CHAPTER - II

MOTHER OF 1084

Mahasweta Devi’s Jnanpith Award winner Bengali novel *Hajar Churashir Ma* was dramatized by her in 1973 and translated in English as *Mother of 1084* by Samik Bandyopadhyay. Later on it was translated in many national and international languages. Like the novel, even the play depicts human predicament bidding to probe into the Naxalite Movement of the early 1970s from a feminist and a humanist point of view. She stands at the intersection of vital contemporary issues of politics, gender and class. Recording history was her self-imposed mandate. She recreates a span of history permeating her depiction with trenchant satire against government and soul stirring poignancy for peasants, outcastes, untouchables, tribal and young idealists.

*Mother of 1084* displays Mahasweta Devi’s social cognizance and literary maturity that empowered her to experiment with compressed plot and narrative technique. The play documents the troubled time of Bengal's political history. It is a yawning psychological sketch of a mourning mother, who instead of drowning her son's memory in tears, keeps the ardent ideal alive. She never lets the memory fade out. Her personal predicament turns into political awareness and metaphysical understanding.

Mahasweta Devi has chosen the theme of the drama as ‘the awakening of an apolitical mother.’ (2008, ii) The play, focused around Sujata Chatterjee, a middle-aged woman belonging to an upper class of Calcutta, is strikingly rich in its encrusted intensity and complexity. Sujata, born into a conservative well-off family, is an undergraduate. She has married to Dibyanath, a Chartered Accountant. In thirty-four years of their married life, she gives birth to four children, two sons - Jyoti and Brati and two daughters - Nipa and Tuli. When the play opens, two of her children are already married, Jyoti to Bini and Nipa to Amit. In the eyes of the world, all of them are leading immaculately happy and settled lives, but as Sujata goes on to discern later, this happiness is only skin-deep. Significantly, Sujata makes this and several other such discoveries only after the unexpected and mysterious death of Brati, with whom she has always shared a very keen relationship. For example, she discovers that all the
thirty four years of her married life, she has been living a lie as her husband, being an inveterate womanizer always cheated on her with his children's tacit consent.

The play enacts a single day in the life of the most dominant and central character, Sujata, the mother of corpse number 1084. She is a typical wife and a loving mother; however she is ignored in her own family where she is reduced to a mere cog. On the contrary, she feels at ease in the company of her younger son, Brati Chatterjee, who unlike her other children, is full of ideals. It is his life and activities that Sujata fails to understand which enhance to the tragic interest of the play. It reflects her soul stirring predicament.

Sujata comes to know of the facts behind Brati’s sacrifice exactly two years after her favorite son’s death, coinciding with his birthday, seventeenth January. The learning process continues till the end of the play involving her in a series of meetings and encounters with the people whose cause Brati campaigned. As Sujata’s voice on the tape informs, “I didn't know Brati well enough, Somu’s mother knew him better. When I visit her, I find Brati.” (2008,12) At the end of the play Sujata, clipped of all prejudices, discovers herself drifting towards a kinship with her son’s ideology as she bursts out angrily at the stupor of the spectators.

Sujata Chatterjee is one of those victims whose dear ones have been killed in a confrontation with the people in power. In fact, Mahasweta Devi, through her, seeks to lime light the darker areas of life where maltreatment and the persecution of the innocent continue unabated. Sujata takes up a job in the bank being alienated from her corrupt husband and children. Her mind is crammed with Brati’s memories after two long years since he was slew. At times, Sujata attempts to find a fulfillment in his death which she has never dared to claim for herself.

Brati, Sujata’s younger son, like other youth, was disillusioned with the existing social and power systems. They harbor many evils which boom on the credulity of the innocent people. Consequently Brati rebels through the people’s movement ignited by the peasant revolt in the rural West Bengal. Later on, the movement spread to the metropolis, when the urban highbrows, out of a sense of guilt, resolve to take part in it. Jai Sen puts, “for their guilt in acquiescing in the perpetuation of a system of
exploitation from which they had reaped benefits for generations.” ([The Unintended City, 1976, 33-40] The political fervour of Mahasweta Devi’s concerns spills over her narratives through a powerfully direct style of presentation. *Mother of 1084* is one such outstanding instance.

Brati, like Sujata, has no attraction for the luxuries that his rich background offers. He champions the cause of the oppressed being aware of their economic deprivation and exploitation. He protests against the irrational ethics of all those establishments that add to the woes of the underprivileged. Ironically it is unexpected of him as a member of a household which has been built on the mount of corruption. This marks the play with a snooping amalgam of the elements of surprise, innocence and youth imminent in life and history.

Sujata, like Brati, is against all the pretenses that are inherent in the patriarchal institution. However it is surprising that even with such innate umbrage against family she fails to take cognizance of the rising tide of rebellion in Brati. Accordingly, Sujata is caught in the conflict within herself between a sympathetic mother and a silent dissenter against the corrupt life of her family. This conflict takes up an altogether different stand when her motherly affection is contrasted with the unresponsiveness of the members of her family and their indifference towards the news of Brati’s death, with which the play begins.

Dibyanath Chatterjee, the domineering husband of Sujata, is a smug. He is unabated to risk the personal sentiments to keep his public status spotless and unblemished. He knows how to be benefited by playing the cards accurately to expand his stature among privileged. This insolence of Dibyanath is intensely portrayed and illustrated in the opening scene of the play when Sujata receives a call from the police to identify corpse number 1084 which is, in fact, Brati’s. Being a sensitive mother Sujata is all concerned and restless, while Dibyanath pursuits for the ways to hush up the happening. As:

VOICE. Dibyanath Chatterjee’s house?

SUJATA. Yes…

VOICE. Is there no male member around?

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SUJATA. Still sleeping. Who are you?
VOICE. What’s Brati Chatterjee’s relationship with you?
SUJATA. Son.
VOICE. Son? Come to Kantapukur.
SUJATA. (uncomprehendingly). Kantapukur?
VOICE. Yes you have to identify Brati Chatterjee…
DIBYANATH. What’s the matter? Who was it?...
SUJATA…He only said, come to Kantapukur…You have to Identify?

Brati?

_Dibyanath and Jyoti look at each other, with a clear understanding of what has happened._

DIBYANATH. Kantapukur?

SUJATA. Haven’t I told you? Jyoti, get me the car out . . .

DIBYANATH. My car, at Kantapukur? No. Listen, Jyoti . . .

SUJATA. But why? Why can’t the car be there?

DIBYANATH. I need the car. I’m going to Chaudhuri. You, ring up Dutta. Tell him…why don’t you go over straightaway? …

Jyoti, there may be time still. Isn’t there a relation of your Mother-in-law’s in the police? ... Ring him up. Chaudhuri must help hush it up. He had warned us. (2008, 4-5)

The insignificance of Dibyanath towards Sujata and the dead son and the indifference of her children exposed here is an archetypal characteristic of upper class people that enjoy the status of elite and cossets in self-esteem and self-interest. They put a mask of detachment only as a ploy to hide their transgressions and to emission consequent penalty. Nandini relates to Sujata the predicament of relationship thus:

So where do we reach? Brati came from a household of a certain kind. He hated his father, Sanchayan, Dipu and Smaran came from a smug, high middle class. Somu, Laltu and Bijit belonged to apolitical, poor refugee homes. Mani and Kushal had parents involved in left-wing politics. But they all shared one common feature: the children and the parents were strangers to one another (2008, 29).
The play accomplishes all prerequisite of an efficacious opening scene. As C.V. Venugopal notices:

A playwright invariably has to be very careful with his first scene of the play if he is assured of a satisfactory impression on the audience.

*(Perspectives on Indian drama in English, 1977, 171)*

The first scene of the play not only suggests the central conflict but also convincingly introduces the major characters—Sujata, Brati and Dibyanath.

As the plot evolves the characters emerge that is the significant parameter of *Mother of 1084*. Except Sujata Chatterjee, the other characters are given minor roles to perform in the drama. Entire theme of the play is woven around Brati; even he is assigned only a few conversations. In the opening of the play he is presented as a dead body number 1084. As a living character he appears only twice, first time in the company of his mother in scene five and second time with his friends in scene seven. Nevertheless, Brati and his activities are informed to the audience when his mother Sujata gets involved in conversation with other characters at different places. This, in fact suggests the movement and development of the drama.

Human predicament permeates *Mother of 1084*. Sujata senses quashed under the encumbrance of the suffocating ethics enjoined on her by the male-dominated society. However she never endeavors to unravel herself from the stuffy morals. She knows Dibyanath’s womanizing and immoral acts, but she remains silent. So much so that she attempts to escape all the restraints and checks by getting a service. At times she begrudges the corrupt practices of the children; however she carries on the familial responsibilities serenely bearing all disgraces and degradations. In spite of all these, she is very fond of Brati who unlike her other children is full of integrity. In his company she gets solace that she misses in her other children. Mahasweta Devi excellently creates an emotional situation in scene five evoking an affectionate relationship between mother and son. As:

**BRATI.** (lowers his eyes). Mother, you have to bear with a lot for me, don’t you?
SUJATA. No, Brati. Bear with a lot for you? Oh, no.
BRATI. Don’t they bully you a lot over me?
SUJATA. Let them.
BRATI. (with tenderness and concern) Why do you bear it, Mother?
SUJATA. It hurt once, doesn’t hurt any longer. It hasn’t hurt from the
time you came, because you’re there.
BRATI. Because I’m there!
SUJATA. Oh, let it go. You tell me what you’ll have for dinner
tomorrow.
BRATI. Why? What’s special about tomorrow?
SUJATA. Don’t you remember, it’s your birthday…
BRATI. How can you remember birthdays?
SUJATA. How can I help remembering? I was almost dying when you
were born.
BRATI. (smiles). Lucky you didn’t! (2008, 16-17)

Surprisingly Sujata is unaware of Brati’s revolutionary activities, though they care for
each other’s sentiments. She acquires the information from Nandini, Somu’s mother
and others about his ideals and activities. Indeed, her first meeting with Nandini, an
activist, faithful follower and beloved of Brati acquaints Sujata with an understanding
into the so far unknown portion of her son’s life. She recognizes how he imperiled his
life by remaining at home on his birthday to honour her fondness and emotions. As
Nandini says, “Otherwise, he should have left for the base on the fifteenth.” (2008,
29) In that case, he might have escaped death.

*Mother of 1084* dramatizes predicament and intense agonies of sensitive mothers, who
have been forced to part from their dear sons. The play like Asif Currimbhoy’s
*Inquilab* is a commentary on the historical movement that shivered West Bengal
during 1970s. Mahasweta Devi purposefully writes historic and domestic literature to
portray the actual situations of the contemporary society. As Sujit Mukherjee
observes:

> Mahasweta Devi turns, with *Mother of 1084*, to recording the present
> instead of reconstructing the past. It is a typical play of documentation
in which she seeks the roots of the revolutionary fervor of the urban rebels in their discontent with a system that upheld a corrupt and insensitive establishment both in the family and in the State. (Book Review, 1991, vii)

Brati in his full commitment to rebellion reminds Ahmed of Inquilab. Ahmed ruthlessly kills his parents. However unlike him, Brati remains a devoted son of his parents till his death, even though he knows about his father’s moral and physical corrupt life. Nandini informs Sujata that Brati has a high opinion of his mother, “he hadn’t ever seen in his life a person as totally honest as you.” (2008, 27)

Brati never makes his true self of a rebel known to Sujata. He does not want the familial feelings prevail upon his revolutionary zeal. He is dedicated to the mission of life. It is to liberate human beings from the grabs of the hydra-headed exploitative mechanism. His mission is to create a class-less society where mankind enjoys equal rights. Ironically the autocrats of the ruling party like Saroj Pal looks at the young rebels as a malignant tumor on the face of democracy. The power politics consider their revolutionary acts as a menace to the establishments. Therefore, there is a conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed, resulting in brutal muggings and counter muggings and an orgy of viciousness, violence and killing under an excuse of fake encounters. Brati, the corpse no. 1084 is slaughtered along with his friends-Somu, Partha and Bijit, in such an encounter with the muggers of the powers.

In a way, Sujata’s meeting to the persons beyond the course of her experience is a confrontation. Her each visit uncovers the secret areas of understanding about her son. In the introduction of Bashai Tudu Gayatri Spivak writes, “In fact, these confrontations take place across the cleavages of hierarchies of power, of class and commitment.” (1990, viii) Mother of 1084 is full of such confrontations serving two purposes. Firstly they let Sujata come face to face with the realities of life and secondly of self-realization.

Having all such realizations and understandings, Sujata is in clash and conflict with the world around her. So far she has been forced to adjust herself to the patriarchal social codes and conducts and unconsciously she has accepted them. She has
inadvertently surrendered to them as they have gone into her psyche. She does not dare enough to protest and bring about a rebellion of deep rooted social and familial change. As a matter of fact, she is heedless to Brati’s revolution against the traditional social ethics and beliefs. It is quite ironic that the protagonist has been pitifully unaware of her condition until Nandini makes her conscious. As she says to Sujata:

NANDINI. I loved Brati.
SUJATA. I know. (Pause). It leaves one so empty when you think of it,
Nandini. Brati was the soul of my life, yet I knew him so little.
NANDINI. Did you ever try?
SUJATA. Is it a relationship where you have to try?
NANDINI. It’s a deadly time when people do not belong to one another by virtue of kinship or ties of blood. Everyone remains a stranger these days to everyone. It’s a crime to allow this to persist. It’s an obligation these days to know one’s son.
SUJATA. Is it an obligation for parents alone?
NANDINI. (smiling) It’s for you to take the first step. Isn’t it your obligation to set a model for the younger generation to follow? Why do you demand loyalty by virtue of relationship? Why don’t you try to earn it by virtue of your integrity? You won’t be honest, won’t forge relationships and then you put the whole blame on us. (2008, 28-29)

Nandini’s tone presents her as an angry young woman livid by the cruelty and torture of police. However her resolute confidence in humanity is inspiring and moving. In fact Sujata’s self-realization occurs in her company. Nandini asks her:

How can you be so smug and complacent? With so many young men killed, so many imprisoned, how can you wallow in your complacency? It’s your ‘all’s right with the world, let’s go on nicely’ that frightens me most. How can you carry on with your pujas, concerts, cultural festivals, film festivals, poetry fests? (2008, 35)
The Naxalite storm has gone but its ruin and wreckage left. The nightmarish reminiscences of the disruption and turmoil still disturb the survivors like Nandini. They could not come out of themselves and readjust to the mainstream normal life. Somu’s father is a frightened man all his life. He is innocent and does not know how to cheat. He feels cheated being unconscious of the monstrousness of the crime executed by the ruling party with tacit backing from the police. At first, like a common person, Somu’s father believed that the police would come to his rescue. He goes to the police station for support, when the furious crowd confronted and slaughtered his son, Somu, Brati and their friends. However his optimism and wish of saving them were devastated. As Somu’s mother says to Sujata:

He had such faith in police, but they wouldn’t even take down his complaint. They didn’t do a thing. They only sent their vans when it was all over to collect the dead bodies…They didn’t do a thing. That was more than he could bear, and he died of the shock. O God! Is there no justice in this country? God! No justice? He went on and on asking till he was dead. (2008, 22)

In an orgy of violence Somu’s mother has lost the last bread-winner for the family. Consequently many mothers and sisters have been given to hopelessness. Their social situation is wretched, aching and soul stirring, as is obvious in the grievance made by Somu’s mother to Sujata. Mahasweta Devi reveals the pathetic life that seems to mock at the fate of history. Still, the mutual lure of anguish and hopefulness at that time intensifies the sense of human conflict and struggle. As Somu’s mother informs Sujata:

My daughter tells me, don’t cry. Will he ever come back? Think of Partha’s mother, sister; she handed her son over to death. Partha’s younger brother can’t come back home. They’d kill him too if he came back…How can there be quiet with the mothers’ hearts burning like bodies on fire? …it’s not easy to…feed two souls, mother and daughter…You have yet another son. You can still hold him to your breast and forget your grief. (Sujata shakes her head) I lost my son, my
son’s father and I, with this tortoise’s life of mine, shall live on forever,
the two funeral pyres burning within! (2008, 12, 22)

On one hand Sujata passes through an agonizing process of discovering Brati and herself. On the other hand her children and even her husband enjoy entertaining with those socially elite people blatantly allied to the power politics who are responsible for Brati’s death. Now she is completely cognizant of the condition in which she lives. The more she discovers about her son, the nearer she feels to Brati. In fact she finds him among the people for whom he struggled and died. In the beginning misery and pain had brought them and Sujata together. As Somu’s mother conveys to Sujata:

SOMU’S MOTHER. Your son, sister, gifted his life away. He had come to warn
Somu and his group. They had got wind that the four of them were there in the colony, there was the fear that they wouldn’t survive the night…

SUJATA. I hadn’t ever seen them. (Pause) Brati had never brought them home.
(Pause) I wasn’t home all the time.

SOMU’S MOTHER (draws a breath). You’re a working woman, you’ve a rich home,
I wonder why Brati chose such a course! Didn’t you ever realize what your son was up to? (2008, 12, 14)

Initially Sujata could not mix up with Nandini and Somu’s mother. Bit by bit the barriers that detach her from them diminish. She finds an echo of her inaudible cry of anguish and harassment in their perpetual miseries and woes. However, the oppressors sense a rebel in her and accordingly ban her visit to the houses of the underprivileged. Sujata and Somu’s mother, both are victims of the holocaust of Naxalite Movement. The bond, established between them, is natural and it feasibly turns a major threat to the privileged ruling people. They fear that the sufferers may learn to revolt for the common cause against all kinds of persecution. Somu’s mother tells Sujata not to visit her home again for “They tell her, Why does she come to your house? Forbid her. It’ll be dangerous otherwise.” (2008, 23) Sumanta Banerjee,
throwing light on the after effects of Naxalite Movement of 1970s on the lives of the poor, writes:

There are thousands of sufferers who are not being allowed to lead a normal life. For years the police have been trained to suspect every young man as a potential rebel, and they find ready preys even among those unfortunate youth who were perhaps once on the fringe of the Naxalite Movement but have no political connections whatsoever now. (*Economic and Political Weekly*, 1983, 176)

Through Nandini, Mahasweta Devi echoes the same:

Betrayal. The prison walls rise higher, new watch towers shoot up, there are so many young men still in the prisons, and the political party will not take a stand until it has been able to determine how it’ll serve its own interest and affect its standing with the centre. Betrayal. (2008, 27)

Sujata has recognized how she is handcuffed all around and how she fails wretchedly to come out of the restraints of the patriarchal society. Her predicament finds expression before Nandini thus, “I won’t go to Somu’s mother. I won’t come to you. I won’t go to the places where Brati exists. May be that’s my punishment for not knowing Brati.” (2008, 36) Inspired by a generous and noble aspiration to fetch in a new age the young men like Brati are encouraged to revolutionary actions. They have vowed entirely to the cause of suffering humanity. The lure of money, career and power do not shatter them. However they always fall short of and victimized due to betrayal and an overdose of romanticism for ideals. They are too heavy as Nandini says to Sujata:

Why we hadn’t provided for the possibility of people joining the party as friends only to betray us ultimately…We didn’t have a clue about the reality…I still wonder how we could afford not to know that with all that has happened since 1947, all human loyalties had dissolved by 1970. I wonder how we could be unaware that they could betray us to
kill us…We could be shocked whenever we heard that behind an assassination there was someone closely related to the victim. (2008, 25-26)

Moreover, the ruling party has a mindset to abolish the leaders of the common people. Anindya, the betrayer and one-time associate of Brati carried out establishment’s orders in a lure for attractive rewards. Saroj Pal, a bloody cur of the police for whom there is no forgiveness, is a typical autocrat tyrant, exceeds all those torturers notorious for persecution. The scene of interrogation, in which he implements terrible procedures and skills to bring out information and evidence from Nandini, is poignant:

SAROJ PAL. (softly) what was your relation with Brati Chatterjee? Was he a friend?
NANDINI: Stop it.
SAROJ PAL (the same voice) what was your relationship with Brati Chatterjee? Was he a friend?… (Bends close to her, lights a cigarette, presses the lighted cigarette to Nandini’s cheek. She screams.)… He puffs at cigarette and then presses it again to Nandini’s cheek. The questions and the pattern continue. (2008, 33)

Subsequently, the survivors of the victims either learn to bend or rebel. The disclosures made by Somu’s mother and Nandini are severe impeachment of the authority’s merciless insolence towards revolutionaries. As Nandini says:

No. No. No. No! It was never quiet, nothing’s quiet. Nothing’s changed. Thousands of young men rot in the prisons without trials, they are denied the status of political… Torture continues with greater sophistication and secrecy. (2008, 34)

As the theme advances the audience recognizes the utmost irony of the state of affairs. On one hand, a person like Brati, dedicated to the cause of suffering mankind, is
brutally killed. On the other hand the traitor like Anindya is free and unpunished. The prize for the sensitive mothers like Sujata is only a chic number 1084 to identify the dead body of her dear son among hundreds of other dead bodies at the police morgue. She is not allowed even to take the corpse at home. As the stage direction reads:

*The sentence--‘No. You won’t get the body’- reverberates in different voices,* in different pitches, *each time striking Sujata’s face like a whiplash,* as Sujata kneels, *her face staring upwards,* shocked. (2008, 7)

The corpse number 1084 given to Brati’s dead body suggests the immeasurable repulsions and terrors happened to the common people during the ruthless subdual of Naxalite Movement in 1970s. The power politics cruelly attempted to suppress its rebels and their survivors to the level of paltry subhuman.

For the first time, Sujata recognizes the impact of Brati’s sacrifice and responds cuttlingly when her children make facetious comments about him. He achieves herculean height when equated with her other children and her husband. As:

Sujata. Brati’s belief was so different from your belief in the
   Swami, or Bini’s in her prayer room, that it sounds utterly
   absurd when you drag his name into the same context.
Tuli. The same thing again! You will react every time we mention
   Brati… Are we not worthy enough to pronounce his name?
Sujata. The way you pronounce it! To hurt me! ...To Tony and his
   crowd, to the others. You, your father, Jyoti, Neepa, the way
   you all speak his name, as if…as if Brati was a criminal. (2008,
9-10)

The mother’s identification with the son is complete. For Sujata, he is not only a son now. Brati epitomizes an entire class that risked their lives for the welfare of humanity. Nevertheless the authority dehumanized Brati by allotting a number to his dead body; he is still a human being. Sujata is satisfied by seeing and reaching an analogous in Brati’s rebel to her repressed revolt against the rotten patriarchal habits.
Indeed, Sujata’s realization of Brati and his mission support her to realize herself and her mission as a mother, a woman and a human being. Instead of regretting she feels proud being casted with Brati’s camp. As the tape reveals:

> With Brati, they’ve cast me too in the opposite camp. If Brati had been like Jyoti, or drunkard like Neepa’s husband, Amit or a hardened fraud like Tony, or had run after the typists like his father, he’d have belonged to their camp. (2008, 11)

Sujata is in direct clash and conflict with her phony children and hypocrite husband. In her home she is reduced to a submissive person while the family members, invitees and guests enjoy her daughter’s engagement party. Coincidently, it is Brati’s birthday and also encountered on the same day. Moreover it is the same day on which Sujata discovers her Brati again. As Sujata’s voice on the tape reveals, “Brati I spent the whole day with you, and I can’t forget myself now to carry out my duties. (Aloud) True!” (2008, 36) Dibyanath blames Sujata of being liable for Brati’s death. This broadens the gap between them. However groundless the charge, it quickens her release of the pressure of the kind of life she has lived so far. She realizes that the society is full of Dibyanaths and Saroj Pals. She sees that a bigger revolution and greater martyrdom like her son is indispensable for the sake of human ethics.

Sujata is a working woman for whom her job is a form of self-assertion against the male dominated power of her husband. Nonetheless there is no escape from the domestic duties. It is obligatory to take part in her youngest daughter Tuli’s engagement party where she feels uncomfortable. Hence, her heart bites when sees Saroj Pal. He is the DCDD- Deputy Commissioner, Detective Department. Being a friend of her son-in-law Tony Kapadia, he arrives to wish the newly engaged Tuli and Tony. Sujata experiences edged from all directions by his presence. As the stage direction reads, “*she grips her throat to stop the scream from breaking forth. There is a stare of disbelief in her eyes.*” (2008, 40) She remembers his stony and autocratic approach when she was summoned to the police station to identify the corpse no. 1084:
(Voice on tape): I’ve mother too... No, your son never went to Digha... No, we’ll not leave these in the house... What your son did is unforgivable... No, you won’t get the body... No, not the body. (2008, 41)

Sujata sees Saroj Pal in uniform. She fears and guesses another ruthless killing in Baranagar and in Kashipur today. The drama ends with Sujata’s exhortation to the spectators. She appeals to them for not to be the passive victims, but protest actively to the cruel oppressions. Being amalgamated by herself she finds it a collective cause:

Why don’t you speak? Speak, for heaven’s sake, speak, speak, speak!
How long will you endure it in silence? Where is the place where there’s no killer, no bullets, no prison, no vans? ... Where can you escape it all, Brati, in Calcutta, in west Bengal, from north to south, from east to west? (2008, 42)

Sujata’s exhortation is an alarming outburst of counter revolt to the apparently motionless and unfeeling civilization. It seems that with this rousing incitement to the spectators, she throws away the chains of male dominated society thrust on womanhood. Inspired by Brati’s sacrifice, she rises with truncheons against the patriarchal culture and civilization. She metaphorically metamorphosed from the world of ignorance to the world of knowledge. Consequently, she discerns intuitively a desire for her identity, so far curbed due to her passivity and silence.

Sujata’s meeting with Nandini and Somu’s mother awakens her consciousness to the sordid and shabby life, she has been unaware of. She ascertains herself with the cause of the miserable mankind and its welfare. Predominantly, Nandini’s plight moved her the most. She has gone sightless from the glare of blinding lights during police torture. She is on parole for the medical treatment of her eye sight. Otherwise the autocrats have never made her free. This acquaints Sujata with the tyrannies of the police and the power politics. As Nandini scorns:

NANDINI... Do you think they’ve stopped only because the newspaper
doesn’t report them? Arrests? Torture? Murders in the name of encounters? A whole generation between sixteen and forty is being wiped out.

SUJATA. Don’t tell me. (2008, 28)

Sujata, now onwards, changes into a protesting woman and a mother. She revolts in the face of decadent social standards. She has learnt to make a way out:

SUJATA. It’s time for me to leave.
NANDINI. Yes. It’s your youngest daughter’s engagement party.
SUJATA. I’ll come again…
NANDINI. No. What do you gain out of coming to me? You live with your past. I have to harness my present and think of the future…Come, let me show you the way.
SUJATA. Never mind. I’ll find my way out. (2008, 36)

Sujata becomes conscious as a woman and a mother and envisions a way to set an ideal for mankind. In the beginning of scene twelve the playwright employs the device of recorded tape to express her internal conflicts and thoughts. Indeed, her morning to evening peregrination into the miserable life lived by Nandini and Somu’s mother and sister away from her reputable life, puts her face to face with the grim truth of the ruthless slaying of 1084 revolutionaries. Sujata senses an image of her son in every young rebel who dies for the cause of suffering humanity. Mahasweta Devi articulates her agony thus:

You can’t be on the run any longer, Brati. Brati, come back. I found you back today, Brati. If the siren screeches again, if the vans race, and Saroj Pal chases another young man somewhere you’ll be lost again.
(2008, 42)

Sujata contemplates that people are given to the materialism and glamour of the contemporary life. She ponders that society is lacking human virtues and qualities. Therefore, the self-sacrificing act of her son is futile. She anticipates:
(Pointing to the audience, and the dancers) Corpses, stiffened corpses, all of you! (Pointing to herself) And I myself? Did Brati die to let you carry on in your cadaverous existence, enjoying and indulging in all the image of the world...forever, till infinity? No! Never! ...Let this ‘No’ of mine pierce the heart of the city...set the past, the present, and the future atremble. Let it tear down the happiness of everyone cooped up in his own happy happiness. (2008, 42)

Sujata falls on the stage with this flare-up. It is pointed to the pleasure-seeking society. However, her quest for Brati and the protest do not end with her outburst, it is very much alive.

*Mother of 1084*, at a glance, seems as a sheer documentation of the merciless overpowering of the Naxalite Movement in Bengal. However at deeper level the drama reads as a predicament of an apolitical mother who wakes up one day to a better fact. The accurate and convincing outward description such as the massacre of the young revolutionaries, the scene of police tyranny to Nandini and the extravagant and pleasure-seeking engagement party are portrayed only to stir the audience to pierce that shallow exterior to the unseen reality underneath.

As a whole, the play is a tale of Sujata's manifold repressions within a stuffy, household, male-controlled and feudal society. In addition, it is also a play reflecting how she comes out of her sheath, of social obligations and cultured facade only to discern the unknown world of the Naxal activists or to discover real Brati, about whom she knew very little while he was alive. Moreover, Mahasweta Devi portrays how an apolitical mother eventually struggling over the edge, is forced to identify the basic human essential to voice her moral, social and ideological place in a snappy narcissistic and extremely practical society of upper class people such as Chatterjees. In fact, the play is a suggestion of what the playwright actually aims to dramatize and her intension are explicitly clear.

In her introduction to *Agnigarbha (Womb of Fire, 1978)*, Mahasweta Devi admits, “Rural India has the appearance of an enormous graveyard...This Movement has been the most significant and inspiring event for a number of decades in this country.”
(2008, ix) It is only in the course of voicing one's moral, social and ideological place that a person could probably hope to reconcile some wounds of tyranny and subjugation and rise to protest the system of oppression personally or collectively. It is an attempt to pave the way for self-liberation.

*Mother of 1084* varies from the rest of Mahasweta's oeuvre in many ways. Firstly, some of her earlier works such as *Stanadaini* and *Draupadi*, which are centered on the tribal women, *Mother of 1084* is about a bourgeoisie apolitical woman. Secondly, many of her works, by virtue of their location, are in the oral-folk tradition; *Mother of 1084* owns an exceptional erudition of temporal-spatial design. The whole action of the play is cramped to only one day. Mahasweta Devi, employing the stream of conscious technique, has skillfully divided the twenty four hours of action into four timeframes- dawn, afternoon, evening and night, ensuing one another.

*Mother of 1084* is so framed that the continuity is persistently broken and interrupted through a series of memory snapshots and flashbacks. They not only help Sujata in the recovering her personal memory but also give her the most desired psychic healing. The playwright’s deliberate rupture of the chronological and linear development of the play, clearly suggests that *Mother of 1084* is a drama of multiple oppressions and predicament of a woman. At the end of the day, Sujata falls on the stage, much before she can walk out on her husband, Dibyanath.

Each of the twelve scenes in the play mark a new phase in the culmination of Sujata's consciousness. They empower her to rearrange her scrappy and messy life in search of a unified self. Her confrontations either with her own past or that of Brati, Somu's mother or Nandini, her own deep rooted predicament is gradually released into the ever flaring collective mechanism of treachery and suffering. It is a question whether she is really aware of common human suffering or her own condition, or reaching an enlightened understanding of situations that obliged Brati to become a rebel. Together they posit Sujata as a will less, pigeon livered, miserably helpless, dependent, a non-assertive, morally weak and lonely. As she says, “I’m all alone.” (2008, 5)
In *Mother of 1084*, the playwright documents the economic and social exploitation in West Bengal. It has forced the dispossessed agricultural labourers and tribals to the Naxalite Movement. As Sumanta Banerjee puts:

> It was senseless orgy of murders, misplaced fury, and sadistic tortures, acted out with the vicious norms of the underworld, and dedicated by the decadent and cunning values of the petty bourgeois leaders. (1983, 177)

Mahasweta Devi continues this process of documenting the exploitation of the subalterns closely in her other works such as *The Womb of Fire (Agnigarbha)*, *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* and *The Glory of Sree Sree Ganesh*. Here she focuses on the responses of a cross-section of the fighters and their survivors. They are both, those who endure the mutilations and injuries of the holocaust, and those who have survived through the days of horrible violence in sham insularity. Samik Bandyopadhyay writes:

> The adoration of god men, the euphoria over the Bangladesh war, the pretenses of radicalism and scandals commercial and amorous constituted for the latter a lifestyle that guaranteed their security. At one level at least the urban guerrillas were reacting against the immorality of this lifestyle and rejecting the social-familial system that had nurtured them. The rebellion against the middle class mores need not be an explanation even of the urban Naxalite rebellion, but that would be the one aspect that could rationalize the Movement in retrospect to a fairly affluent, sensitive and enlightened mother, who had not known till the shock of an early morning phone call from the police morgue that her favorite son had become part of the movement. (2008, xiv)

The one day in the life of Sujata disbursed in discovering real Brati. She has passed the day in establishing an identity with Brati or rather in discovering a cause he strove and died for. Therefore it is Sujata's tale, not Brati's, may be Sujata's Brati's. She yells
in aching, toward the close of the drama, when her appendix bursts during the daughter's engagement party.

Asit Bose scheduled to stage *Mother of 1084* in 1973; nevertheless it could not take place. As Samik Bandyopadhyay writes:

However her script was never staged, though there were productions of several ‘safe’ and neutral dramatizations of the novel itself, most of them in Hindi. In her own version, Mahasweta Devi achieves an economy which has been invariably diffused in the productions as they have elaborated the party scene or tried to provide a justification for the extra-legal violence directed against the Naxalites. These productions have actually represented the establishment's endeavor to absorb the exposure with which Mahasweta Devi’s novel and play challenged them. As Mahasweta helplessly saw the distortions of her text in an almost deliberate conspiracy, she could see for herself that the scale of the play and its naturalistic method gave it a dimension that was beyond the reach of the experimental theatre committed to social comment, and the play seemed to lend itself to ‘the commercial’ distortions that the semi-professional companies reveled in. (2008, xv)

In the early seventies her play challenged Indian mainstream theatre. It is a challenge of an experience of familiarity that the theatre failed to incorporate. A few of Mahasweta Devi’s short stories have been dramatized by her since 1976. They are staged by non-professional theatre people, most in Bengal both in Hindi and Bengali. However the prospect of a novelist's theatre has not been explored. It is a theatre that can employ the story of the text as an element rather than practice it merely as the raw material for a drama. Samik Bandyopadhyay writes:

Indian theatre in general—in both its contemporary manifestations, the professional-commercial and the non-professional-experimental—has vacillated between the actor's theatre and the director's, with little regard for the text. The model of the Anglo-American actor managerial tradition, and its culmination in the repertory system, has been too
overpowering for the Indian theatre to allow for probing explorations of and experiments along the theatre too often inherent in a narrative text…She takes pride in the fact that she has been instrumental in the making of a play by the Khedia-Shabara tribal of Purulia in which they enact an old tribal uprising and play it in forests--or rather in open patches in the forest--where the revolt had taken place a little over a hundred years ago. As she recounted to me a performance of this work, I could visualize a forest coming to life with the sound of drums and people on the move, before the band of revolutionaries emerge from the forest, their flaming torches illuminating one of those new moon-nights. (2008, xxi)

The drama, *Mother of 1084*, is faithful to the novel *Hajar Churashir Ma*. Here, Mahasweta Devi dramatizes with an instant past incident in order to comment on the present as a warning anecdote universalizing human predicament. It is a predicament which led so many mothers and sons to martyrdom. Mahasweta Devi contributes to propositions of feminist theatre. It is a theatre that aspires towards the freedom of women from the power of history and boldly discourses the issue of liberating women from the trapped roles. Megan Terry's *Calm Down Mother* demonstrates the creation of the female universe. Helene Keyssar, in *Feminist Theatre and Theory*, keeping into deliberation the changes initiated by the women dramatists, defines the objectives and aims of feminist theatre. Its chief goal is to explore the barrier between art and life. Mahasweta Devi has fruitfully carried the tenets of feminist theatre beyond the decided things. She has successfully broken the barrier between art and life.

*Mother of 1084* is a skillfully structured play with a beginning, middle and an end. The phone call to Sujata for the identification of Brati’s dead body forms beginning. Her discovery of Brati’s revolutionary self and activities set up the middle of the play, while her fervent exhortation to the audience constitutes the end. The playwright interchanges the time scale backward and forward by dealing with the past and the present in alternating scenes. She experiments it very much in the style of a memory play. Her stage is free of unnecessary theatrical properties. The empty stage gives her great liberty to dramatize various situations more by suggestion than by scenic displays. Moreover it does not confuse the spectators much.
Following the ‘Third Theatre’, Mahasweta Devi remains more authentic in her representation of the existing realities. The swing in the scene is suggested by partly darkening the stage. Moreover, she uses tape as a dramatic device. It convinces the smooth flow of the action as well as delivers a substitute to rather awkward dramatic device of soliloquy in the play. Soliloquy is often utilized by the dramatists to inform the spectators about the inner thoughts and conflicts of the characters. Unlike covert soliloquy, tape is rather overt stage apparatus.

Mahasweta Devi focuses more on the theme and content than on the theatrical stuffs and properties. She concentrates on the direct communication of the theme and content between the spectators and the characters. Here, Mahasweta Devi reminds Brecht, who in order to create better dramatic effect uses ‘anti-illusionist theatrical device.’ (Drama: An Introduction, 1983, 163) His plays celebrate the empty stage to greater advantage. He has proposed ‘Third Theatre’. It is empty without any external trappings like sets, lights, costumes, sound and make up, which are necessary in a professional theatre. The dramas of Badal Sircar and Mahasweta Devi can be staged everywhere. In his drama, Michhil (Procession) Badal Sircar presents a dead character rising and speaking directly to the spectators.

I was murdered yesterday, day before yesterday. And the day before that.... I am murdered every day. I will be murdered tomorrow. (Three Plays, 1983, 6-7)

Scene twelve of Mother of 1084, where Sujata exhorts, is very much alike the scene of Sircar's Michhil:

Still in uniform? Still on duty? Mass action again in Baranagar?... still the Black Maria, the revolver in the holster, the helmeted policemen within the van? Where's the job this time? Where will the Siren Screech? Where will the streets resound to the pounding boots, the threatening van? Where will bullets pierce the wind? Where again? Where will Brati run to? Where? (2008, 41).
They both signify the bitter social truth that human predicament is inevitable and perpetual.

The series of events and actions are set in a time of violence and bloodshed. However, Naxalite Movement is back grounded and not the center of the play. *Mother of 1084* is focused around the effect that cruel massacres leave on the families of the young men. The terrible war and violence of the movement are only mirrored subtly by the feelings battling inside sensitive mothers. *Mother of 1084* seems to be inspired by Maxim Gorky's novel *Mother*, which was filmed by Vsevolod Pudovkin in the year 1926, the year Mahasweta Devi was born. The mother of Pavel becomes a martyr, whereas Brati’s mother suffers the predicament by limiting herself to the understanding of her son and passes this knowledge to the audience. With her exhortation directed against the pleasure-seeking and glamour loving people, Sujata collapses on the stage. The drama ends, however her search for Brati does not end with her fall. It continues as a search for identity very much alive. *Mother of 1084* is a stormy tale of human predicament.

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NOTE

- All the textual citations are from Mahasweta Devi’s *Five Plays*, translated by Samik Bandyopadhyay: Calcutta, Seagull Books, 2008.

REFERENCES