Chapter II

Oppression and Exploitation

Webster’s Third International Dictionary defines oppression as “Unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power especially by the imposition of burdens; the condition of being weighed down; an act of pressing down; a sense of heaviness or obstruction in the body or mind.”

Tilly defines exploitation as powerful, connected people deploying resources from which they draw significantly increased returns by coordinating the effort of outsiders, whom they exclude from the full value added by that effort – any search for exploitation in real life must keep alert for seven elements: power holders, their coordinated efforts, deployable resources, command over those resources, returns from those resources, categorical exclusion and skewed division of returns as compared with effort.

The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology has an excellent definition of social oppression:

Social oppression is a concept that describes a relationship between groups or categories of people in which a dominant group benefits from the systematic abuse, exploitation, and injustice directed toward a subordinate group. The relationship between whites and blacks in the United States and South Africa, between social classes in many industrial societies, between men and women in most societies, between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland – all have elements of social oppression in that the organization of social life enables those who dominate to oppress others.
Mahasweta Devi is much concerned about the tribals and downtrodden who are oppressed and exploited by others. The three stories in *Imaginary Maps* focus on the issues of oppression and exploitation in the third world’s colonial and postcolonial situation. According to Waseem Anwar, “The title suggests that Imaginary maps are about imagining maps as well as about mapping imagination. It is not only about dividing lines or drawing maps and signs on the face of the earth, but also about the invisible yet indelible marks of socio-economic transitions affecting human minds.”(83)

The first story “The Hunt’ in the collection *Imaginary Maps* is a story of a rural tribal woman Mary Oraon. Dixon was a white, who had timber plantations in Kuruda. But after independence, the whites gradually left the place. Mary’s mother Bhikni looked after Dixon’s bungalow after he left without enjoying any right or privilege. Dixon’s son came back in 1959 and sold the bungalow to Prasad. He put Mary in Bhikni’s womb thinking that it was his right. Bhikni’s helpless condition under different masters is referred to by Chari in his article, “Deconstructing History: A Study of Mahasweta’s *Imaginary Maps*” in the following manner: “Bhikni who worked as a servant in the house of Dixon gave up Christianity to be employed by Prasadji from Ranchi who bought the bungalow. Thus without her knowledge, Bhikni’s life has been dictated to and imposed upon by the transfer of power from the imperialists to the native epigoni of imperialism-from colonial to post-colonial masters.”(60-61)

Bhikni’s daughter Mary, born of an Oraon woman and an Australian father grew up to be a woman of strong physical aptitude. She was also a smart business woman. Even the owner’s wife appreciated the way Mary worked. She said, “You have to take words from a girl who works like an animal, carries a forty-pound bag on her back, and boards the train,
cleans the whole house in half an hour.” (4) Mary also got praises at the marketplace: “Mary has countless admirers at Tohri market. She gets down at the station like a queen. She sits in her own rightful place at the market.” (2) She was healthy and authorized with strength, intelligence and humour. Her generosity and outspokenness made everyone respect her. She was dreadful with her two weapons - words and machete. Regarding her condition, Chari remarks, “Mary is . . . both an insider and outsider to the tribal society of Kuruda. Although she is accepted, she is also feared by everyone, especially the youth at the market who have designs on her.” (61-62) Trouble came to her in the form of an outsider.

When the logging contractor Tehsildar entered the village, trouble started. He bought the sal trees, which were planted by Dixon and ready for felling, from Prasad’s son Banwari. Enticed by Mary’s beauty, he started pursuing her. But she opposed his sexual advances. Later she turned a killer and murdered him in an act of self-protection. That happened when Mary’s virginity was endangered in a probable rape. Mary reproached the sexual moves with her first weapon verbal threats. But he continued to follow her and one day when she came back from the market, Tehsildar caught her hand. He said, “I won’t let you go today.” (12) Luckily she was able to escape from him that day. Unable to bear his torture any longer, she devised a plan to put an end to the man’s sexual violence.

According to the plan, Mary arranged a meeting with Tehsildar in the forest during the annual spring festival ‘Jani Parab’:

It is revealed that the ritual of the hunt that the tribes celebrate at the spring festival is for the women to perform this year. For twelve years men run the hunt. Then comes the women’s turn. It’s Jani Parab - Like the men they too go out with bow and arrow. They run in forest and hill. They kill hedgehogs,
rabbits and birds, whatever they can get. Then they picnic together, drink liquor, sing, and return home at evening. They do exactly what the men do. Once in twelve years. Then they light the fire of the spring festival and start talking (11-12).

Mahasweta Devi calls this festival, a festival of justice: “The Tribals have this animal hunting festival in Bihar. It used to be the festival of Justice. After the hunt, the elders would bring offenders to justice. They would not go to the police. In Santali language it was the Law-bir. Law is the Law, and bir is forest. And every twelfth year it is Janiparab, the women’s hunting festival in Bihar.” (xi) According to the tribal custom, once in every twelve years male and female roles are inverted. The women become the hunters while the men dress up like clowns. The men also drink and sing in a festive merrymaking. That year being the twelfth year, Mary would become a hunter in the ritual hunt in which she would be hunting the animal that kept torturing her.

Thus, “The Hunt” is a clear-cut story of the brave woman Mary who could have become a prey of male sexual violence but who by her retaliation changed her predicament and murdered her tormenter. She killed the inhuman predator, Tehsildar Singh and took away his money and threw his body in the ravine. She then joined her people in the festivities.

One can justify Mary’s violence against the physical persecution, mental torture and economic violence faced by her people at the hands of a system controlled by corrupt contractors and bribing Brahmins. From the very moment Tehsildar saw Mary, he began to make advances to her. He even gave a nylon sari to Mary to lure her. However, Mary could not be bought. She threw the sari at him saying, “You think I’m a city whore? You want to grab me with a sari? If you bother me I’ll cut off your nose.”(10) But the contractor was not
put down by her threats. He followed her with more vehemence. Mary then decided to beat him in his own way. Finally she fixed an appointment with him and on the day of the feast, Jani Parab, and asked him to wait behind a rock. On that day, she wore a new, coloured sari and a red blouse gifted to her by Jalim, her lover. She went near the rock and when Tehsildar arrived, she pretended to make love.

Mary caresses Tehsildar’s face, gives him love bites on the lips. There’s fire in Tehsildar’s eyes, his mouth is open, his lips wet with spittle, his teeth glistening. Mary is watching, watching, the face changes and changes into? Now, yes, becomes an animal. – Now take me? Mary laughed and held him, laid him on the ground. Tehsildar is laughing. Mary lifts the machete, lowers it, lifts, lowers (16).

Thus, she struck him with her machete not with one stroke but with many. She killed him in order to bring freedom not only to her own self but also to other women like her.

Mary represents the Oraon tribal community. Her mother Bhikni suffered under different masters and likewise, Mary was also oppressed as the power was transferred from the imperialists to the post-colonial masters like Prasad who treated her like a slave or a mere commodity. When the white masters treated them as slaves, men like Prasad, Banwari and Tehsildar treated them inconsiderately. When the lust-filled Tehsildar hounded Mary time and again, she could not put up with the mental torment any longer and she became brave. Since she felt insecure and there was no one to shield her, she took the daring step of killing him. Thus Women like Bhikni and Mary were exploited and oppressed because of their gender and class.
The second story in *Imaginary Maps*, “Douloti the Bountiful” deals with the problems of wage earning people and the exploitation of women by referring to their visible as well as invisible labour. Waseem Anwar rightly points out the writer’s purpose in his article “Transcribing Resistance: Cartographies of Struggling Bodies and Mind in Mahasweta Devi’s *Imaginary Maps*”: “Devi writes with a mission to launch a compassionate crusade against injustice and inequality.” (93) The title of the collection of stories *Imaginary Maps* is quite symbolic because Douloti is not only mapped out as a piece of famine-stricken land but also as a female body. With women at the centre of the apparently abolished bonded labour system, “Douloti” expounds on the theme of the selling of women in a heterosexual and predatory patriarchal capitalist system. It is worthwhile to consider what Jaidev in his article “Douloti as a National Allegory” avers,

Douloti is certainly important in her own right, important as a tragically blighted life, but she is even more important as the site on which a whole variety of ‘the Great Indian Meaning’ - mythological, historical, socio-cultural, class, casteist and gender-converges as a set of operative, oppressive forces. It is in their astonishing range that these forces turn Douloti into a national allegory, or rather, an elaborate chargesheet against the nation (136).

“Douloti the Bountiful” was set in the village of Seora in Palamu (Bihar) in post-independent India. The story portrays the plight of Ganori Nagesia and his daughter Douloti. Ganori was a bonded-labourer. He was sent to jail because of stealing water-buffaloes from the market. In order to do the purification for returning from jail and also to feast his people because his eldest daughter and eldest son got married, he borrowed three hundred rupees from the landlord Munabar Singh Chandela. He had to follow the custom. “If you go to jail
and stay in there you have to feed your community when you return. This is such a rule that you can’t get around it.” Thus, “Ganori became a kamiya when he took that money.”(21)

The way Ganori Nagesia became Crook Nagesia tells about the exploitation and oppression the tribals suffered at the hands of the others. Ganori Nagesia was nicknamed Crook Nagesia because he was crippled in an accident. He was forced by the landlord to carry an ox yoke on his shoulders because the young ox of his landlord was eaten by a tiger due to his carelessness. While he tried to pull the cart, Ganori fell on his face with the axle plunging into his back. After this incident, Ganori spent three months in Tehri hospital. He came out of the hospital with his body broken and misshapen. Ganori’s condition was literalized as slave due to the cruel punishment meted out to him. Because Ganori borrowed money from Munabar and because of the increase in interest and the recurrent social and economic needs, Ganori became his slave for an indefinite period of time. Thus the tribals suffered a lot under the hands of the landlords. People like Ganori Nagesia subscribed to the system without questioning anything because to become a kamiya, for the tribal, is ‘fate’s decree.’(21)

One of the villagers, Bono Nagesia, who did not bother to follow the tradition, was taught a lesson. Bono Nagesia who went to work in a coal mine at Dhanbad under a contractor earned a lot of money when he unintentionally killed a hooligan. Bono came back to his village Seora with his money to build a house. He thought that the bond-lord Munabar might take away his belongings like pots and pans but not a house. As a precautionary measure, he got the permission of the landlord Munabar to build the house. But after Bono had built the house, Munabar’s men locked him up in a room and set fire to the house. Then
he was forced to put this thumb print on a sheet of white paper in receipt of twenty-five rupees and was declared a bond-slave thereafter. The landlord tells Bono:

Take these twenty-five rupees. You are borrowing this because your house burnt down. From now on you are my bondslave. You will repay by the body’s labour. I could have made your aunt, wife, and son my bondslave too. But they have no strength in their bodies; they won’t be able to work hard. I won’t ever get back the cost of giving them snacks and their breakfast of thin gruel (28).

Even the unending labour of Bono’s body, the bodies of his wife, his sons and daughters would not be adequate for the repayment of the loan as it had been acquiring metaphysically endless proportions. Hence he decided not ‘to slave for his bond’ (29), and not to perform the marriage of his son Dhano with Douloti and he vanished from Seora. He became a wandering ministerial by joining Father Bomfuller, a reformist journalist missionary. After “Bono’s final departure from Seora village . . . many things happened in Seora village. Munabar’s white horse died. The lightning-struck tree suddenly fell over one night and suddenly the bear-players came to the village. Although Munabar made the bears dance in front of his own house, the whole village could after all see.”(30) In the 1962 elections that took place, the tribals did not have any choice but to vote for the man of Munabar’s choice. The tribals, like all other things, had no say in that also.

When Crook Nagesia was no longer useful to his master, he was freed from bondage to Munabar by Paramananda Misra, who was a relative of the local priest. He did so only to take over Douloti, the younger daughter of Crook Nagesia with an offer of marriage. Crook Nagesia was too ineffectual to resist against the local conspiracy between the Rajput bond-
lord and the Brahmin ‘god’. The thirteen-year old Douloti, the new-found bond-slave was thrown as a piece of meat in the flesh market of the market-town of Madhpura by her master Paramananda. As Chari says, “She is thrown as the live sexual quarry to a pitiless animal, Latiaji, a typical post-colonial aphrodisiac - consuming elite of a contractor who appropriates more than his money’s worth of sensual pleasure from Douloti’s body.” (66)

Ganori and Douloti’s fate is that of so many tribal men and women. Human beings are not considered for their worth and the social system only is to be blamed. Mahasweta Devi brings this out in the story: “The social system that makes Crook Nagesia a kamiya is made by men. Therefore, do Douloti, Somni, Reoti, have to quench the hunger of male flesh. Otherwise Paramananda does not get money.”(62) Since these tribals considered everything as the outcome of fate, they never tried to resist against the system. Douloti’s skepticism regarding the measures that could be taken up by the government to prevent the practice of bonded labour as a result of the statistical data provided by the reformist missionary Bomfuller and his associates is to be considered in this context.

The story came to an end in 1975, just as Indira Gandhi’s Emergency began. The twenty seven year old Douloti’s body had been ploughed for 40 thousand rupees and she died of venereal disease and hunger. Once Douloti was beautiful and useful; she was used, exploited, plundered and wasted. But once she caught her disease and could no longer be utilized to the maximum, she was abandoned. She went to Tohri hospital, where she was not only rejected but also robbed. So she decided to go back to her birth place, Seora. She walked to the village of Tohri where the school teacher Mohan Srivastava of Basic Primary School was preparing for the celebration of Independence Day by drawing a huge map of India in front of the school. Douloti who was exhausted and weak struggled to walk and fell down on the map. When Mohan Srivastava, the school teacher came down from his room, he found
Douloti lying dead on the map of India. The author describes the manner in which Douloti’s body was lying on the ground. “Filling the entire Indian peninsula from the oceans to the Himalayas, here lies bonded labour spreadeagled, kamiya whore Douloti Nagesia’s tormented corpse, putrefied with venereal disease, having vomited up all the blood in its desicated lungs.” (94) The hard-won independence has nothing to do with people like Douloti who are yet to taste freedom. The author’s question “Today on the fifteenth of August, Douloti has left no room at all in the India of people like Mohan for planting the standard of the Independence flag. What will Mohan do now? Douloti is all over India” (94) is quite significant. For people like Douloti, freedom remains only as an illusion. Gabrielle Collu states,

The passage echoing the morning after Douloti’s first rape where ‘she was stretched out quite naked’ suggests the complete identification of the exploited adivasi woman with India; she is all over India; she is India – meaning that the poor, exploited workers compose the majority of the people of India and that Independence is a lie for the vast majority of people in India or at the very least that it is meaningless to them’” (55).

Mahasweta Devi uses the image of the bonded-sex-worker lying dead on a map of India to condemn exploitation and to destroy the myth of a free India for all. Douloti dies on the chalk dust of the map of a mythical India, and in the author’s words, “Everything would have remained a fairy tale, but the conclusion of the fairy tale is life, bloody, pain-filled life” (50). Douloti makes one to reason the new pungent logic behind Mahasweta’s ‘obsession’ with the nation. As Jaidev avers: “The novella can be read as a plea for the nation to be defined by the victims rather than by the ruling parasitic groups.”(143)
In his article “Transcribing Resistance: Cartographies of Struggling Bodies and Minds in Mahasweta Devi’s *Imaginary Maps,*” Waseem Anwar says:

Douloti opens in the drought-stricken tribal areas situated in the Palamu district. Poverty rules the region where decolonization has least prevented free women from being treated as commodity. When a women gets raped, the judiciary system does not support her because of the general consensus that only a woman with loose character gets raped . . . As the story proceeds we figure out that in the process of decolonization and a systematic neocolonial control, Douloti, the land and Douloti the character have been shrunk to the status of a product. Land or body, Douloti is delineated as a space of intervention for its exporters and exploiters. As a land, she is vulnerable to its intruders for crossing its borders, and as a body, she is forced to cross the boundaries of ethical values of free will inorder to benefit others through self-plunder (89-90).

“Douloti the Bountiful” establishes a parallel between the exploitation of adivasi men who become bonded-labourers of the rich upper-caste landowners whose labour and the fruits of their labour are alienated from them and the sexual exploitation of the adivasi women who are used or abused as they are poor who own nothing – neither the means of their livelihood, nor their own bodies.

Gabrielle Collu in his article “Adivasis and the Myth of Independence: Mahasweta Devi’s ‘Douloti, the Bountiful’ ” avers, “The story exposes the continued exploitation of tribals after Indian independence and the establishment of a Constitution that enshrined the principles of freedom and equality, banned discrimination, and outlawed landlordism and
bonded labour. It is significant that Ganori Nagesia, Douloti’s father, becomes a bonded-
slave to a rich landowner after independence.”(48)

The third story “Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha” that follows “Douloti the
Bountiful” in the collection of stories Imaginary Maps is perhaps the most sustained
exploration of Mahasweta Devi to develop a basis of equal dialogue among the tribals. The
report Puran, the journalist got on the appearance of a flying, pre-historic beast lead Puran
Sahay to Pirtha. No amount of reading on the topic or anthropological studies or field reports
from division officers helped him solve the mystery of the bird. The beast is an allusion of
uncertain value and origin which is situated in the world of pre-history, myth and
superstition.

The pterodactyl poses many questions in the mind of Puran. He realizes his
inadequacy and feels alienated from his own self and purpose. The pterodactyl country, more
particularly Pirtha block in Bastar, is better understood in geological time than in history. The
approach to the ethics of the nation and its practical outcome of agricultural produce and
economic-industrial output do not apply here. The very old Austric-Negroid civilization is
endangered more into destruction by each attempt made by the government to include it as a
beneficiary of nation building projects or welfare schemes. In this universe, meanings and
institutional codes of mainstream India get reversed, and even the best plans can lead to
deaths of masses of the tribals. Unable to express its needs to the world outside, the tribal
regresses into a catatonic silence of the kind that Bikhia falls into after his encounters with
the pterodactyl.

Puran realized that the epistemic divide opens like a gap between the world of BDOs,
SDOs, State and Centre run welfare schemes and that of Bikhia’s world. But as he got into
the tribal folklore as their local rain god, he realized that his own connection with the tribal is also a question of call-and-response, a question of assuming responsibility in which one submits to the tribal story as a figure in harmony with the tribals’ system of implication. Puran’s submission to the setback of the common method of encountering a ‘child’, of encountering the peculiar strangeness of Bikhia’s experience and fulfilling his procedures of ritual mourning becomes a regenerative moment for both.

Puran then produces a detailed report on the poverty, exploitation and the condition of the famine-hit area and the troubles of the people. The accurate documents that he carries with him are of the failure of economic upliftment schemes. Acknowledging political and private failure, Puran arrives at a remedial measure which can be achieved through “Only love, a tremendous, excruciating, explosive love can still dedicate us to this work when the century’s sun is in the western sky, otherwise this aggressive civilization will have to pay a terrible price, look at history, the aggressive civilization has destroyed itself in the name of progress, each time.”(197) and this could be taken as the author’s warning to the world where values are eroding. In his article “Transcribing Resistance: Cartographies of Struggling Bodies and Minds in Mahasweta Devi’s Imaginary Maps,” Waseem Anwar points out, The fact that there is no synonym for exploitation and deprivation in the traditional tribal language . . . does not change the history or story of Pirtha and its people who have been plundered for centuries. Because of their historical contact first with Hindus and then with the British, the tribal population has over time been plagued by caste and class systems. Together, the two systems transcribe the tribal population as ‘criminal tribes’ (87).
Pirtha is a region which represents today’s economic exploitation of caste ridden India. This shapes into pterodactyl. The story describes the habits and rituals of the tribal world. “Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha” connect the old myths with the modern, civilized and materialistic world materiality and primitiveness with today’s psychology. The region Pirtha representing today’s economic exploitation is symbolized by pterodactyl, the mythical extinct beast. Thus both pterodactyl and Pirtha map out the bestialities built around the many layers of power over subservient nationalities or groups.

Puran Sahay has been projected as a representative of the mainstream culture of capitalist India. Though Puran Sahay attempts to form some sort of connection through his reports, he is unable to penetrate deep into the tribal history. Finally he comes to know the way things are misrepresented and misappropriated. Waseem Anwar in his article “Transcribing Resistance: Cartographies of Struggling Bodies and Minds in Mahasweta Devi’s Imaginary Maps” remarks,

Pterodactyl, an extinct species that has crossed an evolutionary process of growth from a sparrow-size entity to a cow-size monster, keeps recurring in the story. It stands for not only the land but also the soul of a lost civilization and its dead and forgotten ancestors. “Today” when the “ancient” civilization is lost, Pirtha turns out to be a place of perennial starvation with no resources but only despair, and no missionaries but only empty churches. Due to the oppressive and tactful policies of the local, provincial, state, and national governments, Pirtha transmogrifies into a morbid mythical picture of pterodactyl like a “death-wish” (86).
Mahasweta Devi’s *Imaginary Maps* presents the issue of gender-based discrimination. Pterodactyl talks little about women’s condition, along with other forms of tribal exploitations referring to the counterfeit government plans for banishing poverty and illiteracy by freeing women from the rituals like sati so that they can have financial autonomy while the other stories “Douloti the Bountiful” and “The Hunt” deal with more and diverse divisions of women, their work through their bodies, and their minds amidst regional corruption.

The second book taken for the study is *Rudali*. It is a powerful story revolving around the life of Sanichari, a poor low-caste village woman. *Rudali* is a tale of exploitation, struggle and survival. Anjum Katyal quotes the words of Mahasweta Devi regarding the struggle of the poor for survival: “The text explicates the various strategies of survival employed by the subaltern individually and as a community.” (11)

A woman named Sanichari was born in a small village in Rajasthan, India. She was named so because shortly after her birth, her father died. Her mother, Euli abandoned her and ran away with a rich lover. When Sanichari grew up she was married to Ganju, who lived with his sick mother. Sanichari gave birth to a boy and named him Budhua. The local Landlord, Ramavatara’s son, Lachman Singh wanted Sanichari to live with him as his mistress, abandoning her husband and son. Sanichari was not willing to do so. When her ailing mother-in-law passed away, Sanichari was unable to weep, because “at that time her husband and his brother, both the old women’s sons were in jail because of malik-mahajan Ramavatara Singh.”(71-72) So she was forced to go to the neighbourhood in the pouring rain. “Dragging the neighbours’ home with her, and handling all the arrangements for the cremation, she was so busy that there was no time to cry.”(72) Sanichari’s brother-in-law and
his wife died within three years of her mother-in-law’s death. Sanichari and her husband did not weep. “How is it possible to weep? When you’ve borne three deaths in as many years? Their grief must have hardened into stone within them!” (72)

After some years, Sanichari’s husband died of cholera after consuming the contaminated milk from a temple. Sanichari was unable to weep even when her husband died. When she went to her village, the priest Mohanlal asked her to make ritual offerings in the village also. So she was forced into debt to Ramavatkar. “And after paying for Budhua’s father’s shraddha, she was so hardpressed to feed her little son that she never had time to cry for her husband.” (75) When her son Budhua died of tuberculosis and her daughter-in-law ran away from the house abandoning her son, Sanichari was unable to weep. It was because she was busy cremating her son and enquiring about her daughter-in-law. “Through all this, she didn’t cry for her son either. Nor could she cry. She would sit, stunned; and then fall into exhausted slumber.” (80) Then a woman named Bhikni, who was her childhood playmate, entered her life. She was called Rudali - one who is hired for loud laments, weeping, and beating of the chest when a rich man passed away for a small fee, some milk, oil, and flour. Bhikni wanted Sanichari also to be a rudali. But Sanichari who never cried during the death of her close relations would find it difficult because her eyes were always dry. When Bhikni, as a rudali was called to weep in another town, Sanichari received the news that Ramavatkar died and she was called to be a rudali. Only then was she able to shed tears. Thus Sanichari, the poor Dushad woman, became a professional mourner – a rudali, for two square meals a day.

‘Rudali’ deals with the caste system and exploitation of the poor people. Sanichari was in need of great effort to utilize the system to her purpose. Sanichari who struggles in the
beginning finally manages to get her emancipation against her poverty in the oppressive landlord system.

At the beginning of the story, Sanichari is situated in a socio-economic context and Sanichari, like other members of her community was poor. “Sanichari was a ganju by caste. Like the other villagers, her life too was lived in desperate poverty.” (71) Her mother-in-law would often comment that, she was cursed manhoos, doomed to suffer because she was born on an unlucky day of the week (Saturday or sanichar). Sanichari could not understand why her mother-in-law blamed her like that because even those who were born on the so-called ‘lucky’ days did not always have an easier time. It is not the day on which one is born that matters but the economic condition in which one is born. As Anjum Katyal states,

The very first paragraph thus underscores the tension between the ‘givens’ of fate/karma and the historicity of a politically and economically constructed situation, challenging the concept of a ‘natural’ order. Right from the beginning, therefore, the story places the central character in her historical situation, provided a socio-economic context and emphasizes that her problems are common to her class, caste and gender (4).

Sanichari was not much different from the others of her community either in her appearance or her clothes, mannerisms or habits of speech. When she spoke, she used the same dialect and sounds like any of the other villagers of her class. Sanichari is the representative of many other women who suffer due to their struggle and exploitation. Her private life is connected to the wide socio-economic condition. Her meeting with her childhood playmate Bikhni, and the descriptive passage established her similarity, that she was the same in appearance as her friend and the other women of their class. “Like Sanichari,
Bikhní’s wrists, throat and forehead sport no jewellery other than blue tatoo marks, both wear pieces of cork in their ears instead of earrings; their hair is rough and ungroomed.”(85)

This firmness on implanting Sanichari in the broader context continued throughout the text, in various other ways. When her mother-in-law died, Sanichari didn’t cry because at the time, her husband and his brother were in jail. Ramavtar Singh, who was enraged at the loss of some wheat, had all the young dushad and ganju males of the village locked up. When her brother-in-law and his wife died, she was unable to weep because she was tensed over the fact that Ramavtar was trying to throw out all the dushads and ganjus from the village. Ramavtar with his exploitation and oppression was a constant presence since he embodied a system which dehumanized, abused, invaded the most private space of an individual, the emotions, so that even grief was distorted in the desperate struggle for survival. Grief was turned into a commodity and mourning had become labour. “Their grief must have hardened into stone within them! To herself, Sanichari had sighed with relief. Is it possible to feed so many mouths on the meagre scrapings they bring home after laboring on the malik’s field? Two dead, just as well. Atleast their own stomachs would be full.”(72-73) Anjum Katyal’s remarks in this context are worthnoticing: “If sorrow is controlled by the malik-mahajan, tears can be used as a produce, a source of earning by professional mourners.” (5)

An analysis of all the ‘events’ in Sanichari’s life, could reveal a direct connection between the personal events and the exploitative system. Those who are already poor are further impoverished due to the demands that follow the occurrence of death. Sanichari’s husband died of cholera after drinking the contaminated and decayed ‘sanctified’ milk donated to the Shiva idol by the rich. She had to pay the ritual offerings the second time to pacify the local village priest, who was the family priest of Ramavtar Singh. Hence her
indebtedness to Ramavatar Singh. “In order to appease Mohanlal, she was forced into debt to Ramavatar; she received Rs.20 and put her thumbprint on a paper stating that she would repay Rs.50 through bonded labour on his fields over the next five years.” (74-75)

Sanichari suffered all these losses because of her terrible poverty, the restricted life and the total lack of hope of any change or improvement. Even though her daughter-in-law Parbatia and her grandson opted for prostitution and wandering life with its insecurities respectively, they refused to submit to the harsh conditions. Her son Budhua developed tuberculosis while hauling sacks of wheat for Lachman Singh, Ramavatar’s son. When her grandson grew up, she took him to Lachman Singh for a job since there was no other source of employment. For both the exploiter and the exploited, oppression was hereditary.

Like “Douloti, the Bountiful”, the whole story was an analysis of the socio-economic and religious systems, and the connection between them. The author constructed a powerful indictment by showing the terrible poverty of the villagers, the means through which they were exploited, the burden of ritualized religion, the power of the malik-mahajans over the others and the corruption that ruled within the privileged classes. Throughout the text, this indictment was spoken like a slogan by the villagers, or through direct authorial addresses: ‘Everything in this life is a battle.’ (9) The rich people spend money lavishly on funeral ceremonies whereas the poor do not even have enough to survive and even the necessities of life become luxuries for them. “For them, nothing has ever come easy. Just the daily struggle for a little maize gruel and salt is exhausting. Through motherhood and widowhood they’re tied to the moneylender. While those people spend huge sums of money on death ceremonies, just to gain prestige . . .” (9)
While thousands of rupees were carelessly spent lavishly on the shraddhas of her masters, Sanichari had to borrow a small amount of Rs.20 for her husband’s shraddha (Hindu funeral), which she had to repay as Rs.50 through bonded labour over the next five years. Thus through this bonded labour the malik-mahajans like Ramavatar Singh and his son Lachman Singh, were controlling and influencing each and every aspect of the lives of the low-caste villagers. Whenever they felt, they could lock up the men. They could also use and abandon the women and extract years of unpaid labour as repayment for small debts. “When someone died in a malik-mahajan household, the amount of money spent on the death ceremony immediately raised the prestige of the family . . . The price for this is paid by the dushads, dhobis, ganjus and kols, from the hides of whom the overlords extracted the sums they had overspent.”(9)

The villagers who were thus forced to submit to the power of the masters did not have any dreams. They were submissive and were looking out for means of freedom. Dulan spoke about the perverted ways of the upper classes and gives a mocking account of how Nathuni Singh, who owed all his wealth to his mother, was doing nothing to treat her. “He’s not willing to spend a paisa on trying to cure her, but plans to spend thirty thousand on her funeral!”(99) Even Sanichari says, “These people can’t summon up tears even at the death of their own brothers and father . . . Do you know that Gangadhar Singh . . . was stingy enough to use dalda instead of pure ghee on the funeral pyre of his uncle?” (98) It is quite interesting to note how the sharply vigilant eyes of the subaltern keep the privileged in perspective.

Similarly, the economic monopoly of the malik-mahajans was the social oppression of a religious system which controlled the others through fear and superstition. Throughout the story, religion was shown as offering comfort or succour. Instead, religion further
deprived and bound the poor, causing indebtedness through its web of demands and obligations. To these people, religion was superstition and ritual. When Sanichari’s mother-in-law died one night, in the pouring rain, she was hard pressed to carry out the required rituals before daybreak. There was no grain in the house and there were no men around to help them lay out the body. When Sanichari’s brother-in-law and his wife died, “There was no crying over those deaths either. Was one to weep or to worry about how to burn the corpses and feed the neighbours cheaply at the shraddha?”(72)

When Sanichari’s husband died, she did not have time to register the fact when the lower-order priest of the Shiva temple at Tohri demanded that she should make ritual offerings before returning to her village. Even a simple offering of sand and sattu (gram flour) was quite expensive to her as they cost a precious rupee and a quarter. After she returned to her village, Mohanlal, the priest of Ramavatar’s presiding deity, mocked —“Can a Tohri Brahman know how Tahad villager’s kriya is done?”(74) She repeated the offerings to pacify him which means that she was indebted to Ramavatar. As Anjum Katyal observes, this proves to be “A perfect example of how religious and economic exploitation reinforce and strengthen one another.” (11)

To drive home her message of Rudali Mahasweta Devi uses the character of Dulan. The resistant will, the sharp intelligence, the disrespect, the disbelief and the cunning that the subaltern uses to overthrow the total control of the masters are found in Dulan. He, being the oral narrator of their history, questioned authority constantly and made the others to analyse it. By telling her at every stage to adjust and cope, Dulan contributed to the growing empowerment of Sanichari.
Dulan intervened at every hectic and strenuous moments of Sanichari’s life offering help, advise, education and enlightenment. Mahasweta Devi does not centre the gender issue with regard to community relations. In the process, she avoided even a hint of patriarchy. The author was not much concerned about Dulan being a male playing adviser and guide to helpless females. As a result, Dulan and Sanichari interact as equals, unselfconsciously, free from all irregularities in their relationship. After her son Budhua died and her daughter-in-law deserted her, she found it difficult to bring up her infant grandson. So Dulan got her a job of repairing the railway line. When Bikhni spent all her money, she along with Sanichari approached Dulan for advice. To make sure that they get a good deal, he accompanied them and negotiated on their behalf.

Once the two women became rudalis, he gave them ideas on how to know about potential jobs by keeping their eyes and ears open during their trips to the market place. He told them to offer an additional service – to gather extra rudalis from the whore bazaar.

Towards the end of the story, after Bikhni’s death, Sanichari once again went to Dulan for advice. Dulan advised her not to give up her profession which was like the land itself. This meeting of her with Dulan was quite significant because this transformed Sanichari from a helpless victim to an empowered woman.

Dulan equated professional mourning and physical labour. Even before he had suggested that like the coal miners, they should also form a union of rudalis and whores, and that she could be the president of that union. He fully appreciated that rudalis were professionals like the organized labour sector. Sanichari, who took over her husband’s work in the malik’s fields after his death should also take over Bikhni’s work of interacting with the prostitutes in Tohri. Knowing that Sanichari might not like this because of her daughter-
in-law’s presence in the Tohri randipatti (whore’s quarter), Dulan urged her to involve her daughter-in-law Parbatia also.

Dulan’s reasoning made Sanichari realize that the prostitutes also were victims and that she could accept her daughter-in-law. Thus Dulan opened up an avenue by which Sanichari could accept her daughter-in-law. When Sanichari who had always put a “premium on community support and approval”(14) was worried about the village speaking ill of her, Dulan comforted her saying, “What one is forced to do to feed oneself is never considered wrong.” (116) Thus by Dulan’s reassurance, Sanichari turned into a confident, unrestrained and shrewd woman.

All through, Dulan had been sentimental and prejudiced in favour of adaptation and rational argument. He had been a critic accusing and condemning the upper classes, highlighting their moral corruption, greed and hypocrisy. He helped maintain a critical perspective on the system, thus, politicizing the community. Gramsci’s views in this regard were quoted by Anjum Katyal in “The Metamorphosis of Rudali”: “Every social group coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields.” (14)

Mahasweta Devi never missed a chance to highlight the value and necessity of the significant survival aids such as community, partnership, organization and sisterhood. She was able to do this through direct statements: “There are some debts that can never be repaid . . . If her fellow-villagers had not rallied around in this manner, would Sanichari have survived?”(15) The clan and class solidarity among the rich people when faced with the
challenging situation is brought out carefully by Mahasweta Devi because she wanted the exploited also to be strong and in unison so that they would also be able to overcome their infighting. What Lachman Singh says on the occasion of Bhairab Singh’s murder brought out this quality of the upper class: “Hai Chacha! As long as you were alive, the lower castes never dared raise their heads. For fear of you, the sons of dushads and ganjus never dared attend government schools! Now, who will take care of all these things?” (88) Like the banding together of the rich to present a united front inspite of the power struggle, the exploited also should unite to ensure their own protection.

The support and bonding the community offered helped Sanichari to survive. She had a hard time tending to her infant grandson, who cried incessantly. Dulan’s wife who happened to come there picked up the baby telling that the child would also be breastfed by her daughter-in-law along with hers. She also told Sanichari of a job — that of a rudali — which could help her earn some money. As Anjum Katyal observes, these are “examples of networking, solidarity, communal mothering—all of this in a matter-of-fact, down-to-earth manner, with no nuance of condescension or charity.” (15-16) All these things made Sanichari realize the importance of the survival of the community - “In order to survive, the poor and oppressed need the support of the other poor and oppressed. Without that support it is impossible to live in the village even on milk and ghee provided by the malik.” (82)

By presenting Sanichari and her husband as partners working hard together for home and for livelihood Mahasweta Devi shows men and women of the lower class as supportive and helpful to each other:

She leaves her six-year-old son at home and goes to the malik’s estate where she chops wood, fetches fodder for the cattle and, at harvest season, works
shoulder to shoulder with her husband. Together the two of them erect a hut on the piece of land they had inherited after the death of her brother-in-law. She draws decorative pictures on the walls, he plans a vegetable patch in their courtyard and she arranges to rear one of the malkin’s [mistress] calves (17). Even now there are women crying at the rich people’s house for one square meal.

In the novel The Mother of 1084, the mother Sujata is oppressed not only by her patriarchal husband Dibyanath but also by her mother-in-law. He did not allow Sujata even to exercise the ordinary, basic rights of a woman. As in any typical Indian household, Dibyanath’s mother had everything under her control. The manipulation of power in the house, in the system and in the nation made her son Brati a naxalite and he joined the revolutionaries to fight against the deceitful and capitalistic society. Thus Sujata is subjugated not only by her patriarchal husband but also by one of her own gender, her mother-in-law-who believed firmly in the traditional Indian family system.

The Mother of 1084 is a story of an apolitical mother who searches for her identity. The novel deals with the psychological and emotional suffering of a mother who arose one morning to the shocking news that her beloved son was lying dead in the police morgue, condensed to a simple number: corpse no. 1084. This news forced her on a journey of discovery, in the path of which, struggling to understand her Naxalite son's revolutionary dedication, she began to recognize her own alienation, as a woman and wife, from the contented, deceitful, capitalist society her son had revolted against. The upper-class mother Sujata collapsed at the end of the novel as she could not cope with the stink that overpowered her precisely two years after the brutal killing of her sensitive, brilliant son Brati in an ‘encounter.’ The policemen who were involved in the killing were supported by a political
party. Even though that party was no longer in power, the policemen continued to move about freely and arrogantly, just because they have changed their party label. On that fateful day, which happened to be both Brati’s birth and death anniversary, Sujata at last discovered answers to several crucial questions that had been troubling her like - Why did Brati lose ‘faith’ in his family, in the system and in his nation? Why did he opt for a dangerous life when his future could have been very secure otherwise?

Sujata’s husband Dibyanath, a chartered accountant having his own firm was an affluent and self-centered man. A womanizer and hypocrite, Dibyanath treated his sensitive wife with contempt and neglect, since he openly had affairs with many women. His interest in his wife Sujata was limited to sexual pleasure, without any real concern for her. When he suffered due to financial problems, he forced her to go to work and when his condition improved, he asked her to resign her job. He wanted her to be a puppet in his hands doing whatever he wished.

Sujata had been leading a servile existence in her house. Dibyanath and his mother was the centre of attraction in the house. Whenever Sujata expected a child and went to the hospital for delivery, her husband never accompanied her. He did not allow Sujata to have the most common rights that a woman should have. His philosophy was that his wife should be under his feet. Dibyanath was a male chauvinist and he thought that as an Indian wife, her primary duty was to love, respect and obey her husband and that he was not required to do anything to win his wife’s respect, love or loyalty. He used to say “I am the Boss in this house; what I say goes thousands of times.” (44) Dibyanath wanted Sujata to manage the house by herself and he did not like to share the responsibilities of running the household or bringing up their children.
This overbearing and complacent Dibyanath loved his corrupt life so much. When the family received a call from the police to identify corpse number 1084 which in fact was their son Brati, the mother was shocked and grieved over the loss of her son; but the father was bothered about his prestige and status. While Sujata was helpless, Dibyanath was in search of ways to hush up the incident. The indifference shown by him was the most characteristic of a section of the people who passed for the elite society which indulged in self-love and self-esteem.

Dibyanath did not feel sad for his son’s death but he was more concerned about his status and reputation in the society. He wanted to keep the news of Brati’s death away from the people who knew him. He did not even care to collect his son’s dead body from the morgue and did not allow his wife to take his car because he did not want his car to be identified. Sujata was much disturbed by his behaviour. Thus this incident widened the gulf between the husband and wife.

That day, with Brati’s death, Brati’s father had also died for Sujata. The way he had behaved that day, that moment, had shattered numberless illusions for her. It had burst upon her with explosive force. Like one of those massive meteors crashing upon the ancient world billions of years ago. Like one of those explosions that broke up the solid mass of the earth into continents separated by the oceans (7-8).

Dibyanath had succeeded in his task of hushing up the news of Brati’s murder. The next day the newspapers reported the deaths of four young men and their names were reported. But Brati’s name was not mentioned in any of the reports. With that Dibyanath succeeded in wiping Brati totally from his life.
Sujata was able to get her answers by looking at several contradictory factors around her. As Jaidev points out,

These include victims whose plight had become all the more grim due to their being blood relations of a butchered Naxalite youth; Brati’s activist girlfriend, Nandini, who has been released by the police only after their dazzling interrogations have damaged her eyes and the ‘statement’ ceremonies have ruined her sexuality forever; Sujata’s own family members who have simply, completely erased all signs of the embarrassment that was Brati, before he became the unacknowledged 1084th corpse (7).

Mahasweta Devi’s *Breast Stories* is a collection of three stories namely “Draupadi”, “Breast-giver” (Stanadayini) and “Behind the Bodice” (Choli ke Pichhe). The first story “Draupadi” is about Dopdi and her Naxalite career. Dopdi was an extraordinarily beautiful santhal woman vigorously engaged in the Naxalite Movement. As Srilatha states in her article, “Mahasweta Devi’s Draupadi: A Critical Study,” “Dopdi and her husband Dulna Mejhen work as farmhands. They were the chief instigators in the murder of Suraj Sahu, their landlord who occupied upper-caste wells and tube-wells during the drought. These villages were cordoned off by the police and people machine-gunned. Dopdi and her husband faked their own death and escaped.” (101) since then, they had been couriers for the activists constantly giving vital information. They were experts in the art of evasion and hiding, and frustrated the Special Forces, who butchered many sanitals in various districts of West Bengal. However, they could not trace Dopdi and Dulna. For a long time Dulna and Dopdi were in complete darkness. At last Dulna was killed when he came to drink water in a pool in Jharkani forest which served as the impenetrable hide out of the activists. Then the special
forces led by Senanayak, the seasoned soldier started searching for “NAME DOPDI MEJHEN, age 27, husband Dulna Majhi (deceased), domicile Cherakhan, Bankrahjarh, information whether dead or alive and/or assistance in arrest, one hundred rupees…” (19).

There were posters everywhere. Finally, Dopdi was also caught. The army officer Senanayak captured Dopdi and ruined her. Then he ordered the men in uniform: “Make her. Do the needful.”(35) Dopdi was gang raped by them.

When Dopdi was finally captured, her exceptionally effective political career and her brave character did not save her from disgrace that can be meted out only on a woman’s body. There was no compassionate god to save her like the god who saved Draupadi in the epic Mahabharata. Towards the end of the story, Dopdi rose above her mortified and injured body and inquired the values of this world where a man is free to use a woman in this way and then call himself a man. In the epic Mahabharata, Draupadi’s plea to Lord Krishna to clothe her suits her complacently into the specific role for woman in a patriarchal setup, whereas this Draupadi (Dopdi) steadily resisted the guard’s attempts to clothe her: “Her ravaged lips bleed as she begins laughing. Draupadi wipes the blood on her palm and says in a voice that is as terrifying, sky splitting, and sharp as her ululation, what’s the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man?” (37).

Satyanarayana quotes in his article “The Unconquered: A Study of Mahasweta Devi’s ‘Draupadi’” the views of Mahasweta Devi about Dopdi: “What a woman considers sacred and important in her life is plundered. So there is nothing more that she is scared about. Decided to be naked at her own insistence, Dopdi says: “There isn’t a man here that I should be ashamed. I will not let you put my cloth on me. What more can you do? Come on, counter me - come on kounter me?” (183)
Dopdi’s relentless faith in human dignity created fear among the army men. Although the story ends in “the culmination of her political punishment by the representatives of the law” (183), Dopdi was not conquered. Her boldness was not only an act of militant impulsiveness but a perfect challenge to the male-dominated world.

Dopdi was a depiction of a female figure ready to stand up for her rights and her attitudes and as a female controlling her fate. She emphasized herself as the male figure and Senanayak became the female figure. He was frightened of Dopdi and also unable to predict what would be her next plan. Dopdi faced such a condition which would make any woman go mad. She used her predicament to her advantage in order to make her tormentor confused and go mad. Srilatha comments, “Senanayak, an expert in tracking down insurgents and capturing them and in ‘retrieval of information’ finds an enemy he can neither understand nor destroy.” (103-104) Senanayak was an aged Bengali specialist in warfare and severe politics. The rebellious outlook of Dopdi frightened him. Dopdi pushed Senanayak with her two mangled breasts and for the first time in his life, he was afraid to stand before an unarmed target.

According to Shoba Venkatesh,

Mahasweta Devi, in her short story Draupadi wrenches her character out of myth to insert her into history. This displacement out of myth is accompanied by a displacement out of class, for Mahasweta’s “Dopdi” is a tribal woman engaged in the Naxalite insurgency of the late sixties . . . the short story is also a calculated act of violence against the significations of the mythic tale. With the subversive power of a troping . . . Mahasweta transforms the mythological Draupadi into the tribal Dopdi, the agent of a potential unmaking of gender and class containment (97).
Shoba also quotes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who reads the story as “the allegory of the woman’s struggle within the revolution in a shifting historical moment.” (97)

Draupadi faced not only bodily suppression but also political oppression. Inspite of her bravery and effective political career she too was oppressed and tortured; what she considered sacred and important in her life was taken away by force. Ironically, justice is oppressed and exploited by law. Thus Draupadi stands for gender, legal and political oppression.

The second story “Breast-giver” brings out the oppression of women in general and mothers in particular. The motherhood of Jashoda is being capitalized using her poverty as a reason. Jashoda accepts the offer of breast feeding the whole family of Haldar grandchildren and great grandchildren because that will be a means of winning bread for her family. Moreover, brought up in the patriarchal society she felt that mothering was the only point of being born a woman. Her health is ruthlessly compromised at the cost of her family. Her oppression thus proved to be that of the gender and class.

The short story “Breast-giver” gives a vivid picture of the non-planned family of Jashoda and Kangalicharan, who were living in poverty and hunger. Jashoda, a poor brahmin woman, was obliged to take up a peculiar job when her husband was crippled. Her job involved breast-feeding a whole family of Haldar grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The Haldar patriarch’s idea was that this arrangement would go quite some way towards keeping the young Haldar wives slim, beautiful and attractive, without diminishing their urge to create a host of children. It would also discourage the young male Haldars from taking to immoral ways.
Jashoda considered the offer a godsend. Her breasts had plenty of surplus milk, and she was convinced with that. Mothering was the only point of being born a woman. So she would be more blessed with the more mothering and milk-mothering she could do. But she soon realized, no matter how abundant, this milk supply was still focused on natural science. Her breasts could not yield milk unless she kept breeding annually. She did not mind the annual labour pains: “Where after all is the pain? Didn’t Mistress- Mother breed 13? Does it hurt a tree to bear fruit?”(50)

Jashoda was a lower class wet nurse. Though she came from a poor family, she nourished a whole generation of rich Haldar family. Due to this, she developed breast cancer in her later years. She fulfilled her tradition of womanhood more than was her due. She not only provided for her own family, but also nourished the infants of the rich family. To continue her work as a wet nurse, Jashoda experienced motherhood many times. Her breasts were her chief identity for many years. At the end, she had suckled fifty kids, including thirteen of her own. While the going was good, her self-perception and how others viewed her was in perfect accord: she was a latter-day Yashoda, Krishna’s milk-mother, and therefore the milk-mother of the whole world.

However, Jashoda’s breasts and the suckled sons betrayed her. At the moment of her death, she realized herself. As she lay abandoned by all her children and milk-children, dying of breast cancer, she made a crushing discovery about both her misery and her philosophy. She was ruthlessly exploited by all kinds of bastards, her children, her milk children, her husband and her masters. There was nothing glorious about her mother image but only an effective plan to make use of her.
The third story ‘Behind the Bodice’ in the collection of *Breast Stories* is a least exciting story highlighting the professional photographer Upin who is enthralled by the lovely breasts of a tribal girl Gangor. Gangor is oppressed sexually because of her beautiful breasts. Her body is used as a lucrative commodity. When Upin offers her money for taking photographs of her and her breasts, she readily relents to that because of her oppressive poverty. Due to the pictures taken by Upin and the fame his pictures brought them, her breasts have been ruined and she was exploited by the police, the labour contractors and others who had made her plight all the more miserable by turning her into a whore. The last two stories present the wretched condition of the women who sacrificed their own life and gave themselves away thinking that they were doing it for the sake of their livelihood.

Upin was an ace-photographer. “He is of squarish build, bearded, with too-bright eyes. He takes a bath once every few days, eats meat and drinks beer, smokes country cigarette” (138). Once he took photographs of a tribal girl Gangor and her marvelous breasts when he saw her baby suckling. Gangor did not object it but she asked, “Money, Sir, rupees? Snap a photo so give me cash!” (141). He sold the photographs and earned money. Then upin took the photos for the second time. This time Gangor asked 100 rupees per picture. Upin gave his watch to her. But Gangor threw the watch and shouted at him “You bastard ball-less crook! Give me a watch with one hand, and tell the police I stole it? Go, go, old jerk.”(143) Then Gangor’s man came, slapped her and took her away. However, Upin couldn’t forget the “mammal projections” (143). After some days when he came to see her he was shocked to see that the girl and her breasts have been ruined as a result of the fame his pictures brought them.
The tribal girl Gangor was subjugated by the police, the labour contractor, and others, and was now an alcoholic and a whore. When Upin met her, she said, “You snapped many many times my chest, Sir. But, I knew your plan. Otherwise would you have given so much cash? . . . Will Gangor unwind her cloth, or just lift it? Do your stuff, 20 rupees. Spend the night, 50, tell me quick” (154). Upin was shocked to see that Gangor became a whore. He asked her to take off her blouse. Gangor said angrily, Don’t you hear? Constantly playing it, singing it, and setting the boys on me . . . behind the bodice . . . You are a bastard too sir . . . you took photoks of my chest, eh? Okay . . . I’ll show . . . but I’ll take everything from your pocket, a – ll . . . Gangor took off her choli and threw it at Upin. “Look, look, look, straw – chaff, rags – look what’s there” (154). Her breasts were smashed out by fingers and nails and only gaping holes remained there. No breasts. “Two dry scars, wrinkled skin, quite flat. The two raging volcanic craters spew liquid lava at Upin”(155). Upin was much shocked when he saw the condition of Gangor. “Gangor puts her hands in his pockets with skilled ease, scrabbles in his pants pockets, what a smell of violent resentment in her body . . . and then she kicks the ground”(155). Unable to withstand her suffering, Upin threw himself before a train.

The fifth book taken for the study is Outcast: Four Stories. It is an exposition on the sad state of four marginalized women characters Dhouli, Shanichari, Josmina and Chinta who are particularly victimized by being marginalized even by the people who are considered as marginalized in society. In the four stories, Mahasweta Devi truly visualizes three level ladder formations in the Indian social order which consists of the rungs of the non-marginalized or the mainstream, the marginalized or the subordinated, and finally the outcast or the marginalized by the marginalized. The author discloses the essential buying
and selling of slaves that aggravates under the impression of the self-ruled society of India, and evidently specifies the difficulties of women who generally have no one to help them and have only some people to speak for them.

The first story “Dhouli” presents the sad predicament of a lower caste young widow (dusad) who is persuaded and infused by the son of a wealthy, upper-caste Brahman named Hanumanji Misra. His name was Misrilal. He got relieved of the dependability of the baby and its mother Dhouli by marrying another woman who belonged to his own caste and by settling in Ranchi, a distant Indian city. So Dhouli started to sell her body to take home bread for her son and for herself. At that time Misrilal arrived and he became instrumental in forcing her to leave her village and move to the city to become a prostitute.

Misrilal was fair skinned, curly haired and good looking. He was called a deota (devta or god/master). He fell in love with Dhouli, a dusad. He wanted to marry her. But Dhouli refused to accept his proposal because a Brahman like him could not marry a dusad. Even Misrilal’s mother and his elder brother Kundan did not like Misrilal marrying Dhouli. So they decided to send Misrilal away. But he refused to go because Dhouli was carrying his baby in her womb. Finally Misrilal got a promise from his mother that Dhouli and her mother would be taken care of when he went away. After getting this assurance from his mother, he left the place.

Misrilal’s family was on the lookout for a good looking girl for him. Misrilal met Dhouli and said that he would make some arrangements to open a shop and return in a month. Tying five ten rupee notes to the end of Dhouli’s sari, he asked her to be brave for a month. However, he did not return as he promised.
Four months passed. But Misrilal did not return. In the meantime, a son was born to Dhouli. Shanichari, the medicine woman of the village said to Dhouli’s mother that Misrilal was getting married and he would be sent to Dhanbad after the wedding. When Dhouli heard the news of Misrilal’s marriage, she became worried about her future. Misrilal came to the village after the marriage but he never tried to meet Dhouli. So she sent word through Shanichari asking him to meet her. “Then you’d better tell him to come here. Say that if he doesn’t, I’ll take his son and go to his wife. Even if the chief deota kills me for it.” (22-23) Misrilal came to meet Dhouli. She asked him why he ruined her. “If you had taken me by force, I could have got an acre of land. But you’re not even a man! Your brother’s a man! He gave Jhalo sons and he also gave her a house and land. What did you do for me?” (23) Misrilal consoled her and said to her that he would send her money from the shop and gave her a hundred rupee note. But since Misrilal ruined Dhouli’s life, she was angry with him. She felt that he tried to settle things with money. She said “You’ve ruined my life, deota. Does it hurt to hear a few hometruths? Or are all rich people like you so thin-skinned?” (24)

Then Dhouli told her mother to speak to her Mausi in Bhalatore. They could shift there and if necessary she would sell herself there. But her aunt did not encourage them. She also did not receive any news or money from Misrilal. One night she heard someone pelting stones at her door. She screamed, “Whoever you are, I sleep with a baloa beside me.” (25) Her mother was worried about their future. So Dhouli decided to go for work. The next day she went to Parasnath’s shop and asked him for a job. But he said, “Here’s some maroa. Take it and leave. I don’t need a helping hand. If I give you a job, the deota will be annoyed with me.”(26) Dhouli’s mother was angry on seeing her daughter return with the maroa. She said that she could not starve to death and she left the place by saying, “. . . Wretched female, if you can’t do anything else, why don’t you kill yourself!” (27)
Hearing the words of her mother, Dhouli tried to kill herself by drowning. But a man in a printed lungi saved her. He was the one who pelted stones at her door. By seeing his offensive gestures, she realized that it was her fate and she asked him to come to her house with money and some *makai*. Dhouli eaned some money by selling her body and ate two square meals a day with her mother. Misrilal’s brother Kundan watched Dhouli and he burned with rage. He questioned about her to Shanichari. But Shanichari said, “She was a widow. But your brother forced her to become a prostitute. If she hadn’t, would your brother’s son have survived? Everyone seems to be happy now. Even your friend, the contractor. His coolies no longer wander off here and there for a bit of fun.” (28) Kundan got angry and he went to Dhanbad and warned his brother. “Either give her some land, or some money. Because of you we now have a whore in the village!” (29) Misrilal was enraged and said to his brother that he would believe him if he saw it with his own eyes.

When Misrilal came to his village, he went to Dhouli’s house. Dhouli, dressed in a red sari with green bangles, hair smoothly oiled and braided opened the door. By seeing her, he said, “You’ve become a whore? . . . Why didn’t you die instead!” Dhouli answered, “I tried to kill myself. But then I thought why should I? You can get married, run a shop, see movies with your wife, and I have to kill myself? Why? Why? Why?” (31). In a few days, a panchayat was called for. It was announced that Dhouli should not practice prostitution in that village and that she could go to Ranchi, and do her whoring there. The next day Dhouli went to Ranchi with Kundan’s contractor where she was exploited and oppressed. As. M.N. Chatterjee writes in “Three Sides of Life: Short Stories by Bengali Women Writers”: “As poignantly brought out by the reputed author and social activist, it is not only the ruthless
exploitation of the weak and helpless but also the inhuman mindset of the oppressor that is reprehensible" (173).

In the second story, "Shanichari," an Oraon girl is marginalized like Dhouli in her own society for coming back with a diku’s child in her womb. A middle-aged woman, Gohuman, sold Shanichari to a brick kiln owner in Barasat, West Bengal, where she faced economic and sexual exploitation which led to her pregnancy. Then, Shanichari was sent back to her native village, only to face isolation.

Rahmat was the brick kiln owner in Kolkata. He opened brick kiln in and around Kolkata. Along with two other men he used to force the small farmers to give their land by giving them money or threatening them with some local musclemen. Shanichari was forced by Gohuman to seek work in Rahmat’s brick kiln. Rahmat raped her daily. “Rahmat would dress Shanichari in good clothes and nice jewellery, rub fragrant oil in her hair - and then tear into her ruthlessly.” (51) When the brick kiln was shut down, Shanichari returned home with Rahmat’s child in her womb.

The tribal people were forced to go to Kolkata and work in brick kiln in inhuman conditions. The Bihar Military Police (BMP), the Central Reserve Police Force (CRP) and the Border Security Force (BSF) set free a reign of terror. They gang raped all women along with Shanichari and left them in the forest without food or clothes. General Railway Police (GRP) got their share of flesh.

In the third story, “The fairytale of Rajabasha,” a self-imposed isolation from the world, is the outcome of the love of Josmina for her husband Sarjom. They were sold to a landowner in the far-away Indian state of Punjab, where Josmina faced the same treatment as Shanichari, although she finally managed to come back home with the hope of beginning a
new life. But her image of hope became an illusion because she had the symptom of motherhood. Finally, to save her beloved husband from being detested by his own community, Josmina committed suicide.

Nandlal Shahu was a village money lender. Sarjom Purti got money from Nandlal Shahu. So he worked in Nandlal’s land to repay the money. Nandlal supplied cheap coolie labourers to Punjab. He tempted Sarjom with a dream of high wages. He took Sarjom and Josmina to Punjab and sold them to Niranjan Singh who made them work eighteen hours a day with less pay. He also raped Josmina daily “To Niranjan she was just fresh meat; dark, junglee flesh which he had paid for.” (72)

Karnal Singh lived in Johan village. The couple Sarjom and Josmina went to him. The same work – routine was given to them. The same story of rape and exploitation was also repeated. Karnal Singh also tortured her sexually. He said, “Why shouldn’t I? Did Niranjan spare you, you wild junglee female? Don’t pretend to be so virginal!” (73)

Pritam Singh belonged to Kosa village. He gave shelter and work to Josmina and Sarjom. In the beginning, he said “Your wife is like a mother, a sister, to me.” (73) But finally he started to send word to Josmina. Thus the story of violence, torture and exploitation continued. Sardar Gyan Singh belonged to Hoshiarpur. He also tortured Josmina. He dragged Josmina away and poured liquor down her throat and told his cohorts, ‘You can have her, one by one.’ (76) Dileep Singh was the son of Sardar Sarban Singh of Badala village of Kapurthala district. He lived in the town. When he returned to the village, he saw Josmina and started to torture her. His act went on for a long time. Thus Josmina suffered at many hands. The exploitation and oppression did not stop but continued as she went for work to different men.
The last story ‘Chinta’ is located in an urban setting. It is different from the other three stories. But the theme of exploitation remains the same. Every year a group of people from Medinipur migrated to Calcutta. Medinipur provided them with a place to live and the means to live. Men would join as cooks. The women would work as part time maids forming groups and renting rooms in the slums. They also worked as live-in maids.

Chinta was a short, fair woman who wore silver bangles and a tattooed necklace. She was working in a house and her two-year old little daughter sat with a rope which was tied around her waist. “What an emaciated child, just sitting there in the dust of the porch. A sickly face which made her looks really ancient. Huge vacant eyes, with no trace of a child’s curiosity. She sat there with an air of great fatigue, patience and forgiveness.” (84)

When Chinta was asked why she kept her daughter tied up, she said she had work to do. Chinta had no one at home to look after her daughter. She had to work for a salary of eight rupees a month. In the meantime, Chinta gave birth to a baby girl. She went through hard times. She had to sell her silver bangles for ten rupees. Her fellow mates said “She has some fine bell-metal bowls and glasses. It’s unlikely that she’ll ever be able to claim them back.”(86) After a few days Chinta returned to work. She was very weak. She said, “I’ve left the elder one with the younger child this time, Ma. Poor people like us are killed off in many ways.” (86-87) Later, her health recovered and her salary raised to ten rupees a month.

One morning, there was a great hue and cry in the neighbourhood. Chinta was standing on the pavement. Two men came from her village with a twelve year old boy. One of the men shouted at Chinta, “You commit a sin and you don’t want to pay the penalty.” (88) Chinta never spoke a word, except, “I can’t afford it. What am I to do?” (88) When she attempted to embrace the boy, they pushed her away.
Chinta came to the narrator and asked for some money, narrating her story. Before completing the story, she said, “I m a great sinner, I’m cursed!”(88) Chinta said that she was a widow. She had a son called Gopal; she also had four bighas of land, two rooms, a couple of goats and a cow. Since she was a widow, her in-laws said, “You’re a young widow. Give us custody of your land.”(89) But she refused to agree; she had a terrible time in the village. During the night men began to prowl around her house. She would hold on to her son and recite God’s name. One day a man named Utsab came from Calcutta. He tried to seduce her. At first, Chinta did not encourage him. But he won her through her son Gopal by being very kind to Chinta and Gopal. As she was telling this point of the story Chinta burst out, “Youth is a terrible thing, Ma. The body’s hunger, I became a sinner.” (89)

Utsab wanted to marry her. He asked her to leave her son Gopal in the village so that they could go to Calcutta and get married there. Believing him Chinta went with him to Calcutta. Chinta took her bell-metal utensil with her because she thought that the villagers might steal them. After living with her for some time, Utsab went away leaving Chinta alone. She cried, “He ruined me and then left me. Didn’t marry me, didn’t give me any ornaments. He would beat me up, take all my money, and after giving me these two daughters, he absconded.” (89)

When the narrator asked Chinta why she did not go back to her village, Chinta replied that she had to pay two hundred rupees as penance for having sinned. She had to feast the people on rice and pithy and she had to forsake her two girls. If she passed all these tests only she would be accepted by her community. Since it was difficult for her to pay so much, she could not go back to her village.
The two men who came to meet Chinta were her late husband’s uncle and his son. They had looked after Chinta’s son after she left him. They wanted Chinta to get rid of the girls and come with them to the village. They would organize the repentance rites, so that Chinta could join them. They wanted to take her back because her son had come off age and they had to look for a girl for him to marry. When the narrator suggested to Chinta to stay in Calcutta along with her son, she refused. She said if she ignored the suggestions given by the in-laws, she would not be accepted by them; no one would be there to cremate her; her son would be made an outcast. Inspite of all these things, she did not want to go back because she was much worried about her daughters.

Chinta borrowed two rupees from the narrator to buy sweets, curd and murki for her in-laws. She believed that, “God helps those who have no one to turn to.” (90) Chinta’s in-laws held discussions in her room. She had to borrow money to buy them paan and tea. If Chinta was not scared to commit a sin, she would have earned more by flirting with the paanwalla. But she did not do that. The next day the maid who went to fetch water brought the news to the narrator that Chinta had given away her daughters for money.

As the narrator went for an evening walk, an old man from the neighbourhood said to her: “Two of her so-called relatives said they had sold her little girls for ten and eight rupees each. They wanted me to sign a paper. I drove them away. Just imagine! I’m sure you know what kind of people trade in flesh!” (92) The old man felt sorry because people like the narrator did not bother about Chinta; nor did they take any effort to correct her ways. He asked her to do some social work in the area.

The next morning Chinta came to the narrator wearing a new sari and blouse. Flanked by two men, she carried her bundle. The narrator could not ask her anything: “I didn’t ask
where she got the money for them. I was scared. Chinta didn’t cry this time. She wore the stunned, numb look of someone who has undergone some unimaginable horror. She kept looking at me with the eyes of a wounded animal. As if to gauge whether I too held her at fault.” (92)

After telling the narrator “You are a good person, Ma” (92), Chinta left that place. Before leaving, she said, “There’s no God for the poor” (93). Chinta’s son was to get married. The dowry money would be paid for the repentance rites or to help Chinta to get acceptance in the village. Chinta was silent and she crossed the road along with her in-laws and son. That was the last time the narrator saw Chinta.

Utsab who came from Calcutta was a handsome man. He made many promises to Chinta. Since Chinta did not encourage him in the beginning, he got to her through her son Gopal. He wanted to marry her for her beauty. Utsab supported her, because he wanted to show that he was their only source of support in her miserable condition. He asked her to leave her son in the village and come with him to Calcutta. He promised to marry her in Calcutta. But he ruined her and did not marry her. He used to beat her and take all her money. Finally he absconded after giving two daughters to Chinta. His oppression and exploitation reduced her to such pathetic condition.

The paanwalla also used to glance at her whenever Chinta went home after work. He was also attracted by her beauty. One night, he tried to clasp her in his arms. “The paanwalla with his lewd smile was obscenely keen on getting within touching distance. The knowledge of Chinta’s utter helplessness made the paan juice froth on his lips”(91). If Chinta was not scared to sin, she would have earned money by flirting with him. Then she was deceived by Utsab who deserted her at Calcutta.
Chinta’s late husband’s uncle and his son went to Calcutta and asked her to get rid of the girls and return to the village. Chinta’s son Gopal was under their control. It was time for him to get married. They told her that they would organize the repentance rites and see to that she would not be made an outcast.

The women characters and their stories appear differently. But the label of ‘Otherness’ that was attached to their survival categorizes the three characters. The opening paragraph of “Dhouli” created an atmosphere of an "Other world,” the world of the subaltern where no light can ever break in.

The bus left Ranchi in the evening and reached Taharr around eight at night...
The world beyond and the wide, metalled road ended here. Rohatgi

Company's bus was the only link between Taharr and the rest of the world ...

They used poor, rundown buses for poor, rundown places like Taharr, Palani or Burudiha. The service was suspended during the rainy season as buses couldn't ply on unmetalled roads. Taharr would be completely cut off from the rest of the world during the monsoon months (I).

An atmosphere of marginalization which was exaggerated later on is recommended by the use of words like “poor, rundown buses for poor, run down places” (I). At a different level, too, the word “buses,” a clear signifier of modern life style and civilisation, deals with the nature and role of the people of the “Other world” as these buses are clearly defined as abandoned vehicles fit only to work to a world where the “metalled road ends”. Like these buses the women also were used. In total variance from the allusion to the civilized world in the opening paragraph, the concluding paragraph of “Dhouli” indicates another structure of marginalization. Here Mahasweta Devi defines the natural world and thus brings out the nature-civilization dichotomy:
The sun shone brightly. The sky looked blue and the trees as green as always. She realized that nature was unaffected by the upheaval in her life. This painful thought made her weep. Wasn't everything supposed to change from to day? Everything? The day Dhouli was to finally enter the market place? Or is it that, for girls like Dhouli, nature accepted such a fate as only natural? The nature, which, after all, was not created by the Misras—or had the sky, the trees and the earth sold out to the Misras as well? (33)

The world of civilization is signified by the “metalled road” in the opening paragraph, and the nature at the conclusion of this short story remains indifferent to Dhouli's segregation from her own subaltern community.

Yet, Mahasweta Devi makes it clear through her story that the brand name of “Otherness” is given by the politics of power dynamics and the domination employed and enjoyed by a privileged class. In the Panchayat meeting, Dhouli’s destiny was decided by the senior Misra and Dhouli was given two options, whether to be burnt alive, or having to adopt the path of prostitution in an “Other world”.

Hanumanji declared, “Dhouli cannot practice prostitution in this village. She can go to some town, to Ranchi, and do her whoring there. If not, her house will be set on fire and mother, daughter, child will be burned to death.” (31) It is important and relevant to notice that the tribal untouchables, the dusads and ganjus, do not make any protest against this judgement. Hence the story clearly points to direct subjugation, which is the outcome of a communal power structure connected with the control of a dominant class. The approval of the decision of Hanumanji by the marginalized is revealed to be the outcome of the created
culture of the privileged, which results in the abandonment by the marginalized of those who belong to their own community.

In the story “Shanichari”, Mahasweta Devi portrays the young tribal girl, Shanichari’s position in the social ladder. Shanichari, along with her grandmother “enjoyed the train ride to Tohri, sitting on the floor of the compartment, chugging along, having a good time picking the lice from each other’s hair.” (34) This indirect indication to Shanichari and her grandmother’s subaltern state, recommended by the phrase “sitting on the floor of the compartment” (34) is more resistant through an obviously harmless fable told by the grandmother: “Don’t you know the one about the carpenter who carved a girl out of wood and became her father? The weaver who gave her clothes and became her brother? The goldsmiths who gifted her jewellery and became her uncles? Didn’t the sindoorwala bring her to life by giving her sindoor?” (35)

This story is a reminiscent of the myth of the birth of Eve in personification. As Eve was brought to life from Adam's rib, so also this girl was engraved from wood by a man and brought to life by the sindoor of another man, the Sindoorwala, who finally haunted her. The allusion to this tale in the very opening of the short story is that Shanichari will be treated as a product and thrown away as soon as her product life becomes worthless to the males in her life.

This suggestion turns out to be clear with the arrival of Hiralal, the wandering folk-song singer who leads his life by singing songs in train compartments. Hiralal, who is gifted with an apparent choratic purpose in the story, solves apparently Gohuman's tricks in confining young girls like Shanichari. Mahasweta Devi depicts the cunning ways in which tribal girls like Shanichari “felt the fangs of Gohuman” (44) by making use of a close informal manner
and occasionally a direct descriptive method. The dreadful destiny of tribal girls like Shanichari is clearly portrayed by Mahasweta Devi in this short story. The Indian paramilitary forces were required to suppress the tribal people by flaming their huts, by raiding their possessions and killing them, and by gang raping their women. In a manner of critical satire, Mahasweta Devi differentiates between the educated mainstream reader, reading a short story about the condition of the oppressed tribal sitting in his or her secure fireplace and home, and the condition of the “Ho-Oraon Munda girls”:

The BMP took the young girls into the forest and raped them. Imagine the scene. Familiar to you, no doubt, from innumerable story books —the lush green forest and a group of Ho-Oraon-Munda girls who look as if they have been exquisitely carved out of black stone. Only the bestial howls of the BMP would have been left out of such a picture-book scene(46).

It is persistently sarcastic that Mahasweta Devi corresponds with a song of the tribal community:

“My girl could live on tubers,
Wear leafs and buds in her ears,
Alas, trees can't grow clothes
“Dear Ma” my girl said. “So
To the brick kilns I must go
To the brick kilns I must go” (47)

With the storyteller’s ironic opinion along with inquiry presented for the concern of her readers: “Don't some of you buy saris worth thousands of rupees every puja?” (46)
Since Shanichari was compelled to leave the village and forced to go away from the desolate forest, she moved to the brick kilns. There she came across even a worse situation. In the brick kiln, the owner provided her clothes only for her to be exposed and raped. Shanichari’s fate could be compared to that of Douloti.

As soon as Shanichari left, another tribal girl was restored and she began to work as a reja (A tribal girl who works in brick kiln). Shanichari was paid less and fed little. She was considered as sub-human and infused by the owner of the brick kiln. Finally Shanichari went back to her people only to realize that she was an outcast in her own village. The final marginalization of Shanichari is portrayed through a conversation between naiga, the village head priest and the brother of her murdered lover, Chand Tirkey: “We should think about this as a community. There could be more Shanicharis in the future. Should we cast out our own women? Will that benefit our society?” The naiga said, “We'll think about it if it happens again. Not now. This is a new problem.” (54)

Through the story “The Fairytale of Rajabasha” Mahasweta Devi, provides a vivid portrayal of the exploitation of a tribal couple Sarjom and Josmina. She also brings out the oppression of the tribal people who live below the poverty line and finally records the performance of the wealthy people belonging to the mainstream. The story begins with the narrative of the preparation of a tribal feast on the event of the marriage service of Sarjom and Josmina, and Sura Jonko says: “Not just turmeric and salt, let's cook it [the meat] with onions, pepper and other spices” (57) and the narrator voices their unuttered sentiment: “Great fun, great food” (57) The feeling of peace and happiness experienced by the couple amidst scarcity and poverty is conveyed by the author: “Josmina collected roots and tubers from the forest. Living off just these and ghalo made of makai, she looked gorgeous. A new
mother, the curves of Josmina's body tilled out like the gushing Koyena in the months of rain. There was much happiness and peace in this first chapter of the fairytale of Rajabasha.” (59)

Soon after these happy days, the disastrous confusion entered in the lives of the couple caused by their travelling to Punjab as slaves. When they came back to their village again, Mahasweta Devi's depiction shows their happiness:

Within no time everything became as it was before. It was so refreshing to bathe in the waters of the Koyena. So peaceful to boil some makai at the end of the day and cook ghato in the evening. To sprinkle salt on it and eat off leaf plates. So pleasant to sit by the banks of the river, washing pots and pans while chatting to girls you've known all your life (78).

The happiness of the couple inspite of their poverty is contrasted by Mahasweta Devi’s portrayal of Nandlal Sahu’s sorrow along with his prosperity. “He had two fine houses in the districts of Manoharpur and Raikera. And two wives (in contrast to Sarjom's one hut and one wife) in those two houses. Now his first wife, who lived in Rajabasha, was pestering him for a pucca brick house.” (59) So to fulfill the desire of his first wife, Nandlal sold Josmina and Sarjom to an “adarsh kisan of Punjab” (65)

Mahasweta Devi illustrates that at the very centre of the mainstream - marginal problem lies the typical self-motivation of a feudal master and slave relationship in which the master treats the slave as a product and also as a tool of labour. Due to this, as he bought the couple, the Punjabi agriculturalist, Niranjan Singh, “pinched Sarjom's arm and shoulder muscles,” and after sometime when Josmina, “gaping open-mouthed at everything around her, put a nipple to the child's mouth,” Niranjan mused: “Feed her for a week and these goods
will be just right.”(66) All through the story, Mahasweta Devi advocates that these subaltern people are nothing but “maal,” “goods” commodities, “junglee jaan-wars,” forest animals, to those at the top of the social ladder: “To Niranjan, she (Josmina) was just fresh meat; dark, junglee (savage) flesh which he had paid for. They bought it all up, everything. Everything that belonged to the Josminas.”(72) As a result, the master treated them as he liked, made them to work sixteen to eighteen hours, exposed and ill-treated the wife in front of her child, and put them under lock and key at night: “It was his (the master’s accomplice, Harchand’s) job to keep the buffaloes, cows and bonded labour under lock and key.”(68).

“The Fairytale of Rajabasha” is not merely the exploitation of the tribal “Other.” After winning a reprieve from their slavery, Josmina and Sarjom came back to their tribal village. But their hopes of happiness were crushed when Josmina realized that she was carrying the child of the Punjabi man who had raped her. When Josmina came to know that her own tribal community would never forgive this, and that they would not be accepted within the society, she drowned herself in the Koyena River on the banks of which she spent pleasant moments with Sarjom. Debasish Chatttopadhyay says in his article, “Frames of Marginalisation in Mahasweta Devi’s Outcast-Four stories”, “One way to look at these short stories of Mahasweta Devi is to read them as the voiced articulations of the tribal “others” in contemporary Indian society.” (111)

The answer of Gayatri Spivak to the question whether the subaltern can speak has been deeply in the negative sense. Yet, it is important to notice that Mahasweta Devi speaks not only about the marginalized, but, more significantly, about the marginalized within the society of the marginalized. She does not give voices to the troubles of those at the limits of civilization, but studies about them and replicates how organizations that cause
marginalization are imitated in the surface of the marginal’s society. The author's compassion reveals the reality of an exploitation suppressed within the truth of another exploitation. Regarding Mahasweta Devi’s concern for the exploited, Debasish Chattopadhyay says, “Mahasweta’s true concern is with a subalternity subsumed within a larger parameter of subalternity. In a sense, this is a deeply humanistic perception, one that is as incisive as an insight into human reality, as a deep and penetrating social understanding.”(111)

Mahasweta Devi champions the cause of the downtrodden. N.S. Jagannathan remarks about the involvement of Mahasweta Devi in the protest movement in “Champion of the Downtrodden”:

Mahasweta Devi has not only participated and led protest movements of tribals and other members of the underclass but is continually involved in the engendering of a consciousness of their rights. For this purpose, she has used, among other things, Bortika, a quarerly journal she has been publishing from 1980. This has not only her own writings but also those by the victims of exploitation who air in its columns their views, experiences and grievances (11).

Mahasweta Devi presents how sexual politics perpetuate the oppressive system and destroy those who threaten to destabilize the system. Among her women, Draupadi refuses to be destroyed. Mahasweta Devi explores the way in which Indian women have occupied a subaltern position that is oppressed both by traditional notion of patriarchy and by colonialism. Jaidev states in the article “This Fiction is Injurious to Illusions”:

Mahasweta Devi’s fiction depicts the casual way in which the entire democratic apparatus, including our judiciary, appears to be all too keen to
reinforce the moral that like engineered droughts and the systematic elimination of all dissent and resistance, all rapes, murders, displacements and robberies of the poor are natural, are indeed the daily, necessary expressions of god’s will (6).

Mahasweta Devi’s novels and short stories comprise of the dehumanized and exploited. Sexual exploitation unites with class and caste suppression to consign the woman to the lowest level of the village hierarchy. Mahasweta Devi slashes at Indian society’s hierarchical structure which is divided into two desolate and harsh categories. One is the dominator, nameless and monotonous and the other is the dominated, helpless and oppressed. Despite the fact that there is no patriarchal dominance in the lowest classes and the tribals which are portrayed by Mahasweta Devi, tribal women confront gender isolation and sexual exploitation besides the regular class and caste subjugation under the dominant class.