushering forth a foundational representation, Mahasweta Devi also considers it to be a platform to attack the power structures which distorted the representation in the first place. Hence, her novel can be observed as an inquisition of the culprits as well as a hearing of the petitioner with an aim to expose and correct the errors simultaneously.

Giving an encompassing representation of the Queen, Mahasweta Devi further makes references to the habits, routines, propensities and general tenor of Queen and her relationship with the people. In making such approaches towards a subaltern representation, her target has been to submit a subaltern history which rectifies the orthodox telling of Queen that has hitherto undermined the real essence or human element of the Queen. Devi writes about Laxmi Bai’s favourite choice of weapon – a sword, her unpretentious tastes, Pathani outfit, zeal to preserve of scholarly books, her equestrian feats and her belief in an egalitarian set- up that disregards discrimination of the masses into high and low caste. All these diverse details, Devi has collected from exploring the native places Queen had visited and the people living in these locations. It is hence Orality which aided Devi to complete the human picture of Laxmi Bai to give a whiff of fresh air to the till now mundane and rather one-sided representation of the Queen. As the writes states:

The details of the Rani’s habits, her clothes, her favourite things attracted me very much. Probably because I am a woman, my perspective has been different. I wanted to know how she began her day, spent her leisure time, brought up her son, organised a separate force of women soldiers, looked after her army and such other things. I was interested in not only learning about her fight against the British and the facts of that war but wanted to get under the skin of the person. The various roles she had to play...

(The Queen of Jhansi 316)

Orality hence was her repository of stories but also a yardstick that helped the author measure what was truth and what was a lie. It not only provided her with facts but also the details which have brought the essence of the Laxmi Bai to the readers. Appropriating official
sources had been a tradition followed by most of the Indian historians, which Mahasweta Devi has been critical of. It was by means of incorporating the oral sources that she had been able to rectify the misrepresentation of Laxmi Bai and create a subaltern story that is built on the apostles of truth. Mahasweta Devi appreciates that Orality is being recognized as a source of history and that historians are no longer trivialising its importance. She writes:

Today, when the importance of oral history is widely recognised, it feels good to look back and think that I had turned to reclaim history through such sources...After all what is history made of...If Rani’s image has remained in the collective memory of the people of Bundelkhand so deeply so as to produce rhymes... (then) history definitely needs to be retrieved...(Further she comments) I feel that history comes alive authentically through the oral tradition.

(The Queen of Jhansi 320)

In acknowledging the significant role of Orality, the author also laments that due to the surmounting significance given to written texts especially of western origin, Indian historians scarcely had given importance to the words of their own countrymen. She cites how Indian historians like relied, as mentioned earlier, on the British sources to know the history of Laxmi Bai, and completely disregarded the words of G. C. Tambe who had reliable knowledge about the Queen. In noting these statements, it is further attested that Orality despite its significance still has a long road ahead of it till it attains legitimacy as a source of history.

Speaking about the trivialisation of Orality, G.N. Devy also remarks how oral literature despite its latent significance is yet to be discovered and appreciated. Devy further states that most of Indian literature is richly composed in oral folklores, myths and legends. But as spoken languages which do not have written script are not deemed worthy of preservation or recognition, these oral literatures are gravely endangered. He states:
...unless we modify the established notion of literature as something written, we will silently witness the decline of various oral traditions. That literature is a lot more than writing is a reminder necessary for our times...In fact, every written piece of literature contains substantial layers of Orality...the elements of Orality need to be significant if the work is to be effective.

(Painted Words xiii)

Orality despite its significance is negated as source of information and this aversion towards it can be understood as to how story or novel is weighed lightly in comparison to history. It is evident, that history is by no means a story. But story in Indian context has a significant role to play in subverting historical record which produce false histories. Story in India called as ‘katha’ has been an instrument of power for the subaltern, as they did not have access to the institutions which produced historical accounts and so the subaltern would voice stories, folklores and legends to convey their identity; while history has been a weapon of the elite to justify and perpetuate its dominance. History hence was an ivory tower aloof of the sufferings of the subaltern classes and had ennobled itself as an impregnable, exclusive and authoritative structure. In the wake of this cliquish possession of history by the elite, the subaltern had only one alternative to articulate his/her identity - by means of story. To add more, story further became an instrument by which the subaltern or a historian/novelist in case of Mahasweta Devi could subvert the official records to establish the voice of the subaltern. It can be stated:

‘Itihas’...stands for the story of a dominant tradition. On the other hand, the term ‘story’, liberates even marginalized groups of Indian society and enables them to enter the meaningful domain of knowing, inventing, creating and telling the past as a constant dialogue with the present. The ‘Story’ is not the fiction or fictional narrative of the printed literary world. The ‘story’ as narrated by
communities is not just fiction. It is an existential narrative reflecting living cultural contexts.

*(Folklore Tradition 43)*

In examining these assertions, Devi’s role in employing oral records as in stories serves to rectify histories produced by dominant classes. Further, the stories as in folklores, myths and legends are an embodiment of the subaltern identity – its voice, consciousness and struggles. Hence, story is undoubtedly not history but it sure works as an empowering agent of the subaltern and a corroborative gauge for history. Further, in debating about history vs novel, it can be noted that each do not supersede each other but serve to corroborate each other. There can be no preference, as any preferential treatment towards novel vs history is only conducive to unnecessary confrontations and binary oppositions.

Further, in exploring the dynamics of Orality, it includes two categories which though confounded are but altogether different. Oral History and the other which is Oral Tradition are distinctly apart in the nuanced difference between the two. Philippe Dennis has investigated the disparity between the two in order to bring forth the significance of Orality. In noting how he has analysed the intricate manner in which Orality serves as a method of history writing, one can recognize the manner in which Orality functions and propagates history. In highlighting the technique of Orality, and distinguishing between the difference between Oral history and Oral tradition, Dennis avers:

Oral history is based on reminiscences, hearsay, or eyewitnesses accounts that occurred during the lifetime of the people who are interviewed. Oral historians typically interview participants in recent or very recent events, when historical consciousness in the communities is still in a flux. But what happens when stories are passed from mouth to mouth for a period of time beyond the lifetime of the people? Jan Vansigna, a Belgian anthropologist, called these stories “oral tradition” to distinguish them from oral
In this school of thought, Oral history is considered predominantly legitimate while Oral tradition is given negligible precedence. The debate on this polemical stance has been taken up by critics of history to exert due importance to Oral tradition as well. What is oral tradition, how is it a methodology of history, its working and its validity, how can it be ascertained? Jan Vansina answers these contentious questions beginning with the assumption that oral tradition is history. He claims that oral tradition or the messages from the ancient times exist but due to their inaccessibility they are considered either absent or are fabricated. It is due to the unwritten, volatile hence inaccessible nature of the oral tradition, it is dubiously considered a form of history. Vansina claims:

Oral traditions make an appearance only when they are told...the utterances are transitory but the memories are not. No one in oral societies doubts that memories can be faithful repositories which contain the sum total of past experience and explain the how and why of present day conditions... “Ancient things are today” or “History repeats itself”....culture is reproduced by remembrance put into words and deeds. The mind through memory carries culture from generation to generation...Oral traditions are documents of the present as they are told in the present...they also embody a message from the past...Does this situation and the reliance on memory automatically deprive oral tradition of all validity as source of history?

(Oral Tradition as History xii)

From this discussion, oral tradition comes across as a process while its products are the messages which are transmitted from one generation to another. Hence, unlike oral history, oral tradition is not contemporary and depends on the messages which have passed
on from one period of time to another. If it is passed then this reveals its special purpose, and as it has not been supplanted yet (as in the case of Indian tribes or in parts of Africa etc.) its importance cannot be undermined. According to E. Bernheim, the first-hand narrative includes eyewitness reports while second-hand consists of hearsay reports of events which can be equated to reported narrative (Oral Tradition 3). The American ethnohistorian R.A. Hamilton suggests that in order to prove the reliability of oral tradition, it has to be confirmed by other sources and cannot be taken up as a sole source of history. He states:

..oral tradition ought never to be used alone and unsupported. It has to be related to the social and political structure of the people who preserve it, compared with the traditions of neighbouring peoples, and linked with the chronological indications of genealogies and age-set cycles, of documented contents with literate people, of dated natural phenomenon such as families, and eclipses and of archaeological finds.

(Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology 7)

In this exposition, it is to be noted that what makes Oral tradition reliable, is its encompassing linkages with social, political and cultural ethos of the times. It cannot be explored in seclusion of the structures of the society, and has to imbibe in it the culture of the masses. There have been various attitudes towards Orality be it Oral history or Oral tradition, some calling it unreliable while others demand it should be substantiated by the canons of historical methodology. But these debates do not condemn Orality as completely unreliable and also do not uphold it as containing the kernel of historical truth on its own. In relation to other modes of history, Orality can be examined and considered a source of history. The societies such as tribes in India, do not have a written script, and Mahasweta Devi has in her works discovered these people while recording their history in strict accordance to their Orality. In the novel taken, for instance, Mahasweta Devi has meticulously substantiated the Oral history of the historic figure Laxmi Bai with the official records of India as well as abroad. In her works as a whole it can be asserted that, “the divide between oral and written
history is a misconception. Writing and Orality do not exclude each other; rather they are complementary” and the same is evidential in the historical technique employed by Mahasweta Devi where Orality is complementary to writing (“Oral Traditions” British Columbia University).

It can be, consequently, ascertained that Orality as evidenced in the chapter aids in furnishing a subaltern history by rectifying false representations, and apprehending dominant epistemological records which harbour subalternity. In the chapter the attempt has been to formulate three major findings in order to propose a methodology which expounds the major debates of representation vis-a-vis subalternity. These have been: (i) representation that breaks superficial or gallant depictions; (ii) misrepresentation and subalternity; and (iii) Orality as complementary to subaltern history. Hence, the attempt has been to recognize how fabricated representations result in the production of bogus histories that act as official contagion of falsehoods or misrepresentations. The end result being that the subaltern in question remains relegated to the margins as an outsider, as well as an unsung participant to the point of being criminalised or scandalised as witnessed in the case of Laxmi Bai. In examining the novel, it was palpable that incorporation of oral sources substantially resolved these polemics of representation and subaltern history. Besides, Mahasweta Devi’s approach to Orality in this regard can be seen as a step forward towards realising the significance of this field. In an interview, when she was asked about her adherence to oral tradition, the author claimed:

To me history means the blank space between two printed lines. Therein is the true history of the people. (The) song (Orality) about Rani ki Jhansi is an example of that space because...they would never appear in history books. So whatever I have learnt in my life is from the people. I have gone to them, I respect them and I return to them.

(The Big Bookshelf 77)
True, it can be said that in rectifying official history and rewriting it, the chapter has replaced it with a new paradigm of representation. The question however is - is the new model, that is subaltern history of Laxmi Bai as ascertained in Devi’s novel, a useful one? Subaltern history as studied in the chapter, is established on the notion to: firstly resurrect the importance of Orality as aboriginals in India, for example, do not have a written script and hence their existence is expressed in folklores, legends and songs etc. Besides it takes the historian closer to the speaker to know the truth (or a good measure of it) first-hand; secondly it highlights the individual for instance in analysing peasant revolts, the critics of Subaltern Studies emphasised on the peasant as a human latent with subaltern consciousness (and that the latter was not imported). Further how peasant revolt was an organic insurgency as opposed to its false representation in the official records; further, subaltern history does not ennoble itself as absolute or indisputable; and finally it may be condemned to be carrying a figment of truth as histories generally are, but here a conscious effort is made to write a good degree of truth. In writing a subaltern history of Laxmi Bai, Devi hence has attacked how conventional histories especially the ones which commemorated her to the pedestal of a goddess failed to appreciate her human existence and instead made her a divine figment of imagination. Similarly texts which denigrated her for reasons non-existent and concocted, further separated her from the reality of the past.

Hence, is the new model a reliable one? The answer is yes. In analysing the fabricated histories of Laxmi Bai (which are fabricated not because of the inherent error of history, but due to the intentional stratagem of the elite to undermine and disparage Laxmi Bai), it can be said that this model indeed serves to reach a degree closer to truth by retrieving the ‘lost text’ on Laxmi Bai. This text, as observed in the chapter, cohesively addresses the human element of Laxmi Bai in the backdrop of revolt of 1857. Further, as claimed by Devi, the sources she has collected for her work have been written as well as oral wherein written sources comprise colonial as well as nationalist works while oral sources include folklore and memory. The purpose of Mahasweta Devi has been to address the people’s narrative about Rani and to highlight her story as a story of the common masses.

Justifiably, this representation of the queen which carries in itself as higher degree of truth, focuses on firstly Rani’s pioneering role in 1857 without any hidden agenda of colonial
or nationalist working; secondly to rewrite and thereby rectify the gross misrepresentation; thirdly to narrate Rani as a realistic character from the point of authentic history than as a gendered subject and lastly to observe Rani’s freedom struggle as “intertwined” with the low caste communities as Dalits and hence showing how both had equal role to play in reclaiming the “shared heritage of the postcolonial nation” (The Rani of Jhansi 27).

In her emblematic history-writing, Mahasweta Devi has also traced the individual in history in regards to Titu Mir. In the novel, by the same, she has defied the misrepresentation of peasant rebels as derivatives of Nationalistic struggles and colonial regime. Her novel is claimed to be a historical tale which aims to address Titu Mir as a hero of his own story rooted in the larger socio-economic situation of his era. The novel is not only a highlight of the peasant as a rebel but his consciousness as well which, as analysed in the chapter, is generally purported to be created by elitist power structures and hence relegating the peasant to the margins of his own tale.

In investigating the theoretical framework of Subaltern Studies, its approach of ‘history from below’ attempts to rewrite official history by scrutinizing elitist records and thereby retrieving the agency of the peasant class. Peasant revolt and representation of a peasant or a subaltern in totality has been a key element which has governed the first phase of Subaltern Studies. Representation of the peasant rather has been a major concern in history-writing with respect to subaltern history. Originally the objective of Subaltern Studies was to underscore “what is the true form of the subaltern” which later became an encompassing question “how is the subaltern represented” which gave impetus to representation by scrutinising available records and rewriting history with accurate claims of representation (Empire and Nation 296). The subaltern critics have attempted to highlight the shocking irony of official records which disown the peasant as a participant in India’s freedom struggle but do not err to highlight him as a criminal of Indian nation (Guha Elementary Aspects). This gross and unchecked misrepresentation which is abiding in the official history is a proof of the tradition of falsification that has continued even now when it comes to representation of the peasant. This intentional misrepresentation of peasant has been a strategic violence committed by colonial and native elites to hijack the objective of the revolt which was overthrow of the usurper.
In the Indian context, peasant revolts have been a harbinger of India’s freedom struggle and despite their pioneering role in launching a massive demand for independence, their misrepresentation or rather lack of representation is highly objectionable. In reading the records of radical historiography which correctly incorporate every element of peasant’s agrarian histories, the role of the peasant as observed above, serves as an apocalypse on Indian as well as colonial records of peasant uprising. Availing Carlyle’s rendition of the word ‘apocalypse’, radical histories or ‘history from below’ find out the truth, that is hidden, deliberately misrepresented and bypassed by the official records. Further, in continuing the practice of misrepresentation, when the peasants are vilified as a fanatic, their revolt is also condemned or undermined “purely spontaneous and unpremeditated”. Ranajit Guha in recording the authentic version of a peasant revolt has attacked this crass misrepresentation when he says, “The truth is quite to the contrary.... Insurgency, in other words, was a motivated and conscious undertaking on the part of the rural masses” (Reading Subaltern 59).

In the light of this sorry state of affairs, the chapter examines how Mahasweta Devi’s tale on the peasant revolt spearheaded by Titu Mir, works as an intervention in apprehending the almost persistent and outrageous falsification of subaltern accounts for ulterior motives of power. In recovering the truth, Mahasweta Devi indicts the historians who have produced unfaithful and scandalous records of the revolt and stamped Titu Mir, a folk hero and a peasant rebel, as a violent extremist. In her novel, which she has rendered as a historical fiction to revisit history, the author has commented how the authentic account of history has been smothered as historical records have been rewritten from the stage of misrepresentation. In doing so, the author attests to the systematic institution of misrepresentation which has obliterated the actual records in favour of partisan, politicised, and elitist historiography. Mahasweta Devi writes and in noting her claim, the argument of the chapter can be ascertained:

History will be rewritten from today. Some months later the English and Bengali newspapers will get wind of the story and vilify Titu Mir; they will bay for what little remains of the Wahabis’ blood. And hired
historians will swear that Titu was a thorough communal fanatic. And this will be the history after today.

*(Titu Mir 106-107)*

In this stratagem of libel, the elite hence stamps the peasants as heartless and maniacal “fanatics”, while branding the revolt as “wanton atrocities”. *(Prose 48)*. In this deliberate denigration of peasants, the objective of the elite has been to firstly criminalise the peasant, secondly justify its ruthless retaliation against him, and in due course acquit itself of any censure. Mahasweta Devi has vehemently exposed this underbelly of misrepresentation, while signifying how peasant uprisings in India despite being a clarion call for India’s independence struggle, have been calculatedly consigned to amnesia. And if they are explored in the historical records, the masses are misled to accept the wrongful representation as the authentic one rather these calumnies have sunk so deep in the psyche of the masses that drawing an analogy between peasant as a fanatic, and peasant revolt as a ‘mindless response’ does not raise any objection.

Mahasweta Devi in the beginning of the novel sets the tone – Titu’s personality as akin to a leader; his interest in daring activities; his curious conversations with the sanyasis and fakirs reminiscent of the war between these groups and the British; the famine; the Santhals coerced to plant Indigo; zamindars and their exploitative practices, and in the course of the novel, the author now and then intersperses these details with ample significance to Titu Mir as a hero of his story. Devi, as we turn the pages of the novel, has developed a historical narrative of why the peasants were forced to revolt. In doing so, Mahasweta Devi has depicted the culpable reasons to highlight the cause behind the making of a subaltern consciousness which eventually drove the peasant to revolt against such inhuman injustices. As traced in the novel, and in the historical retelling by subaltern critics, the peasants were provoked to rebel due to many culpable reasons as: first, land settlement process namely Permanent Settlement which made the British head of revenue collection etc and due to which the peasants were forced to pay high taxes; and second, the indigo plantation was made peremptory over food crops, and it was observed that indigo gravely effected the fertility of
the lands. The peasants were hence not only bearing the brunt of colonial oppression, but as Devi notes the zamindars, the police and other structures of authority were also implicated in the exploitation of the subaltern. Devi hence also attacks the native elite for conniving with the British and allowing such a state to solidify itself in India in those times.

All these episodes serve as tell-tale reasons of how the peasants were recurrently made victims of elitist tantrums of power and greed. These were the incendiary reasons which naturally instigated the peasants to protest against the exploitative measures taken by the British in the whole of India. And it was due to these inhuman degrees of exploitation, as Partha Chatterjee notes, “...subaltern consciousness... evolved out of the experience of subordination – out of the struggle...the daily routine of servitude, exploitation, and deprivation”(Empire and Nation 292). Consequently, Devi highlights how Titu Mir’s conscious awakening of being exploited was not only on a personal level but that he had grown cognizant of the silent sufferings of his fellow peasants as well. Further, for representing the affliction and wretchedness of the peasants, he was misrepresented as an extremist. It is only in rewriting history from the vantage point of the peasants, can this monstrous subversion of truth be arrested and corrected. The novel in this regard hence as a reconstructed history serves as a significant evidence of peasants and peasant revolt and how they have received marginal representation.

In writing the narrative of Titu Mir, Mahasweta Devi has at the outset explored the identity of the man to break the stereotypical depiction of tribals to yield the truth. Her motive has been to rectify the history but not at the expense of romanticizing the character. She has portrayed the man in his true light by gathering facts and Orality associated with his legend. This technique of historicizing is a break from the traditional notion of historiography that harps on a stereotypical impression of the peasant rebels. The author has opposed this depiction to represent the reality of the anti-colonial and anti-native bourgeoisie struggle of Titu Mir. The subaltern critics have also attacked this stereotypical and rather pastoral method to romanticize the tribal identity. As has been pointed out by Guha:
Historiography has been content to deal with the peasant rebel merely as an empirical person or member of a class, but not as an entity whose will and reason constituted the praxis called rebellion. (Represented by) metaphors assimilating peasant revolts to natural phenomena: they break out like thunder storms, heave like earthquakes, spread like wildfires, infect like epidemics...rebellion (is depicted as) an instinctive and almost mindless response...insurgency is regarded as external to the peasant's consciousness and Cause is made to stand in as a phantom surrogate for Reason, the logic of that consciousness...How did historiography come to acquire this particular blind spot and never find a cure?

(Selected Subaltern 46)

Mahasweta in this regard has done away with the gallant depiction of the hero and his peasant community. She has rendered a realistic portrayal to expose the truth than digress over the truth in flamboyant flourishes of romanticised content; as the latter deals with only the eddy over the ocean than the truth which is lying in its abyss. In her writing, Mahasweta Devi has actively pursued the human element which is often negated as paltry or mulled over as insignificant. In view of this, her works are indeed a radical rewriting of history and reconstruction of historiography as a model. In light of the treatment of her characters as humans and how she accords them primary pedestal, her novels have been considered epitome of historical fiction. It has been her endevour rather raison d'ètre as evidenced in her own words, that human history is her primary concern:

My interest in human history deepened though it was different from the interest professed by conventional historians. I tried to examine the impact of history on human beings. Awareness of history leads to the
enquiry of moving human patterns, documentation of time, struggles and revolts. All these constitute history and I am a part of it....my creative account of Sidho-Kano's rebellion and my narrative of the first Santhal revolt of Baba Tilkamajhi, my stories in Gram Bangla (Rural Bengal) -- and many others. Even the very recent defiance of Suraj Ragrai who tried to stop the construction of a dam that would have evicted tribals in the eighties should be mentioned in this context. I wrote on this defiance as well....literature (should convey) human cum historical perceptive.

(“The Reaction Has Been So Minimal” 23 April 2001)

Devi’s historiographic technique, enables her to detain the falsification, and reveal the character in its real make. In her emphasis on the individual, she ensures the role of the subaltern in his own story should at best be returned to him. Hence, in arresting the blind spot that was blatantly obvious in most of the historic accounts of Titu Mir, Devi’s novel from the individual’s perspective carries significant weight as she states, “There is absolutely no doubt that there are yawning gaps in our conventional historiography” and hence her endeavour to rectify history (“The Reaction Has Been So Minimal” 23 April 2001). As traced above, Titu Mir’s era was rent with double exploitation which had terrorized the peasant community to suffer as mute victims. It is claimed in the novel, that though the tales of alarm carried on, Titu Mir remained aloof from such injustices until one day when he met a fakir, and through a verbal exchange, he was mobilised to carry the weight of his brethren on his shoulders. The significance of the episode as narrated by Devi is how a “spoken word” had the power to sensitise Titu of the emergency of the times and stir an awareness among his fellow peasants to fight the colonial and native oppressors as one (). The fakir in his oral reminiscences of peasant insurgency known as Sanyasi Revolt recounts to Tit Mir, what he and his people fought for, and so allows Titu Mir to relate and rouse his consciousness in the wake of the brutality he and his peasant peers faced every day. In reading the verbal dialogues between the fakir and Titu himself, it is observed, how the “spoken words” of the Fakir and the prophetic cum intense meaning they conveyed, Titu Mir was facing a transition:
(Titu Mir) had never imagined such things. As he listened, a fever seemed to enter his blood, a kind of euphoria. For the rest of his life, he never forgot that encounter. And when Titu Mir, the farmer’s son became the famous Titu Mir, that night unwittingly played its part in the making of the man.

(Titu Mir 17)

The very germ of insurgency arose in Titu Mir’s consciousness that was triggered by a mere spoken word. That word shook him to the exploitation he had been facing but was numb to it. It should but be noted, that the spoken word only provoked his consciousness that was already inside of him. He knew about the abuse of the zamindars and the colonial sahibs, but what the episode triggered was his slumbering consciousness – it awakened it rather than create it. Devi also highlights this point by writing episodes wherein Titu Mir would help his peers when faced with social injustice. In doing so, Devi intends to show that Titu Mir was cognizant of the oppression faced by him and his people. As Devi notes, “...Ever since he was a boy, he has been unable to tolerate injustice. He’d give his shirt to the needy... he’d pour out grain for visiting fakirs” (Titu Mir 45). In his intolerance towards injustice, Devi intends to prove Titu Mir like many peasants were the author of their consciousness than an outsider.

In analysing the encounter between the hero and the fakir, one can discern the role of a prophet and a reformer in mobilising a peasant revolt. In the academic discourse of Subaltern Studies, this aspect is given detailed analysis. It is stated that due to the spoken words of the Sanyasis etc, the ordinary rebels as Titu Mr, Birsa Munda and more were able to manifest the spoken work into a collective action. This school of thought lays significant importance to the spoken word and can be appraised in the following lines:

The spoken word was much more important to the transmission of insurgency. Here a key role was played by authored spoken utterances...constituted a critical
component of the charisma of the leaders in worlds of subaltern insurrection...represented the desire for change in religious idiom. Thus, insurgents, such as Titu Mir, Sido and Kanhu Santhals and Birsa Munda spoke the inspired language of prophets and reformers, their politics were conceived and expressed in religious terms...trigger and mobiliser of subaltern imagination.

(Selected Subaltern 145)

The spoken word, which could trigger a subaltern imagination, highlights the profound significance of oral transmission. It was a verbal encounter with the prophetic and reforming ideals of the sanyasi that Titu’s spirit was instilled with euphoria. He became relentless to join the war on the British. Titu also declined the offer to work as a guard for the zamindars as he realized how they swindled the farmers and were subservient marionettes in the regime of the British. The spoken word hence showed him the mirror to his own consciousness which was present but unstirred – like ambers that only need a little thrust to start a fire. In analysing these meanings explicit and implicit in these episodes, one can appreciate how Devi has attempted to narrate Titu Mir as a peasant rebel – an individual with a subaltern consciousness. The aspect of Orality that has been evidenced in the study of peasant revolts with respect to Mahasweta Devi’s Titu Mir, suggests how it served as a vehicle and an instrument of protest. In saying so, the assessment has been that with the help of oral utterances such as rumours, the peasant rebels have been able to communicate alarm, dread and panic of an imminent attack to keep the oppressors on their tenterhooks. Further, in being used as an instrument, Orality as in ‘spoken word’ became a mode of communication between a peasant leader and the masses – to percolate down to the peasant masses the import of the revolt. It worked both as a harbinger of alarm and also a medium of information, message etc. As Guha has averred in his phenomenal Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India:

...rumour is both a universal and necessary carrier of insurgency... (it) helped to spread an insurrection...anonymous speech in its classic form – rumour. (Its formidable significance can judged by
noting how oppressors throughout history engaged) an entire cadre of officials – delators – in collecting and reporting it... (Hence rumour serves a vehicle of) subaltern protest (being an) oral tradition for the dissemination of news...a trigger and mobiliser...and a necessary instrument of rebel transmission.

(252-256)

To further emphasize on the significance of ‘spoken word’, it also been seen in the novel that it serves not only as a platform for political revolution but a religious one, and the same can be understood by observing Titu’s encounter with a Wahabi (a puritan faction of Islam). Titu had had his consciousness awakened, but he needed an ideology that could articulate his concerns for his people. In search for such an ideology, he goes to visit a Wahabi. In his verbal meeting, he not only realise the import of being a Wahabi but it also rakes up his spirits, that he decides to make a pilgrimage to Mecca for strengthening his resolve and finding a strong identity to manifest his consciousness. It is after these episodes, Devi highlights how, “Titu’s prestige was enormously enhanced...” (Titu Mir 50). Further, in speaking with Syed Ahmad, who was a crusader of religious reform and anti-colonial struggle, Titu Mir relates, draws inspiration and observes his own plight while at the end decides how his own people need an ideology to manifest the consciousness. Devi eloquently notes:

I'll (Syed Ahmad) work to overthrow the foreigners. We must cleanse Muslim society of superstition and false belief...and chase the English out of the country...raise a Mujahid army and fight the foreigners. (He also states that I don’t expect rich landlords, maulvis to fight for us but) I believe unshakeably that the poor weavers, both Hindu and Muslim, the farmers, cotton ginners, fabric dyers, all these folk will definitely respond to your call. It is always them who
come forward. Our fight is against injustice of all kinds, against all torture and oppression...Our battle against the English is a holy war, a jihad.

*(Titu Mir 60-61)*

The key aspects as spoken by Syed Ahmad and the points which inform subaltern consciousness (w.r.t Titu Mir) can be highlighted as firstly the need to purge the distortions of Islam, secondly employ its purest ideals to wage a war against the injustices, thirdly unite all the victims against oppressors irrespective of religious affiliations and finally declare a holy war. It is pertinent to note what this new religious ideology is, which has been achieved by rectifying the superstitious interpretations of Islam. It is called the Wahabi Doctrine. Devi has meticulously noted its precepts to highlight how a religious ideology which is shorn of the misrepresentations can serve to be a powerful force behind a revolt. Devi notes through the spoken words of Syed Ahmad:

Islam is verily a religion of peace...The true teachings of peace Islam have become obscured by many later beliefs and superstitions. Poor Muslims are caught in these like flies in a web, and they no longer know the true faith as it was meant to be known.

*(Titu Mir 61)*

The objective behind the retrieval of the pure form of Islam is further attested by Syed Ahmad. In his objective, one see how a peasant reinforces his consciousness as embedded in the reformation of his religion or religious ideology per se. The peasant like Titu Mir and his peers were hence not only driven to oust the colonial and native oppressors but also in a final swoop rid the irrational deformation of religion as well. In discerning the basis of subaltern consciousness, every peasant has had employed necessary means to articulate his/her concerns. In case of Titu Mir, as narrated by Mahasweta Devi and as studied by subaltern critics, it was religiosity which served as a pedestal on which subaltern consciousness was
lucidly and coherently articulated. In order to undermine this meaningful process, colonials often warped it as “absurdities”. Guha notes:

...the regime interprets religiosity as a propagandist ruse used by the leaders to sustain the morale of the rebels. Referring, for instance, to the messianic rumours in circulation it says, 'All these absurdities were no doubt devised to keep up the courage of the numerous rabble. Nothing could be more elitist. The insurgents are regarded here as a mindless 'rabble' devoid of a will of their own and easily manipulated by their chiefs.

(Prose 35)

In a straining effort to secularize the basis of subaltern consciousness, the historians are hell-bent to circumvent the ideologies of religion as formative basis of peasant consciousness. Hence, historiography has not substantially highlighted the towering role religious ideology has played in informing the subaltern consciousness with the notion of justice, morality, ethics, and other humane ideals of religion. In doing so, official history acutely fails to reason why peasants as Titu Mir relied on the essence of religion, and wished to correct its falsities, so that the masses can employ it in its pure and undistorted form to attack the elite forces of power abuse. Rather, historians, “explain it away as a clever but well-intentioned fraud perpetrated by enlightened leaders on their moronic followers—all done, of course, 'in the interests of the people!”(Selected Subaltern 83).

In discussing the subaltern consciousness of Titu Mir, from the perspective of religion, it can be analysed as prompting the awakening of Muslim consciousness. Syed Nesar Ahmad, in tracing the genesis of Muslim consciousness highlights the indispensable role of Titu Mir to have sparked a significant note in this direction. He writes:

Titu Mir’s social and religious program.... (created) a distinct Muslim consciousness. The stress on Puritanism, the banning of all non-Islamic rites and
adopting a distinct appearance...solidified the identity of these fundamentalist followers of Muslims.

*(Origins of Muslim Consciousness 27)*

Devi in the novel highlights the significance of this religiosity which stirred the consciousness of Titu Mir to not only rid the country of the suppressors but also purge the religion from the distortive practises and rituals. Religious ideology hence as observed acts as a unifying as well as powerful persuader of masses, as its precepts are taken to be gospel truths of divine justification and hence claim irrefutable veracity. Therefore, in articulating one’s attack on injustice, the peasants mobilised their stand by means of such an ideology or an ideology which can be considered as equally potent. In order to rid the country of a foreign evil, hence the peasant moved by his consciousness looked closer home by exposing and reforming the distortive renderings of his religion first; and then with a firm footing based on a corrected religious ideology, he was empowered to depose the oppressor. In noting Syed Ahmad’s adherence to this ideology and how he perceived it as a base for attacking the colonial powers, one can note when he claims:

...Company’s rule is turning the whole of Hindustan into a land of enemies ranged against each other. That is, why I say, reform the religion, rid this land of the foreigners and raise an army of mujahids to carry out this task... (it will be hence) a declaration of war. ...(and due to this) poor Muslims (will) begin to see that it is possible to live without blindly obeying the diktats of these god men, they’ll stop being fearful; they’ll take heart... (finally Syed Ahmad’ fight) has been a crusade for the individual’s freedom of worship (reform and consequent empowerment) as well as a revolt of the oppressed against the oppressor (social justice).

*(Titu Mir 62-100)*
In the last line, the need of a religious ideology to articulate one’s consciousness comes forth. Why religion needs reformation is firstly to empower the poor subaltern with a concrete foundation. Once it has been achieved the subaltern can without any doubt believe in the rectified faith and fight for what is right based on an ideology which has been made right. This point can be further analysed in the novel as Mahasweta Devi narrates the history of factors which eventually lead to a revolt, factors being – consciousness, consciousness based on religious ideology and eventually a consciousness that helps manifest a revolt. In regard to Titu Mir and his meeting with Syed Ahmad, which acts as a final push to his awakened consciousness, Devi writes that Titu hence had found “the charm, the incantation that banished fear” and hence had “found the path he was looking for” (Titu Mir 64). It can then be said that religious ideology, therefore, served as a charm, and an incantation to empower the peasant in his finding of a path and the means to tread it to eventually finish it and seek what had been the calling of his consciousness - justice.

In further highlighting the indispensable role of subaltern consciousness, it can be stated that without it a revolt cannot come to pass. A peasant had it, and it was only because of it that there were inestimable peasant revolts. In the novel, Devi has strikingly commented on it when she writes that only those who had suffered at the hands of the oppressors and realised their suffering could be in a position to revolt. It is tempting to note her exact words, when she writes:

(Titu Mir) was coming to realize that only those who had suffered at the hands of zamindars, planters and government officers, had the courage and the strength to stand up, armed with nothing but lathis, against the English and their gun-toting soldiers. (Further she writes) This strength had always been within them, only they had not known it. They had needed a Titu Mir to prove it to them.

(Titu Mir 96)
In analysing the import of these lines, it is evident that peasant consciousness is born out of an experience of exploitation and the realisation of the same, than imported from someone other than the oppressed. Further, the role of Titu Mir or any peasant leader has been to aid in the realization than create it. In saying this, the claim the chapter aims to make is attack the perceptions which grant the agencies such as colonial or nationalist leaders as the purveyors of subaltern consciousness. There is a difference in proving a consciousness and creating one and most of the historic records tend to support the latter. As Devi notes, the consciousness was already inherent, and what Titu Mir did was prove it to the peasants, rather than foster, build, copy-paste one for them. As Partha Chatterjee speaks on the misrepresentation of peasant consciousness, it can be noted how the colonial historians as well as native historians rendered consciousness as an outside product than a conscious self-articulation of the peasant. In attacking the colonial historians, subaltern critics expose how they claimed it was used as a subterfuge by the national parties who conned the peasants to join the leaders and overthrow the British. While, in attacking Indian historians, the critics expose how they deny the peasant the authority of his own consciousness; while stating that because of the nationalist leaders, the peasant was able to rise and rebel. In both these cantankerous interpretations, the peasant is conveniently and most deviously represented as an outsider to his own consciousness. It is thus evidential how such a strain of history has established itself as a faithful record while the peasant as a pioneer of India’s struggle, and maker of his own consciousness is nowhere to be heard except in the radical and reconstructionist works of the authors and historians.

In the backdrop of Titu Mir’s waging of peasant revolt, Devi also narrates the Sepoy Revolt and how Titu Mir was beginning to perceive and discern these recurrent injustices – all of which were due to the complicity between the colonial powers and the native elites. Devi has eloquently noted the effect of these terrible episodes on Titu Mir and how it stimulated his consciousness to fight back:

Thinking of these things...he was gradually changing.
He had stepped out of the narrow village circle, he had gone out into the word and taken his share of hard knocks. His mind was no longer circumscribed by the
horizons of his village, and that’s why all these strange thoughts came visiting him.

\textit{(Titu Mir 54)}

The impetus of these analyses is to show that Titu’s rebellion was not an overnight emotion to revolt against the British but was a gradual change. It was also not built in an irrational fit of rage as most colonialists would interpret. The Subaltern critics have attacked this interpretation of the peasant rebellion and have declared:

The tendency in the discourse of colonial authorities, often reproduced by historians, is to describe and deal with the spread of peasant violence in terms of contagion. In brief, peasant rebellions resemble a disease or virus that spreads through the countryside. This defines both violence and its transmission as irrational. Treating the two as natural phenomenon... (rather) the insurgency involved energies of consciously acting peasant subjects...and its transmission constituted cultural facts of the social world.

\textit{(Selected Subaltern 145)}

This analysis stands as a proof of the conscious effort made by the peasants to rebel against the colonial regime. It was a rational, a collective and a socially-oriented rebellion which aimed at evicting the British as well as purging the evils in the Indian society. In considering these observations, the attempt hence has been to attest significant importance to peasant histories as being an integral part of India’s history as whole. Consequently, the attempt has been to prove that peasant rebellions were significant, an based on a collective action; further, the peasant rebel was an author of his consciousness. This sentiment as found
in the field of Subaltern Studies has been significantly traced in the writings of Mahasweta Devi with special reference to Titu Mir. The sentiment being:

An Indian history of peasant struggles will tell us a great deal of more than simply the story of medieval peasant rebellions. For it is a history that constitutes our living and active present. It is a history that will tell us why, when peasants identified the colonial state as their enemy, as they did in 857 or 1942, they could be so more radical and thoroughgoing in their opposition than their more enlightened compatriots. It is a history that will educate those of us who claim to be their educators. Indeed, an Indian history of peasant struggle as a fundamental part of real history of our people; the task is for the Indian historian to perceive in this consciousness of his or her own self.

(Mapping Subaltern 23)

It should not be a radical thought to conceive history of peasant struggle as a part of Indian history. It should be perceived as a common, accepted and established mode of history, if one is to consider the magnitude of peasant struggles, and the rational cum highly pragmatic modes of subaltern consciousness witnessed; it hence should be generally understood to consider such histories as integral part of Indian history. But such is sadly not the case, which is shocking to say the least. It instigates one to ask, why such a misdemeanour, to what end, and how could possibly a nation call itself enlightened if it bars the most momentous struggles of India namely peasant revolts from its official history. To this endevour which is to ask these questions, find resolutions and expose the perpetrators, the activists as Mahasweta Devi have weaved their historic fiction. To this end, the academic discourse of Subaltern studies debates representation, consciousness and subalternity etc. To this end hence the aim of the chapter has been to realize how peasant rebel history that exists is either inadvertently uninformed, or strategically fabricated; and the peasant as an individual is often superseded by a peasant as a metaphor for the savage hence his life is
represented as a precipitous occurrence than a conscious, organic and human experience. Due to this, the representations which are derived from the tenuous and highly objectionable as well as self-serving sources cement themselves as historical records which further buttress themselves as an unassailable myth.

Broadly speaking, the attempt of the chapter vis-a-vis Titu Mir has been to: first expose this intricate process of misrepresentation, its correlation and affect on history-writing; examining subaltern consciousness in peasants and how it serves as a significant power behind a revolt, also observing the religious foundation of this subaltern consciousness; how Orality as in spoken words, rumours etc serve as agents of an insurgency; and lastly how a subaltern history can rectify the misrepresentation perpetrated by official records etc.

As evident in these observations, which reveal the shocking obliteration of ethnic identity, the chapter hence has examined how Mahasweta intends to empower these people with an identity and a history. Mahasweta Devi therefore, does not leave any stone unturned to rewrite subaltern history. Her novels Queen of Jhansi and Titu Mir are a proof of the significance of history and its relevance in contemporary society. The criminal falsification of elite history has continued to prevail even today. The past which was not documented from an impartial eye has infected the present of the subalterns, and shall slander the future if not rectified. The objective of the novels is to set the record straight in exposing the blighted lies of elite history be it colonial or native elitist history. In this respect, Mahasweta Devi has vehemently questioned Indian historiography in order to create a space for subaltern history.
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