PREFACE

Maheshweta Devi, an eminent Bengali activist writer, focuses on the hard realities of life in the Post-Independent Indian context. During the last fifty five years of her literary career, she has written more than 175 works including novels, novellas, short stories, children’s stories, plays, journalistic writings and biographies. Her works cover a wide variety of subjects. She writes on the problems of the tribals, untouchables, bonded labourers, share-croppers, prostitutes, slum dwellers and the Naxalites. She also writes on superstitions, gender discriminations, history, myth, exploitation of various kinds and corruption at different levels of our system. It is found convenient to divide the chapters based on the texts instead of the issues she deals with, as she covers too many number of issues. Hence the chapter division is made on the basis of the literary forms like novels, novellas, stories, plays and activist writings. There are five Chapters in the thesis in addition to an “Introduction” and a “Conclusion”.

In the “Introduction” an attempt is made to prepare a ground for the study of Maheshweta Devi’s works. It is tried to show how Literature and Society are related to one another. A passing reference is made to “Resistance Literature”, the “Protest Literature” and the “Dalit Literature” in order to find a historical and a theoretical background for the present study. A brief review of the literary background of West Bengal from the early days to the present time is included here in order to place Maheshweta Devi in the hierarchy. A brief note on Socio-Political scenario of West Bengal with special attention to the tribals is also added.

The first chapter, entitled “The Major Works of Maheshweta Devi” has two sections. The Section I deals with the historical works and the Section II deals with her other novels.

The Section I includes The Queen of Jansi (1956) and Jungle Ki Davedar (1976).
The way she brings the Queen of Jansi and Birsa Munda from the lost pages of history to the living present is discussed in detail here. How she makes use of folk tales, legends, myths and people's beliefs is highlighted. It is also shown how she differs from the main stream historians in reconstructing the past.


The complexities and vastness of the world of exploitation and the Manipulation tactics of the exploiters, as exposed by her, are taken into consideration here. Her anger and anxiety for the present state of affairs is also taken note of it is also attempted to see how she deals with different themes—tribal, historical, social, mythical and political with equal mastery and deftness.

The third chapter deals with her stories. Among fifty stories that are available in English version, about thirty are given serious attention, as they are related directly to the topic. It is tried to show how the Master story teller attacks the social evils that are haunting our society.
and castigates all those who are responsible for them. It is shown how the number and the
variety of stories enable her to peep into the vast web of Indian life with all its complexities and
varieties.

The chapter four is on the plays of Mahashweta Devi. In the introductory part, the
growth of Bengali drama and theatre since the ancient time to the present days is traced. Later
five plays of Maheshweta Devi are taken up for discussion one after another. The plays that
are analysed here are; *Mother of 1084* (1973), *Aajir* (1976), *Urvashi and Johnny* (1977),
*Bayen* (1971), and *Water* (1977). These five plays dealing with five different themes show the
indomitable spirit of resistance and desire for deliverance in the characters like Sujata, Paatan,
Johny, Chendidas and Meghai Dome.

In chapter five, Mahashweta Devi’s activist writings are taken up for detailed study.
How effectively she makes use of the newspapers, journals and magazines for getting justice to
the deprived section is reviewed here. The hard work, research, documentation and above all
the concern for the fellow beings that lie behind every article are pointed out.

In “Conclusion” the observations and arguments of the previous chapters are reviewed.
The overall contribution of Mahashweta Devi to Indian literature is assessed. Various issues
she takes up in different works are pointed out. References are also made to the stylistic and
linguistic features of her works. It is tried to evaluate her multi-dimensional personality as a
writer, activist, fighter and above all a humanist. Based on all these findings it is arrived at the
conclusion that Mahashweta Devi is one of the greatest activist writers of this century.