Chapter IV
Resistance

Literature does not stop with the mere portrayal of suffering but also offers means to alleviate suffering. One such means offered by Mahasweta Devi and opted by her characters for the alleviation of suffering is resistance. Resistance is a means to defy any kind of imposition. Generally people resist when they are in trouble; they resist to come out of their trouble or suffering. It is also the act of opposing passively or actively.

Through Mahasweta Devi’s works, one can hear the voice of the community, which remains voiceless otherwise. The personality of Mahasweta Devi, her views, opinions, thoughts and feelings and her attitude and outlook are reflected in her writings. This outstanding contemporary Bengali novelist and social activist writes about women, tribals and revolutionaries who undergo untold sufferings. She also focuses on the resistance of her characters though it is not explicitly shown in all her writings. She writes with both passion and a sense of history. Her direct involvement with the lives of these people enables her to write with exactness and accuracy. In her article, “Battling for the people: Mahasweta Devi,” Kalyani Dutta talks about her concern for the tribals and their sufferings: “Her unflinching dedication to her chosen cause, both literary and social, has swayed the highest institutions in the land, both official and private, to bestow on her the greatest awards they have in their keeping.” (4)

Mahasweta Devi lashes at the exploitative system, which treats them in an inhuman way, refusing to give them their due dignity. Because of the exploitation they are subjected to, the hardships they face, the official indifference and lack of concern, survival itself becomes difficult for the tribal community.
Through the three outstanding stories of *Imaginary Maps*, Mahasweta Devi presents the real India. The plots and action of the stories are the prevalent conditions of India. They are illustrations and examples of human suffering and resistance. Mahasweta Devi feels that human beings should know what they are entitled to so that they could claim whatever is their due. Unless the tribals feel for the necessity of their freedom and liberty there will not be any possibility of resistance. As Waseem Anwar has said in his article “Transcribing Resistance: Cartographies of Struggling Bodies and Minds in Mahasweta Devi’s *Imaginary Maps*”:

From the world-renowned organizations to the unknown regional slums in Indian villages, Devi has ironically compressed the expanding margins of local poverty within the shrinking borders of global prosperity. *Imaginary Maps* foregrounds the hypocrisy operating behind the inclusive-exclusive dynamic and records its effects on the resisting bodies and minds of the most discriminated populations in the world village (94).

*Imaginary Maps* indicates map-drawing of resisting bodies and minds and their struggles against mysterious brutal forces controlling life at local and global levels. The characters reproduced on real life heroes and heroines by Mahasweta Devi in *Imaginary Maps* give evidence to the reality. They are an example of “the celebration of the organic intellectual in Mahasweta’s work and writing-work” (xxiii) says Gayatri Spivak in the preface. Chari quotes the words of Gayatri Spivak, “When the subaltern ‘speaks’ in order to be heard and gets into the structure of responsible (responding and being responded to) resistance, he or she is or is on the way to becoming an organic intellectual.” (59)
The bold and clever protagonist Mary Oraon of “The Hunt” retaliated and killed the oppressor. She was able to keep everyone at a distance. She hated Tehsildar’s advances and was tired of Tehsildar’s pursuit. She was also worried about her lover Jalim’s safety. She said, “Tehsildar has a lot of money, a lot of men. A city bastard, He can destroy Jalim by setting up a larceny case against him.” (12) So she decided to do away with him on the day of the feast. Mary was waiting for a chance to put an end to the tortures she suffered due to Tehsildar’s pursuit.

Mary planned things in such a way that she would not miss her chance of doing away with Tehsildar. She escaped from him one day when Tehsildar caught her hand by saying, “Today I’m unclean. On the day of the feast. Stay near that rock. The women will go far to play the hunt. I will come to you. You know which rock! You look for me from behind that stone.” (13)

Mary was excited on the day of the feast. She wore a new coloured sari and red blouse and she was like “the flamboyant tree in motion.” (15) She eagerly waited for the time of the hunt because she was not going to hunt an ordinary man but “the big beast! A man, Tehsildar.” (15) When Tehsildar was at the rock, she became like an animal in her spirit. She laid him on the ground and kept on lifting and lowering the machete till she accomplished her task. She took the wallet from Tehsildar’s pocket as there was a lot of money in the wallet. She took all the money and threw his body in the ravine.

In “The Author in Conversation” Mahasweta Devi justifies Mary Oraon’s act of murdering Tehsildar as an act of justice which is done on behalf of tribal community: “She resurrected the real meaning of the annual hunting festival day by dealing out justice to a crime committed against the entire tribal society.” (xi) Chari sums up the character of Mary
and her desire for freedom when he comments, “Mary Oraon zealously protects her honour in the face of the violence-packed dichotomous relation operating all around her. She spurns all attempts on her independence, keeps the savings she earns by picking the seed from the four Mahua trees on the Prasad property as she is aware of the legal provision that ‘the right to the fruit goes to the picker’. ” (3)

Mary was free from Tehsildar. All along she was undergoing mental agony because of him. After killing the big beast Tehsildar, Mary joined the festival with her people and enjoyed the feast. When the others were busy dancing she moved back so that she could join her lover. Mary Oraon was not afraid of darkness; nor was she afraid of the animals in the forest; with the removal of the ‘one’ animal she feared she was exultant: “all the mundane blood-conditioned fears of the wild quadruped are gone because she has killed the biggest beast.” (17)

The story ends as “Backing in the dark . . . Mary runs fast in the dark. She knows the way by heart. She will walk seven miles tonight by way of Kuruda Hill and reach Tohri. She will awaken Jalim. From Tohri there are buses, trucks. They will go away somewhere. Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Gomo, Patna. Now, after the big kill, she wants Jalim.”(16)

Mahasweta Devi upholds the indomitable spirit of Mary Oraon who resisted the oppressor. One cannot go on as a slave even if the social system which they are parts of demands it. All human beings should be accorded freedom and dignity that is their due. It is fitting to note what Waseem Anwar says in his article “Transcribing Resistance: Cartographies of Struggling Bodies and Minds in Mahasweta Devi’s Imaginary Maps”:

Mary Oraon in ‘The Hunt’ replicates the historical images of the third world women freedom fighters. She casts away misrepresentations about herself to identify a stronger self-
representation . . . Mary’s violence is justified against the physical harassment, mental
torture, and economic violence that her gender faces at the hands of a system controlled by
corrupt contractors and bribing Brahmins. The emptiness of the forest resulting from the
money mongering mentality of the city-bastard ends up in a hunt that harks back to the
historical repercussions of unstable and unequal distribution of rights, humans as well as
economic(89-91).

In the second story “Douloti, the Bountiful”, the exploitative metaphysical dichotomy
is established in its natural precapital form. Douloti, the innocent tribal girl became a kamiya
to Paramananda. Filled with human spirit, Douloti refused to be monotonous and so she “has
taken the yoke of Crook’s bondservitude on her shoulders.” (73) When Bono escaped the
bond-slavery, Douloti tackled it bravely and with moral responsibility of love for her father.
Chari says, “Crook Nagesia is too ineffectual to resist in the face of the local conspiracy
between the Rajput bond-lord and the Brahmin ‘god’. It is a hegemonic nexus of power
politics and caste or religion- a coercive force of metaphysical proportions over which the
tribals have no power to exercise or resist.”(66)

Douloti was made a kamiya for three hundred rupees. “Having bonded herself for
three hundred rupees in 1962 – how much has she raised by 1970? Over forty thousand.”
(85) After slogging a lot she earned so much for her master. Then she became ill and so
useless in the flesh trade. Douloti had to go to the hospital as she developed fever and red
swelling all over her body. When she was rejected even in the hospital, she decided to go to
her birth place Seora. As she was very sick and tired she was not able to walk. She vomited
blood and fell down near the school.
Mohan Srivastava, the master at the basic primary school in Tohri made arrangements for the celebration of Independence Day by drawing a huge map of India in front of the school. When he came down from his room, he saw Doulot lying dead on the map of India. The question that comes immediately to the mind of the reader would be, when such conditions prevail, how can Independence Day be celebrated? The author’s question “Today, on the fifteenth of August, Doulot 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? Doulot is all over India” (94) is quite pertinent and significant. Even after so many years of independence, the tribals are yet to see the light of real freedom.

Mahasweta Devi uses the image of the bonded sex worker lying dead on a map of India to condemn exploitation and to destroy the illusion of a free India for all. She indicates that real independence is not possible as long as there is gender, social and material inequality which allows one group to abuse another. Doulot, lying on the chalk dust of the map of a mythical India, brings back the harsh realities of life which is reflected in the narrators’ words, “everything would have remained a fairy tale, but the conclusion of the fairy tale is life, bloody, pain-filled life.” (50)

Bono Nagesia who belonged to Seora village went to Dhanbad to work in a coal quarry. He earned a lot of money. With that money he built a house. But Munabar Singh Chandela burnt his house. His men locked Bono in a room and forced him to put his thumb print on a white paper in receipt of twenty-five rupees. Then he was declared a bond-slave. Bono decided not to repay the money because it needed the unending labour of his body and his family. He also decided not to perform the marriage of his son Dhano with Crook Nagesia’s daughter. Finally Bono escaped the bond-slavery and departed from Seora village.
Then he joined in the service of the missionary, Father Bomfuller. Later his family also left the village. The women started up the harvesting song whenever they remembered Bono:

“Down in the wheatfield a yellow bird has come
O his beak is red.” (30)

The manner of exploiting the powerless and the marginalized tribal poor and the kind of official indifference that encloses the fate of these people force Mahasweta Devi to move away from the comforts of her own privileged middle-class atmosphere and identify herself with them and their difficulties so that they could be taught the art of self-emancipation. Their cause has been her life’s mission and her depiction of their troubles symbolically marks the social oppression modern India brings about in any case. The type of resistance Douloti offers against the oppressive reality and inequality is one of defiance of human spirit, instead of “internalized gendering perceived as ethical choice” (xxiv) as Gayatri Spivak reflects about Douloti.

In his article “Douloti as a National Allegory” Jaidev asserts about resistance:

Resistance develops to the Great Indian Meaning but alas, inspite of New Delhi, Patna or social research centres. It develops, simply because it is in the nature of injustice to give rise to resistance, although side by side the ever more effective means of repression are also fashioned out by those favouring the statusquo. Not only does the arrival of the Naxalites on the scene bring in a great number of police, para-military and military forces, but even the contractors and landlords raise their private armies (138).

The third story “Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha” portrays still a new picture of the tribal resistance to the offensive of modernist development. Mahasweta Devi asserts in “The Author in Conversation” that “Pterodactyl is an abstract of my entire tribal
experience.’’ (xiv) The Nagesia experience she has ‘imagined into fiction’ also signifies the tribal experience all over India. This creates the three stories all of a piece in portraying the spirit which is also “the agony of the tribals.” (xiv)

The journalist Puran Sahay has been portrayed as a representative of the main stream culture of capitalist India. Puran Sahay travelled over tribal tracks in search of the truth between fact and fiction for mapping the systems of political economy that influenced these low lying areas and the low caste people.

Puran took a mission of resistance against the corruption rampant in the land, destroying its resources and its people. The tribal people did not want pictures, documentaries and reports about their life. But they were in need of some solid means to get rid of the corrupt political and administrative influences. Waseem Anwar states in his article “Transcribing Resistance: Cartographies of Struggling Bodies and Minds in Mahasweta Devi’s Imaginary Maps,”

Sahay ‘witnesses his own futility’ (181) as he stands exposed in front of the monstrous unfolding history of the region. He keeps questioning whether his fantasized mission would be helpful to highlight the problems of the tribal in India. All that the tribal wants is no more documentaries, pictures, and reports about their life, but some solid means to get rid of the corrupt political and administrative influences (87-88).

The Dahis were the first people to die of enteric fever. Puran was given shelter in the room of Dahis. A shrine was attached to the house and he was warned not to enter the shrine. At night, it started raining. “And when the rain symphony was at its peak, then into Puran’s room came the soul of the ancestor of Shankar’s people, half clawscratching, half floating.” (141)
Puran heard some sound coming from the shrine and he walked towards it. “From the other side of millions of years the soul of the ancestors of Shankar’s people looks at Puran, and the glance is so prehistoric that Puran’s brain cells, spreading a hundred antennae, understands nothing of that glance. If tonight he’d seen a stone flying with its wings spread, would he have been able to speak to it.” (141-142) The soul wanted shelter with Puran. So he couldn’t betray that. The individuality of Puran influenced his ancestor’s spirit, although there was a confusion that, “Why should Shankar’s ancestors give Puran strength?” (142)

Puran Sahay realized that he could save the respect of the tribals by not exposing the reality to the newspapers and scientists. Puran Sahay was respected by the tribals. Shankar came to Puran and said, “You have brought this rain, the people of Pirtha are now in your debt.” (144)

When Puran set out with his bag on his shoulder, Shankar said ‘Come at the drought.’ (195) As a miracle happened by raining, they wanted Puran to visit again. Shankar said they would not leave that place. He said,

The ancestors’ soul let us know that all the places it visited are ours. Can anyone leave any more, or will they leave? . . . They will not leave, they will not go anywhere leaving those stones, hills, caves, and river. To the fertile fields, to the plains, where there is plenty of water, and many supports for survival. If they want to give us aid, let them give it to us here (195).

Puran was the close participant and not the distant spectator for pterodactyl! “Love, excruciating love, let that be the first step. Now Puran’s amazed heart discovers what love for Pirtha there is in his heart, perhaps he cannot remain a distant spectator anywhere in life.”(197) Waseem Anwar’s view on Puran Sahay reflects his stand: “Like the tribals, he
holds to the mission of resistance against corruption that is fast eroding the land, its resources and its people.” (86)

In the situation of colonial and counter-colonial requirements, the raiding of the tribal land by colonial and aboriginal powers offers multiple views. This is what Homi K. Bhabha called the “authentication of histories of exploitation and the evolution of strategies of resistance.” (qtd. in Anwar 88) The postcolonial and neo-colonial facts about global economy emphasize the resistance of the most oppressed population against the oppressive technologies that use power through unequal supply and allotment of labour.

Regarding the resistance of the body and mind, what Waseem Anwar opines is worth noticing:

The imaginary travel through myth and reality reveals various forms of resistance to the multilayered oppression and economic exploitation. The cartography and politics of the global economy in Imaginary Maps raise issues related to the subdivision of land into human categories of distance and difference. In doing so, the text highlights the secret routes of international transactions. From the world-renowned organizations to the unknown regional slums in Indian villages, Devi has ironically compressed the expanding margins of local poverty within the shrinking borders of global prosperity. Imaginary Maps foregrounds the hypocrisy operating behind the inclusive-exclusive dynamic and records its effects on the resisting bodies and minds of the most discriminated populations in the world village (93-94).

The reasonably-disabled woman Sanichari of Rudali, fought with the system which guarantees an organized peace and incompetence of the subaltern. Religion, patriarchy,
feudalism and capitalism are the basic elements of the system which constantly and
effectively strengthen and support each other. Malavika Karlekar opines in her review of
*Rudali*: “Mahasweta Devi’s works, deeply rooted in history, provide vivid portrayals of the
rural underclass, her many characters robust even in their suffering and of course, in their
resistances. Her use of local dialects and a pungent turn of phrase make authentic the many
experiences of pain.”(137)

Sanichari, a poor tribal woman, was affected by the existing corrupt system. As
Sanichari was a poor, low-caste farming labourer, she found a way out later in her life. She
became a professional mourner. All she had to do was weep, wail and ululate, roll on the
ground, strike herself on the breast and belly and forehead, and she would receive fine meals,
cash and clothes. The class of malik-mahajans and the landlord – moneylenders, who had
taken the land of the poor in the years following Independence, held rich funerals at which
weeping and ululation was performed by the rudalis. They were gratified to pay off Sanichari
generously for shedding tears in memory of her ‘benefactors,’ their dead relatives. The
rudalis, who had nothing to sell but their wails, were worn out agricultural labourers, some of
whom had been seduced, ruined, and thrown into the whores’ quarter.

After becoming a rudali, Sanichari came to know something about rupees-annas-
paise, and for once in her life she could hold up her end of a good deal in her life. It was quite
a miracle, really, because until then, even though sorrows and difficulties came in succession
and caused sadness, Sanichari could not bring herself to cry. She could not convey her
sorrows and grieves in the usual way in which humans, particularly women, do. Sanichari did
not weep when her ailing mother-in-law passed away. It was because at that time her
husband and his brother were in jail. When her brother-in-law and his wife died within three
years of her mother-in-law’s death, she could not weep because sorrow had become the condition of her life. After some years, Sanichari’s husband also died and Sanichari was unable to weep because she was busy giving offerings to her husband. 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, because she had to perform the rites and enquire about her daughter-in-law.

Sanichari learnt to adjust with poverty and also other forms of suppression. She was also in need of great effort to use the system for her purpose. The untouchables suffered because of the power structure. Sanichari’s first step against the system was her decision to choose the profession of a mourner. Her second method of resistance was her refusal to cry. It was because she did not want to shatter herself. Sanichari protested against the system by exploiting it. When the prostitutes formed an organization through which they formed a group of mourners, they gave a big blow to the upper caste people. The rich people were in a position to accept them for the fear that they would be insulted by the prostitutes. Malavika Karlekar comments,

Mahasweta Devi’s brilliant irony forces the reader to look anew at the social construction of something as natural as crying: the death of her husband and son and later abandonment by her daughter-in-law and grandson- all against the backdrop of a relentless struggle for survival- have made Sanichari unable to cry. And yet in the final analysis, she makes her living by ‘crying’ on behalf of those for whom ostentatious mourning is an essential part of ritual status (138).
The female bonding that developed between Sanichari and her childhood friend Bikhni is an important theme in the story as it changes their position. Saumitra Chakravarty says in “Marad Tu? A Journey towards Female Empowerment in Mahasweta Devi’s Draupadi and Rudali”: “Sanichari and her friend Bikhni become rudalis, professional mourners, mourning the unmourned dead of the landlords for money. They are, thus, ultimately able to reverse the dominator-dominated, predator-prey roles within the village hierarchy.” (148)

Sanichari and her changing personality negotiated the delicate mesh of life at the edge of poverty with energy and determination. Sanichari was different from the upper class wives of the maliks. She was free to identify the restrictions of her life. With Bikhni she worked with whores to create a socially pleasing feminine role, and the beginning of the leadership of Sanichari could clearly be seen when she encouraged them to wail louder hitting their heads on the ground: “The gomasta began to weep tears of sorrow. Nothing will be left! Cunning Sanichari! Hitting their heads meant they had to be paid double!”(140) When the whores decided how much they were to be paid for their dedicated services, the besieged male world of the malik-mahajans moved away to discuss traditional equations. According to Usha Ganguli, ‘Rudali’ is powerful precisely because it is a woman’s story. Her view is quoted extensively here for a better understanding of the condition of women:

I wanted to write about Indian women, about their problems, their sufferings, social prejudices, etc. I produced Bama at that time, which contained three different stories of three different women, but there were no Indian women in it. ‘What about her story, her struggle?’ This question was haunting me all the time . . . Suddenly ‘Rudali’, which I had read long ago, came to mind and I started writing down a few things. Initially, I wrote two scenes: in one
Sanichari wears the earrings, and in the other Parbatia confronts Sanichari. Incidentally, neither of the scenes are in the original story. I couldn’t stop thinking of ‘Rudali’ . . . There are two subjects that I have wanted to work with. One is how the ‘political parties are exploiting our religion . . . The other is the women’s problem. I haven’t found any suitable Indian play dealing with these problems . . . If a man had directed Rudali, I know it would have been totally different. For example, the relationship between Sanichari and Bikhni was based solely on my inner experiences. I also wanted to show different kinds and shades of women in Rudali (35).

Empowerment has also brought about an attitudinal change in Sanichari. The hitherto submissive, inhibited and trampled on by life as contrasted to the more aggressive and defiant Bikhni, Sanichari shed her fear of social criticism and was able to manipulate circumstances for her own survival after the death of Bikhni. In the last scene, these black-clothed mourners took over the bloated and rotting body of the landlord in a symbolic gesture of victory, having shoved aside the gomastha to shed tears over lost opportunities. Their mourning robes flapping like the wings of black scavenger birds over the dead, their howl of grief became a howl of triumph. A young prostitute leered and winked at the landlord’s nephew over the corpse, the same nephew who had helped reduce her to prostitution. This makes it a journey of social, economic and sexual empowerment. Saumitra Chakravarty says, “At the end of Rudali, Sanichari emerges as one able to manipulate the system that threatens to destroy her, Dopdi’s utter fearlessness itself renders the victimiser powerless to destroy the victim. These are climactic moments in the journey towards empowerment of women.” (150-51)
*Mother of 1084* is regarded as an important milestone in Mahasweta Devi’s literary career as it is, according to Savita Goel “a watershed novel both in terms of approach and content, and in terms of language and style.” (118) Mahasweta Devi points out in the introduction to the novel *Mother of 1084*: “I set an apolitical mother’s quest to know her martyred Naxalite son, to know what he stood for; for she had not known true Brati ever, as long as he had been alive.” (xii)

Mahasweta Devi’s novel *Mother of 1084* records the literary establishment of her deepening social awareness in the course of recording the emotional struggles of a mother who tried to understand her son’s participation in the Naxalite Movement, a revolt that began in 1967 in the village of Naxalbari, Northern West Bengal, and soon extended to urban areas in the region until the mid-1970s. Mahasweta Devi skillfully implies how the journey of discovery carries the mother to an understanding of not only her son’s death but also the satisfied and deceitful capitalist society her son had revolted against.

*Mother of 1084* focuses on the psychological and emotional crisis of a mother who awakened one morning to the heart-rending news that her dear son was laying dead in the police morgue, and was demeaned to a mere numeral-corpse No. 1084. That awakening led her to a journey of discovery, in the course of which, struggling to understand the Naxalite son’s revolutionary commitment, she began to recognize her own alienation, as a woman and wife, from the complacent, hypocritical, bourgeois society her son had rebelled against.

Savita Goel while analysing the novel in her article “A Journey of Discovery: Mahasweta Devi’s *Mother of 1084*” points out: “She examines how this awakening leads the mother of the dead son to a journey of discovery, in the course of which, struggling to understand her Naxalite son’s revolutionary commitment, she begins to recognize her own
alienation from the hypocritical, complacent and bourgeois society her son had rebelled against.” (118) Thus Death brought him closer to her through her search and led the mother to a journey of discovery and self-discovery and the reason of her son’s revolt.

Sujata was the wife of a wealthy man. She had four children out of which Brati, the youngest son was a complete rebel. Sujata was betrayed by her husband Dibyanath and also by her family members. Only her younger son Brati understood her. After the death of her son Brati, Sujata began to search for her identity and also about her son. In the final section of the novel, Sujata is shown as self-assured, morally confident and politically sensitive. She decided to step out of the house to understand the lives of the mothers of four boys who died along with Brati. Sujata realized that it was time she resisted. A. Jagamohana Chari and E. Satyanarayana in their article “The Dramatic Strategies in Mahasweta Devi’s Five Plays” remark that “Sujata having found a parallel to her own silent protest against the patriarchal family system in Brati’s rebellion exhorts the people to wake up from slumber and fight for their inalienable rights.”(161)

Sujata learnt many things about Brati from Somu’s mother. The search for the discovery of truth about her son ended up as a self-discovery. When Sujata met Nandini, Brati’s faithful follower, she learnt about a part of the life of her son which she never knew. By visiting these people, Sujata got some secret understanding and awareness. As she made an attempt to re-create Brati around herself, she refused to wipe out Brati’s memories from the house. She maintained a distance with her husband Dibyanath. These were some methods of positive resistance.

The novel discovers Sujata’s transformation from a submissive to an independent woman. When Brati was two years old, Sujata refused to be the mother for the fifth time and
this was her first act of rebellion. This was against the lack of concern of Dibyanath. Her second act of rebellion was her refusal to leave the job. She rebelled for the third time after Brati’s death when she shouted at her husband, “Two years ago, for thirty-two, I never asked you where you spent your evenings, or who accompanied you on your tours for the past ten years, or why you paid the house rent for your ex-typist. You are never to ask me a thing. Never.” (93) Her son’s death made Sujata discover her own self and understand that she too had overcome her submissiveness and meekness.

The continuous neglect of her husband and the family led Sujata to seek emancipation and it came to her when she was able to question the power structure. When Sujata realized the absurdity of the hypocritical order which was established in the house, she started to rebel against it. She blamed her son Brati in the beginning for not behaving in accordance with his social status and this was a strong comment against the power structure. “He gave up the life he was born to. If he had stuck to it, Brati would have gone to Britain, returned from Britain, found a good job and risen up the social ladder with effortless ease” (68). However, later she realized that Brati was not an ordinary person but a revolutionary. She too was not ready to submit to male-domination any longer. When Sujata raised her voice against Dibyanath’s presence in the room it became very reactionary. She did not want anymore interference in her life. “For Dibyanath it was a slap in the face.” (94) Sujata also questioned him about his absences from the house to meet his ex-typist. She refused to give her ornaments to her daughter Tuli and that was also something that brought out her voice.

When Sujata realized the absurdity of the hypocritical order which was established in the house, her voice became louder. Satyanarayana states in the introduction to “The Plays of Mahasweta Devi”: “Unable to free herself from the clutches of male dominated society,
Sujata fails to realize her own being. But after her discovery of Brati through the confrontation with people outside her respectable existence, Sujata does not remain a passive sufferer. She feels punished for not knowing her son Brati. She decides to carry out what he left unfulfilled."(24) Hence her resistance. Thus it is the story of an upper middle class woman whose world was changed when her son was killed for his Naxalite beliefs.

The result of the novel laid on the tension between the inhuman world of the rich and the humanity represented by the poor people. The unearthly figure of Sujata outlined a relation between these two worlds. Her meetings with Somu's mother and Nandini, the girl Brati loved, brought her peace. Nandini was an outstanding comparison to the spoilt sisters of Brati. Nandini was nearly blinded and broken down physically by police torture. But she held in her heart a stern faith in the future of the movement and an intense love for Brati. She patiently accepted the inescapability of betrayal, a betrayal from inside the movement that caused the death of Brati. After meeting Nandini, Sujata came home to the party where she met the police officer who was responsible for the death of her son. When Sujata met him, something broke inside her and the contaminated appendix she had been carrying all the time, burst inside her.

The story of Sujata and the wet nurse Jashoda symbolize descriptions of suffering womanhood; yet without any note of despair. This will not be a suitable tribute to a brave fighter like Mahasweta Devi. One must recall to the mind, the figure of Draupadi, the tribal mother and heroine who tried to establish herself as powerful and disloyal as her epic namesake. As her people were harassed and ruined in false encounters by the police, she faced them boldly and defiantly. With her conviction of state disloyalty, she did this to invite them to battle.
In both the novels *Rudali* and *Mother of 1084*, long suffering is being replaced by resistance and revolution and gender is included into the idea of class because it is not exclusively the resistance of two women, but the group of the subjugated people. The personal becomes the public affair also. Mahasweta Devi initially puts the protagonists in the supreme form, and then reveals their stable and overall change of character.

Sanichari refused to cry even after the death of Bikhnī because she did not want to get upset, and thus expressed her resistance. Sujata’s silence and inactive non-intervention were ways of resisting the worthless system that was functioning against her. She had faith on pain killers and sleeping pills. This proved the way she purposely kept herself away from her husband and children. Sujata’s determination to continue her job at the bank and her denial to talk about Brati in the house are some methods of resistance. The unemotional description of the other exaggerated rural area in *Rudali* can be considered as Mahasweta Devi’s demand for resistance. Anjum Katyal comments: “She replaces the normative urban perception of the ‘eternal’ Indian village as unchanging, peaceful, nourished by tradition — a version of the romance of the pastorale — with her insider knowledge and subalternised perception of power structures and corrupt ways of socially and economically dominant classes.” (3)

The uneven and different descriptive method of *Mother of 1084* portrays the power to resist against deceptive attitudes. Sujata’s aim to reproduce Brati around herself, Somu’s sister’s safeguarding and her very strict outward behaviour, Sujata’s refusal to wipe out Brati’s memories from the house and her keeping a distance with Dibyanath were the methods hidden for a calm resistance. When Sanichari chose the profession of a mourner because she could not cry on the death of her relatives and beloveds, Mahasweta Devi’s
enlargement of the view of the community to include the prostitutes was a different type of resistance.

It was not individually touching resistance that Sujata and Sanichari present; they also acquired economic self-determination. Sanichari was the wage earner, even though she was in rags. Sanichari and Bikhni strove to free themselves from their emotional attachments and their works became both a cause and an expression of positive energy and confidence.

Regarding the change that came over them, Anjum Katyal remarks:

Untithered, thus, from the ties of family and all that family imposes by way of roles, duties and self-imaging, Sanichari and Bikhni are in a highly unusual situation for Indian women, one that allows them to bond a friendship and partnership which, free from preconceptions and societal norms, can, in a sense, invent itself... Once again the author turns disability into an enabling force (20).

Sanichari gradually built up a bold eagerness to get away from the limitation enforced by religious and social traditions. But Sujata was put in a better position after getting a job. She rejected to seek comfort from anyone at home. “She had made up her mind quite early that she would never seek consolation from those who thought first of themselves while Brati lay dead in the morgue.” (30)

Sanichari decided to choose the profession of a mourner and that was her first step against the system. The association of the prostitutes to form a group of mourners was a big shock upon the faces of the superior people who had to accept them, because of the fear of probable dishonour. Sanichari and Bikhni would appear in front of the landowners or their accountants and negotiate about their wages without nervousness. Sanichari’s success in
finding reasons for Parbatia’s weakness was another move against the system which
marginalized its own defects. Gulbadan’s financial emancipation was caused by Sanichari
and she also utilized the system in her own way. “She turns lament into mockery as she casts
a sneering wink at the nephew over her father’s corpse.” (30)

Sujata proceeded against the system by questioning its basic things. When she
realized the illogicality of the deceitful instruction setup in the house, she started to move
against it. When Somu’s mother questioned about the trustworthiness of judgement which
people came across, it was a well-defined enlightening experience to Sujata. It inquired the
reputation of the whole system. “Those who died are lost anyway. But those who remain
alive won’t ever be able to come back home again. What kind of judgement is this, didi?”
(36)

With this eye-opener, Sujata started questioning the well-known power set-up; and in
the case of Sanichari becoming part and parcel of the corrupt state to utilize it to one’s needs,
led to the final emancipation of Sanichari and Bikhni. Hearing about the news of Bikhni’s
death, Sanichari did not cry. She turned into a complete professional – a rudali: “Money, rice,
new clothes – without getting these in return, tears are a useless luxury.” (114) On Dulan’s
insistence, when Sanichari agreed to visit the red light area, she understood clearly the need
to subdue the disgusting landlord system that had rendered them poor and had created the
prostitutes. “Let a few whores from the bazaar come to their funerals. It’s the malik-mahajans
who’ve turned them into whores, ruined them, then kicked them out, isn’t that so?” (115)
This brave articulation against the system was the first step towards freeing herself from
slavery. She did not stop with her empowerment. As Anjum Katyal says, “She offers to
empower them [others] as she herself has been empowered.” (29) At the point where she
repeated these words to Gulbadan, a young Sanichari can be seen emerging. “Gulbadan, you come along as well. Gambhir Singh has died; by wailing for him and taking their money, you’ll be rubbing salt in their wounds.” (117) Regarding Sanichari’s transformation Katyal gives her view: “Towards the end of the story when Sanichari is faced with the knowledge that she is on her own now that Bikhni is dead, she goes to Dulan once again for advice; and their conversation is very significant since it leads directly to Sanichari’s shift in self-image from that of helpless victim to empowerment and agency.” (13)

Sanichari acquired the place as a clever employer. She made the gomasthas helpless and caught them in their own insincerity. As Anjum Katyal remarks, “The author uses the movement of Sanichari’s evolution to empowerment as the organizing principle around which other aspects of the agenda, such as the critique of the socio-economic system, are arranged.” (33) Thus Rudali turns jubilant cries of the disempowered and the outcast who were banded together to invert a howl of grief into a howl of triumph.

Mother of 1084 also portrays the final emancipation of Sujata who, so far, had trained herself to take whatever was granted to her. Both Rudali and Mother of 1084 describe the appearance of Sanichari and Sujata from the position of the subjugated. In the end, these characters took up suitable positions of their own, against the prevailing system. From a very simple position they tried and reached their liberation. Mahasweta Devi’s lively pen brings them to life with a profound awareness and compassion that makes them walk out of the lower bounds of the society to live their own lives.

The Breast stories have a common theme, the breast. The translator points out in her introduction that the breast is far more than a symbol in these stories. It becomes a means of a harsh comment of an unfair social system. In “Draupadi”, the protagonist, Dopdi Mejhen, a
tribal revolutionary, who was arrested and gang-raped in custody, turned the terrible wounds of her breast into counter-offensive. “Breast-giver,” which is written in the form of social realism, is partly a social satire and partly a tragic tale. Its main character Jashoda was a Brahmin. When her husband lost his legs in an accident, the couple and their children became dependent on the Haldars, a rich but lower-caste Hindu family who employed Jashoda as a wet nurse. Mahasweta Devi tells Jashoda’s story in such a way that it becomes a symbolic narrative of Mother India after Independence in 1947.

It is true that the protagonists, the marginalized, tortured, and subdued tribal women protest and revolt against the forces of oppression, forces that gather all their strength to suppress and overcome the revolt. The revolt is powerfully evident in their exposure enforced upon their body, or in their breasts that indicates the source of living. Their lovely breasts may attract the middle-class men like Upin as in the third story of Breast Stories but they are metaphors behind the occupation of men and women who abuse and are oppressed, continuing the shooting pain of suffering which are the destiny of the subaltern, and promising disloyal actions that indicate final salvation for the subalterns.

In the creative world of Mahasweta Devi, the subaltern can speak through the breast metaphor. When breast is the basis of living for babies, it also gives an umbilical push to the sufferers who were once breast-fed by the mother to stand firm and act against oppression. The breast metaphor suggests and brings about an action-oriented practice. The sufferers have the spirit and energy to stand up against chances when that is the only option to deal with manipulation and domination. Struggle is a definite and moral way of identifying and defining the sufferer's individuality. The salvation of the sufferer lies in such identifying and crucial moments. The instant locality of the sufferers and the political affairs of postcolonial
superior, male-centred authoritative agencies that attend to operate within a neo-colonial imperialist theatre, and in the course, have a tendency to disregard the desires of the expelled and the marginalized, force the aesthetically, justly, and morally conscious performer to predict opposition as a possible means of resistance. Hence, Mahasweta Devi's respect of subaltern resistance in order to initiate the people to the persisting discrimination is a rightful act of sensitive impartiality.

In the first story “Draupadi”, Dopdi Mejhen was a tribal woman. She was an underground activist. Her husband was an underground party worker. The police were in search of them. Under the instruction of Senanayak, the police captured Dopdi and gang raped her in the police station. The whole night she was tortured and abused by the police men. “Her breasts are bitten raw, the nipples torn. How many? Four-five-six-seven- then Draupadi had passed out.” (35)

Dopdi expressed her protest against Senanayak by throwing off her clothes because they were removed by the police. She ‘tears her piece of cloth with her teeth.’(36) Her protest was against the men who insulted her and tortured her sexually. Draupadi showed her protest by standing naked in front of Senanayak. “Draupadi stands before him, naked. Thigh and pubic hair matted with dry blood.”(36) She boldly said to Senanayak “The object of your search, Dopdi Mejhen. You asked them to make me up, don’t you want to see how they made me?” (37)

Shoba Venkatesh Ghosh quotes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s views on Dopdi:

Dopdi ‘acts in not acting’. She also says, “We submit, rather, that the effectiveness of Dopdi’s resistance is not the refusal to act, but the refusal to act predictably. She is, as it were, reframing the paradigm of action itself. In
doing so she in turn, ‘unmakes’ her ‘making’ as a victim for she resists guilt, fear, shame or servility. Naked, ‘her breasts bitten raw, the nipples torn, vagina bleeding’, she walks towards Senanayak, ‘her head held high’(98).

In the epic Mahabharata, Draupadi’s appeal to Krishna to clothe her fitted her into the prescribed role of woman in a patriarchal setup, whereas this Draupadi (Dopdi) firmly resisted the sentries’ attempt 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)

What a woman considers sacred and important in her life is spoiled. So there is nothing to remake what is made. On her own perseverance, Dopdi decided to be naked. She said: “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, kounter me — come on, kounter me— ?” (37)

The story of Draupadi presents the nature of female experience under the mechanisms of male oppression. The extraordinary mental strength of Draupadi could be observed when she refused to be clothed. Draupadi refused to be a stereotype female accepting her fate, conscious of her vulnerabilities. She became an activist refusing to play the traditional role assigned to women. She was proud of her tribal men and her forefathers who stood guard over their women’s blood in black armour.

Shoba Venkatesh Ghosh in her article “Refiguring Myth - Draupadi and Three Indian Women Writers” remarks about Mahasweta Devi: By eschewing a resolution and a closure Mahasweta carries Dopdi’s resistance beyond the text to feed it into a larger discourse of resistance. Dopdi’s action
is taken beyond to be picked up, modified and elaborated upon within this larger discourse that knows no closures but only a persistent problematising of gender equations. Mahasweta’s story is remarkable not only for its exploration of modes of resistance, but also for its attempt to locate possible sites of resistance (98).

Opposition is a practical human choice. It is a human act performed by the sufferer in time and space within the contemporary methods of historical research. It is this alternative possibility that captivates the activist-writer Mahasweta Devi to celebrate resistance as an artistic and sensitive act. Dopdi Mejhen (the protagonist in “Draupadi”), her tribal female protagonist, may be seen as the modern Draupadi in both Mahasweta Devi's imaginary and dramatic presentation of the dilemma of the marginalized tribal poor in postcolonial India. This modern Draupadi faces realities, resists oppression, and acts unlike Draupadi of the Mahabharata. Inspite of her terrible predicament, Dopdi Mejhen’s modern tribal revolutionary posture, turning the terrible wounds of her breasts into a counter-aggressive may be cited as a fine example of an art-emotion that ventures and idealizes activism as a role-model, as an example of the victory of the human spirit. Shoba Venkatesh Ghosh in the article “Reading Resistance” comments on Dopdi’s resistance: “Dopdi’s resistance presents a ‘dangerous possibility’ in two senses of the term - it endangers the stability of State/Gender/Class hegemony, but also remains itself endangered because of the vast powers that hegemonies have of retribution and appropriation.” (73)

In the second story “Breast - giver”, Jashoda, a poor woman became a wet nurse to support her family. Since her husband met with an accident and hurt his leg, she had to take up that job. The mistress of the Haldar family made Jashoda a wet nurse inorder to give relief
to her daughters-in-law. The mistress thought, “Daughters-in-law will be mothers. When they are mothers, they will suckle their children. Since they will be mothers as long as it’s possible – progressive suckling will ruin their shape. Then if the sons look outside, or harass the maidservants, she won’t have a voice to object. Going out because they can’t get it at home – this is just.” (49-50)

Jashoda became a professional wet nurse and suckled Haldar family’s children. The Haldar family was happy because they got a milk-mother. Jashoda was given a separate room in the Haldar’s household. In order to get a constant supply of milk, Jashoda had to breed every year. She fed both her children and also mistress’ grand children.

Due to continuous breeding and suckling, Jashoda’s breasts became thick with running sores. The doctor said that Jashoda had cancer of the mammary gland. She suffered a lot because of pain in the left breast. The eldest son of the Haldar asked her husband to take her away from their house. He spoke to Jashoda’s sons, “It’s your mother, she fed you so long, and now she is about to die! Take her with you! She has everyone and she should die in a kayastha household!” (64)

After hearing the news Jashoda’s husband Kangali arrived there. She showed her bare left breast, thick with running sores and said, “See these sores? Do you know how these sores smell? What will you do with me now? Why did you come to take me?” (65) Jashoda suffered from fever also. In the beginning, she was given treatment in the house. But when her condition became worse and she suffered terrible pain, she was admitted in the hospital. She was given injections. Finally one night she understood that she was nearing death. She thought “After all, she had suckled the world, could she then die alone?” Jashoda died in a
pathetic manner – Jashoda Devi, Hindu female, lay in the hospital morgue in the usual way, went to the burning ghat in a van, and was burnt. She was an untouchable.” (73)

The narrator remarks “Jashoda was God manifest; others do and did whatever she thought. Jashoda’s death was also the death of God. When a mortal masquerade as God . . . she is forsaken by all and she must always die alone.” (74)

In the third story “Behind the bodice”, Gangor, the poor labourer was suckling her baby when Upin, the photographer took a photograph of her breasts. “Gangor did not object. But she put out her hand… money, sir, rupees? Snap a photo so give me cash!” (141) Upin told about the breasts to his friend, “God, those breasts are statuesque! Did you see the mammal projections?” (142) He sold all the pictures of Gangor. He earned lots of money out of it. But Gangor underwent endless torture because of the photographs. She was gang raped in the police custody. Unable to bear the torture, she became a whore. The contractor arranged clients for her. After some time, when the photographer came to see her, he could not find her. After a long search, Upin found Gangor. She said to Upin, “Will Gangor unwind her cloth, or just lift it? Do your stuff, 20 rupees. Spend the night, 50, tell me quick.” (154) Upin shouted at her because she became a whore. He asked her to remove her dress. She said, “Look, look, look, straw – chaff, rags – look what’s there. No breasts. Two dry scars, wrinkled skin, quite flat.” (154-155) Upin realized that there was nothing behind the bodice but only rape of people behind it. After realizing his fault he killed himself by jumping in front of a moving train.

In Outcast: Four Stories, Mahasweta Devi’s delicate and sensitive pen brings to life, with deep compassion and sympathy, the stories of four women who have one thing in common - the unending class, caste and gender exploitation which made their lives a relentless struggle for survival.
The first story “Dhouli” dealt with a low caste young widow. She was influenced and fascinated by Misrilal, son of a wealthy upper caste Brahman. Misrilal persuaded her of his love and he also promised to marry her. He also said, “I don’t care about things like caste and untouchability. Besides, Taharr is not the only place on earth. And the government law too sanctions our marriage.” (12) Since Dhouli was very young, she could not resist him. She carried his child in her womb. When Misrilal’s parents came to know about this, they immediately sent away Misrilal to another place. Dhouli and her mother were disgraced by the Misrilal family. It was the fate of the dusad to depend on the Brahmin family. If the victim was taken pity by the Brahmin family and given doles, she could live peacefully. If they did not pity her, she would be made an outcast and forced to become a whore.

When Misrilal told his mother that Dhouli was carrying his child, she said in a very casual manner, “So what? The men of our family have planted their seed in so many dusad and ganju girls. You’re a hot-blooded young man. Even Jhalo has three sons by Kundan.” (13) When he asked her what Dhouli would do, his mother said, “She has sinned. She’ll suffer for it. They’ll both starve to death, mother and daughter . . . It’s always the fault of the woman. For not considering a Brahman’s honour, she’s even more to blame.” (13)

Dhouli was abused by Misrilal. He married another woman to escape from his responsibility of being the father of Dhouli’s baby and settled in Ranchi. Dhouli suffered a lot after Misrilal left her. His mother did not do anything about his promises to Dhouli. When Misrilal met her, she said, “Your mother handed out something like two kilos of maroa, that too once in ten days. Then she called my mother a thief and chased her away.” She argued with Misrilal: “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) She was able to raise her voice of protest.

Dhouli was keenly watched by her community, the Misra family and the contractor’s labourers. Men started pelting stones at her door during night time. She shouted at them and said that she was sleeping with a *baloa* at the side of her. Then she gave birth to a son. To save her son and mother she had to go for work. So she went to a shop. But the shopkeeper refused to give her job because he felt that the *deota* would get angry with him. Then she planned to kill herself. That attempt also failed; when she was trying to drown herself in a waterfall, she was rescued by a coolie. She came to know that he was also one among those who came to her door.

Dhouli decided to become a whore to save her son. The head coolie was her first customer. Misrilal’s brother Kundan came to know that Dhouli had become a whore. He got angry and he went to meet his brother and threatened him. “Either give her some land, or some money. Because of you we now have a whore in the village!” (29) He also said she has bought dishonour to their family. A panchayat meeting was held. In the meeting Hanumanji announced that

> Dhouli cannot practise 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. Such sinful activities cannot continue in the heart of this village. This village still has Brahmans living in it. Puja is still done in their homes every day (31).

Next day morning Dhouli set out for Ranchi with the contractor of Kundan. “Dhouli and the contractor took a bus. A bundle in Dhouli’s hand. Dry tearless eyes. Totally
shattered. As if her mind had stopped functioning. Mechanical movements. A puppet. Controlled by the will of others.” (32) Regarding the exploitation of women like Dhouli, Rekha and Anup Beniwal remark in “From Re-Presentation to Self-Presentation: The Problematics of Female Body/Sexuality in Contemporary Indian Women Writing”:

The ethical-moral context of Taharr, the locale of “Dhouli,” normalizes the sexual exploitation of dusad women by deotas as an upper caste and class privilege. Here land, female-body and money blur into and substitute each other. Those women who passively conform to this arrangement are patronized and those who dare to infringe on it become vulnerable not only to inter but also intra-caste/class exploitation (79-80).

In the second story, Shanichari was an Oraon girl. She was marginalized in her society for returning with a diku’s child in her womb. It was because ‘diku’ belonged to the mainstream society. Gohuman, a middle-aged woman sold Shanichari to a brick kiln owner Rahmat in Kolkata. She was sexually exploited by Rahmat. One day when the brick kiln was shut down, Rahmat sent Shanichari and all the girls to their home. Shanichari wore a new sari and came to her home. The pathetic situation of Shanichari was that when “All the other girls had also been abused . . . she was the only one returning with a child in her womb. Gohuman had given the others pills.” (52) Since Shanichari came with a diku’s child in her womb, she was not accepted in their village. “What could they do? They lived their lives as victims of the dikus. How could their priest, the naiga, allow a woman carrying a diku’s child to be accepted in society?” (52)

In the meantime, a son was born to Shanichari. To save her son from hunger, she went to work leaving the baby with her mother. She was much worried about her son’s
future. She said to her mother, “My son will never get married, Ma...Such boys can only get married to such girls. That’s the khawasin custom.” (53) She asked her mother to build a room for her. She went to the rail track to gather coal and sell it. “They put up a room for her. Walls of tree branches. Thatched with leaves. She cooked separately, ate alone.” (54)

In the end when Shanichari met Hiralal, the wandering singer, who asked her who the culprit was. She said to him that Gohuman Bibi also was not the real culprit. She pointed out then, “Everything around you, ev-er-y-thing. Shanichari stretched out her arms to include the world around her, standing stock still.” (55) Her resistance started with her realization that it was not a single individual but a whole system/society that was to be blamed for her plight.

The narrator says that Shanichari was showing the real culprits and that Shanichari’s story was not over; she points out that if people like Rahmat boldly ran brick kilns and Gohumans persuaded girls like Shanichari to subject themselves to the wishes of others and if our motherland provided basic food and clothing to girls like her, the restricted attempt of Shanichari pointing her finger at the blamer would continue.

In the third story, Josmina was a poor Ho tribal girl. She led a contented life with her husband Sarjom Purti. The village money lender Nandlal Shahu tempted the couple with the dream of higher wages and took them to Punjab and sold them to Niranjan Singh. Josmina suffered a lot in Punjab. A few days after they went to Punjab, “the malik came to the hut and stripped Josmina naked.” (69) She was abused in front of her baby. Everyday Josmina was abused by Niranjan Singh. Josmina and Sarjom escaped from Niranjan and they went to Karnal Singh’s house. Josmina was tortured by Karnal Singh also. She had to get the same treatment from Pritam Singh, Sardar Gyan Singh and later from Sardar Sarban Singh’s son Dileep Singh.
When Sarban heard about his son’s misbehaviour, he gave them money and sent them back to their home. They were very happy to be back in their place. Josmina worked in the fields. One day she vomited in the field and realized that it was the symptom of pregnancy. She was carrying Dileep Singh’s child in her womb. She was worried about her husband because if the village people knew about this, they would make her husband an outcast. Josmina returned to her house and prepared food for her husband, and after he ate she lulled him to sleep. Then she got up and went to river Koyena, and jumped into the river. Josmina committed suicide to save her husband from being cast out of his community. The next afternoon Sarjom found Josmina’s naked body floating in the river. He covered her body. He said “You will sleep in our courtyard, yes, at home. You are innocent.”(81) By giving her precious life, Josmina saved her husband Sarjom’s life and his dignity.

In the fourth story, Chinta was a tribal widow. She had one son Gopal. Since she was a widow, she was tortured both mentally and physically by men in the village. She told the author, “It was a terrible time, Ma. I was so young then — men began to prowl around my house after dark. I would hold on to Gopal, bar the door and call God’s name. A terrible time! ”(89) A handsome man Utsab came from Calcutta and he was very kind to Gopal and Chinta. He promised to marry her. On hearing his words she left her son in the village and went with him to Calcutta. Utsab ruined Chinta in Calcutta and took away her ornaments and money. Then he absconded after the birth of two daughters.

Chinta could not go back to her village because she could not afford to pay the penance for having sinned. Her late husband’s uncle and his son whom they had in their custody came in search of her; it was time for Gopal to get married. So they asked Chinta to
leave her two girls and come with them to the village. They also said that they would organize the repentance rites and see to it that she was not made an outcast. Chinta had no other way but to agree to their wishes. The next day the maid said to the narrator that Chinta sold her two daughters.

Chinta underwent lots of torture in her life. If she was not scared of sinning, she would have flirted with the paanwaala and earned money. She became brave after Utsab’s desertion and faced life boldly. Chinta went to her village with her son and in-laws. The narrator saw Chinta wearing a new sari and blouse and she did not ask her where she got the money for them. Chinta carried the bewildered dull look of somebody who had experienced some unbelievable terror. She also looked at the narrator with the eyes of an injured animal as if to see if the narrator also doubted her. Thus Chinta was also bold enough and tried resisting her oppressors.

Even Mahasweta Devi’s first book The Queen of Jhansi traces the history of growing resistance to the British which came to lead with the 1857 uprisings. This book was a biography of the queen who stood against the British bravely in the battles that followed the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857. Before writing the book, Mahasweta Devi travelled extensively in the area, collecting documentary information from the people who lived in the area and recording folk songs about the Rani. The Queen of Jhansi was an embodiment of bravery. Mahasweta Devi states in the article “Untapped Resources” how she carried out a wide research before she wrote her first historical novel The Queen of Jhansi in the year 1956:

Reading the available books and reports in English was not enough. With the help of others, I also read contemporary accounts and lives of the Ranee in Bengali, Hindi, Bundelkhandi and Marathi. Then I left for Jhansi, for me a
name on the map of India when Daku Man Singh was operating in the region. At Jhansi I collected the old ballads, and met the grass sellers or ‘ganjiwallahs’, peasants and forest workers. Touring the neighbourhood, I went to Gwalior where the Ranee fell in Battle. While travelling I listened closely to the common people. I was convinced that the unwritten material, held in the oral tradition, could help me get to know the people’s version of history (15).

Mahasweta Devi also says that in India people may be uneducated but they are not uncultured, unrefined or lacking in consciousness. The tribal and non-tribal people keep historical events documented in songs, ballads and folklore. The song about the queen which she collected from a group of ganjiwallahs filled her heart with humility:

    Patthar mitti se fouj banai
    Kath se katwar
    Pahar utha ke ghora banai
    Chali Gwalior (UR15)

    (She touched the rocks and the earth and a piece of wood and a hill. Her army sprang to life, the wood became her sword, the hill became a prancing horse and she left for Gwalior). The song refers to the period when Jhansi was burning and the queen escaped through the Bhandeek gate to Gwalior via Kalpi. Rani Lakshmi Bai was a queen in the Maratha state of Jhansi. She is remembered as a symbol of resistance for protecting her people during the siege of Jhansi.

    The Indian Rebellion started in Meerut on May 10, 1857. This began after the rumour that the new bullet casings for the Enfield rifles were coated with pork and beef fat and unrest began to spread throughout India. During this chaotic time, the British were forced to
focus their attentions elsewhere, and Rani Lakshmi Bai was left to rule Jhansi alone, leading her troops swiftly and efficiently to suppress the battle initiated by local princes.

Mahasweta Devi is a creative writer with a social conscience and the sense of duty is an obsession with her. With her lifelong engagement with tribals and issues of ecological resistance, Mahasweta Devi has been campaigning for tribal mobilization, focusing on issues like abolition of bonded labour, industrial exploitation, education and the planning and implementation of development schemes. Mahasweta Devi is a creative writer with a social conscience and the sense of duty is an obsession with her.

Mahasweta Devi translates her opinion of society through the lives of her characters as they move forward in the journey of life, facing difficulties and struggling to maintain their dignity. Her writings reflect a lot of her own work as a social activist with the nomadic tribes, non-tribal poor and people who are generally isolated by mainstream society. Though her works reflect the gloomy reality of the world, she remains positive. She is indeed a wonderful writer with a social device. With her powerful and forceful words she stirs the emotions of people and wakes up their thoughts so that real transformation may set in. Her obsession has been to document the oral histories of the tribal communities before they disappear altogether. Various literary devices such as the use of myths and a sweeping historic imagination combined with her compassion and sympathy makes her stand apart. Her power to mix realism with melodrama with creativity produces an unusual blend. Humanism imbued with a deep-rooted love for the suffering humanity remains at the centre of her philosophy of life.

*The Book of the Hunter*, a charming, vast novel set in the sixteenth-century medieval Bengal draws on the life of the great medieval poet Kabikankan Mukundaram Chakrabarti whose epic poem Abhayamangal, known as ‘Chandimangal’ records the socio-political
history of the times. *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* focuses on the importance of contemporary threats, not only to individual nations and the civilized world, but to the long-term survival of the human race itself, and explores the complex trap of terror that has established itself across the globe. *Five Plays* are embedded in the history and folk myth as well as contemporary reality. The socio-economic background offers a view of India rarely seen in literature.

Satyanarayana comments on the activist role of Mahasweta Devi in “Subaltern voices: A Note on Women in Mahasweta Devi’s *Five Plays*”:

Mahasweta’s activist role has influenced the writer in her and has helped her depict the real life situations. Almost all the characters except Sujata are drawn from the most neglected section of the society, and they are not idealized. They maintain dignity even in the undignified conditions resulting from the dehumanizing poverty. They are alive to the basic human passions such as love, sympathy and anger. However, their anger is not directed at any individual but the present social system which has revealed in circumscribing their class from time immemorial. Thus, when they raise the voice of revolt it is to realize their much cherished ideal of freedom - a freedom from all kinds of oppression. Mahasweta’s portrayal of the women is invariably in tune with her progressive idealism (87).

Mahasweta Devi’s writings are often based upon thorough research, conducted sometimes through unusual means into the history of the people she writes about. Since the late 1980s Mahasweta Devi became internationally famous for her experimental social-
documentary short stories. These stories are often based on carefully researched historical records, investigative journalism, and activist fieldwork in the Indian countryside.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who has translated two collections of Mahasweta Devi’s stories including those in *Imaginary Maps* into English, suggests that this interplay of activism and literary writing in Mahasweta Devi’s fiction can be of important interest to current academic discourse and practices. Spivak claims that “Mahasweta Devi’s work suggests a model in which activism and writing can reflect upon each other, providing a necessary vision of internationality, and the possibility of constructing a new kind of responsibility for the cultural worker.” (*Imaginary Maps*, xxvi)

Mahasweta Devi’s concern with the essential human being and her fight against the system forms the backbone of her work. In most of her works, her underlying belief is the concept of protest and resistance, the concept of fighting for their rights, for their survival and for their dignity.

Though much of her writings in the late seventies focused on tribal people and formerly untouchable castes, her work also dealt with the agrarian movements of the late sixties. These had begun in the Naxalbari region in North Bengal and had quickly spread into other parts of India. Students and young intellectuals in Calcutta and elsewhere set aside their studies to move deep into the rural areas and support the uprising, which had as its target landlords as well as the state that aided their exploitative enterprises. The movement was violently suppressed, and by the mid - seventies many of the activists were in jail. The best known of the novels to portray these troubled and exciting times, *Mother of 1084* has been translated into several Indian languages.
Mahasweta Devi depicts the strength and courage of the human spirit which rises against all odds through her powerful and effective characterization in active stories. Her remarkable novel *Chotti Munda and his Arrow* and her stories revolve around the lives of the marginalized tribal communities and landless people. A rare flash of optimism for liberation pervades her work. Her work is a valuable documentation of the tribal communities of West Bengal and Bihar that have been marginalized and remained together to a great extent in the development process. Anita Singh comments on the unique place she secured in literature.

What makes her stand apart is her power to mix realism with melodrama, irony with indifference and documentary with creativity to produce a blend so unusual that it defies any accepted model. She carries on a relentless battle for the homeless, the tortured and the helpless. Activism and writing, she straddles both worlds with equanimity as according to her, ‘It’s my conscience that spurs me to write’ (148).

Mahasweta Devi’s firm commitment to practicality and humanistic education is derived from her personal knowledge of the people she writes about. Her featuring of the dreadful oppression under which characters suffer is not only a way of accusing the indifference that crushes the poor down to their fate in the name of meetings, religion, traditional belief, and male voyeurism but it is also a way of sensitizing the reader so as to feel for the compassion of the victims. Her practical approach to history, myth and legends is enhanced by her lively, inventive use of language, political satire with reference to modern background, folk symbolism giving rise to a new consciousness, and Bengali tribal phrases pointing to the need for authorizing the tribal community to challenge the domineering cultures and systems.
Scharada Bail in her book “Icons of Social Change” says that in an interview, Mahasweta Devi declined to be drawn into a conversation of language, style and originality. She also quotes Mahasweta Devi’s view on life: “Life is larger than any single creative work. Understand life, work to make life better. Be engaged in the struggle for life – creativity will improve by itself.” (6) N.S.Jagannathan says about Mahasweta Devi in “Champion of the Downtrodden”:

Those who have admired her as a creative writer and judged her in terms of literary criteria and even as a social radical may not be fully aware of her praxis in social activism. This involvement is a uniquely personal political statement of faith that transcends orthodox communism. It is also founded on a profound understanding of the grim reality on the ground. In her own self-estimation, her literary achievements, outstandingly original though they are, come well below her intense preoccupation with the empowerment of the tribals and other wretched of the earth (11).

Mahasweta Devi’s important attempt is to break the fixed ideas held about the tribals and also to make known their practices and recognize them and honour them because some of the good practices followed by them are not followed by the so called ‘civilized’ people of the main stream. Some of the rules followed by the tribals are:

1. There is no dowry system, only bride price; hence there are no dowry deaths.

2. Individual pomp and splendour are also unknown.

3. Women have a place of honour in tribal society.

Regarding her style, Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta states in “Contesting Polarities: Creating Spaces – Reading Myths in Mahasweta Devi’s Stories”: 
Mahasweta Devi not only uses local and hybrid words, as well as words commonly used by people in different realms of activity along with popular English words and phrases, but also constantly juxtaposes them, one with the other, charting out a space of interaction and dynamism – one closer to a lived reality. In a parallel process, the author often draws the middle-class urban protagonist as well to the center of activity in the marginalized space, and a drama related to a conscience that has been activated begins to unfold with all its ambivalence, its dualities (202).

Amar Nath Prasad quotes the words of Mahasweta Devi in “A Passage to Indian Novelist in English”: “Mahasweta Devi . . . contends that women shouldn’t be submissive and passive and . . . should realize the inner strength of which they are known.” (11) Enakshi Chatterjee says “Mahasweta Devi drifted towards a literature of protest, getting more and more involved with the plight of the tribals. Her involvement with the oppressed gradually led her to the tribals of Palamau, one of the poorest districts of Bihar.” (5) Even at the age of 86, the social activist Mahasweta Devi protests against discrimination and fights for the equality of the downtrodden people.