

Tribhuvan University

Subaltern Agency and Resistance in Mahasweta Devi's *The Queen of Jhansi* and  
*Mother of 1084*

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By

Bimal Prasad Adhikari

T.U. Regd. No: 6-1-19-267-2001

Symbol No: 2015088

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

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### Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Subaltern Agency and Resistance in Mahasweta Devi’s *The Queen of Jhansi and Mother of 1084*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Bimal Prasad Adhikari has been approved by the following members of the research committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

.....

Dhruba Bahadur Karki, Ph.D

Internal Supervisor

.....

Dr. Taralal Shrestha

External Supervisor

.....

Dhruba Bahadur Karki, Ph.D

Head

Central Department of English

Date :

### **Declaration**

I hereby assert that this thesis is my innovative work. It contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree in any institution. This thesis, to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any previously published content.

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Bimal Prasad Adhikari

April 2025

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## **Abstract**

*This research examines struggle and resistance of subaltern people in hegemonized Indian society during colonial era and the historical Naxalite breakthrough of Bengal during 1960s through 1970s. The subaltern people allow them to attain their autonomy and identity via agency to resist through consciousness. This study examines why and how Mahasweta Devi's characters Lakshmibai, Sujata and Brati undergo active internalization of consciousness as a catalyst to subaltern agency, and why Devi portrays such experiences of characters in her novels The Queen of Jhansi (1956) and Mother of 1084 (1974) respectively. As a researcher, I have employed the theoretical perspectives of gender subaltern of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and resistance paradigm of Michael Garnett. By experiencing subaltern consciousness- an awareness of hegemonic experience in terms of gender, class, caste, and age or in any other ways, the characters acquire the agency to oppose injustice. They preserve their identity and dignity while establishing their own agency. Devi's Mother of 1084 (1974) and The Queen of Jhansi (1956) depict the protagonists Lakshmibai, Sujata, and her son Brati as the subaltern characters resisting against imperial hegemony, class, gender and caste based exploitation and discrimination in the contemporary society. Through the protagonist's awareness from a state of powerlessness to an empowered quest for agency and autonomy dismantles the notion that the subalterns cannot speak.*

**Keywords:** Subaltern, subaltern consciousness, Resistance, Agency

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## Chapter I

### Resisting Through Subaltern Consciousness

This study examines the struggle of the Indian subaltern people and their resistance through subaltern consciousness in the contemporary Indian society during the 1960s through 1970s. Antonio Gramsci fundamentally refers the subaltern classes to “any 'low rank' person or group in a certain society” (66). This study examines the voice of the subaltern protagonists’ including Lakshmibai, Sujata, and Brati in Mahasweta Devi’s *The Queen of Jhansi* (1956) and *Mother of 1084* (1974) respectively. Though Lakshmibai belongs to Marahatta, high class family of the society and queen of Jhansi state, she has excluded to rule under her son’s hair and finally British imperial power kills her. Similarly, Sujata and her son, Brati are from middle-class female of Bengali society but patriarchal society and state power exploits and dominates them therefore Brati participates in Naxalite movement, a political insurgency between the Indian government and left-wing group, to fight against the social injustice of the then society. The protagonists of both novels are women. The depiction of women and dialectical relationship between canonical group and subaltern constitute its core.

The narratives of both novels depict voice of resistance and self-discovery as a means of fending off social injustice and character dehumanization. They develop their own agency and solidarity after experiencing an awareness- subaltern consciousness. They maintain their identity and dignity in a new community where equality and justice prevails. Additionally, this study examines how Indians overcome their physical subjugation in order to become autonomous. This study further examines how the protagonists develop into enlightened and have an agency to resist against the imperial hegemony and class and gender based discrimination. Devi's

*Mother of 1084* and *The Queen of Jhansi* depict the subaltern consciousness and awakened agency of characters including Lakshmibai, Sujata and Brati. Instead of fate, the suffering is brought on by other people and the social environment, from which the victim still harbors strong and persistent expectations for a better life. Hegemony narrates the exploitation and sufferings of protagonists Lakshmibai, Sujata, and Brati. In Devi's *The Queen of Jhansi* and *Mother of 1084*, the protagonists Lakshmibai and Sujata lead to the emergence of consciousness after having agency on them. The protagonists' journey from a condition of helplessness to an empowered desire for agency, emerging as an agent and site of resistance dismantles the idea that the subaltern cannot speak.

Antonio Gramsci defines the word subaltern as any "low rank" person or group of people in a particular society suffering under hegemonic domination of a ruling elite class that denies them the basic rights of participation in the making of local history and culture as active individuals of the same nation (66). A ruling class's hegemonic dominance causes suffering for subalterns. The elite's hegemonic dominance denies them the fundamental right to take part in creating their own history and culture. They are not seen as contributing members of the country. Gramsci uses the phrase to describe the subjugated and controlled workers and peasants under Benito Mussolini and his National Fascist Party members. For Gramsci, "The history of the subalterns was as complex as the history of the dominant elite class" (67). The subaltern has a disjointed past and is constantly impacted by the actions of elite organizations. Despite the fact that subalterns rebel against aristocratic groups, they Subaltern Politics since consciousness lacks a past to establish its identity, it is unable to achieve total autonomy.

The subaltern agency of Devi poses the question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak's claim rejects the gendered subaltern's capacity for self-representation, speech, and autonomy. Devi's special concern for women and their difficulties is also avoided by her claim that "the subaltern as female cannot be heard or read (13)," which turns into a place of resistance. Her works highlight the suffering of subalterns in consumerist culture and capitalistic world where people have been reduced to commodities. The examination of Devi's texts gives us the impression that the oppressed people's plight and the atrocities committed across India are unchanged. Devi's writings are unique records of violence and defiance by poor, illiterate tribal people who, in refusing to give up, not only reveal the ugly and dreadful side of political repressive forces like the government, bureaucrats, feudal masters, and state-sponsored criminals, but also challenge the power of the post-colonial state and its horrors.

First, this research work investigates socio-political situation of Jhansi and the struggling life of Lakshmibai, Sujata and her son Breti. Second, this study examines the journey of powerless to empowered agency to resist against imperial colonial society and gender, caste and class based discrimination. Third, this study critiques the struggle of subaltern people and how they cope up with such situations through their conscious agency to resist with their new awakened self.

Devi, a postcolonial historical writer, raises the voice of subalterns of Jhansi against western hegemony during the British rule and against the elitist government and stratified societal structures of Bengal during 1970s. Devi critiques the social structure of caste, gender and British colony that deconstruct the official history and reclaim history of the people Indian society. Her work is a testament to the resilience and agency of those women who resist the forces that seek to silence them.

Devi uses the technique of rewriting of Indian subalterns historiography in order to create a new reality that can transform the backward people of modern-day Bengal and Jhansi, as well as their subjectivities and identities. This helps to address issues such as caste and class-based discrimination, injustice, violence, imperial and state-governed hegemony, trauma, and other problems. Understanding how identity, history, trauma, and narrative connect to the changing process of seeking justice and peace in modern Indian society is crucial in the case of such disparities. Indian people's experiences have been shaped by many historical periods and generations. Such individuals' hostile and painful path can be traced back over many years to the present. Classism, casteism, imperial hegemony, and gender discrimination have all affected subaltern people in India at various points in time. They continue to live on the periphery of society, socially excluded and with limited possibilities.

Devi's turn to the evil of imperial and state-governed hegemony during his writing career makes sense because it satisfies his need to make readers acutely aware of the dehumanizing social evils, arouse their compassion, and mobilize them to fight for their eradication in order to establish a desirable or just social order. It is noteworthy that the English translation of this Indian novel premiered during a period when social reformers in India were making a sincere attempt to eradicate casteism and untouchability. The awakening of subaltern consciousness in Devi's *The Queen of Jhansi* and *Mother of 1084* would undoubtedly create a change that still requires courage and confidence to get rid of superstitious beliefs and customs from subaltern ideologies which currently prevail in our society. It has been more than fifty years since the novel's inception, and even though social life in India has been completely revolutionized since then, one cannot say with confidence that casteism is completely wiped out.

The Subaltern Studies emerges in reaction to what it saw as elitist tendencies in nationalist and colonial histories. In his groundbreaking study "Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India," Ranajit Guha criticized nationalist historiography for ignoring the independent realm of subaltern politics. Guha said that the peasantry's rebellious awareness often misinterprets or suppresses. Gayatri Spivak's thought-provoking inquiry "Can the Subaltern Speak?" draws attention to the epistemic violence inherent in the subaltern representation process itself (66). By advocating for the subaltern, she criticizes both imperial and postcolonial intellectuals, which serves to further silence them. This essay takes Spivak's warning to heart while attempting to shed light on the systems that silence subaltern voices and the tactics these groups use to regain control.

Devi offers the underprivileged a lot of room in her writing. The impoverished, Adivasis, Dalits, and women who are denied a position in the current social structure are among the marginalized groups that are portrayed in her works. She allows the underprivileged to freely express them by telling her story from their point of view. By educating the downtrodden about their situation and encouraging them to band together to combat injustices, she aims to destroy the hierarchy between the center and the periphery, the affluent and the poor, the Dalit and the Brahmins. Devi often portrays the double marginalization of characters in her novels. She picks up the issue of economic exploitation, gender discrimination, imperial hegemony, state atrocities and its impacts on the psyche of individuals in *The Queen of Jhansi* and *Mother of 1084*, novels that advocate for the solidarity of the entire marginalized Indian communities. Devi's position as a novelist has always been critical enough to critique the cross-cutting issues of subjugation of the so called subalterns; firstly in the name of caste, class, gender violence and imperial hegemony.

Devi allows more space in her works and employs the voices of underprivileged people as the awakening agency. In her works, she gives voice to the underprivileged and emphasizes the poor, marginalized, and downtrodden who are not given a place in the existing social order. By narrating her narrative from the perspective of the disadvantaged, she enables them to freely express themselves. She aims to dismantle the hierarchy between the poor and the rich, the center and the periphery, by informing the oppressed about their plight and inspiring them to unite in the fight against injustices. Devi's *Mother of 1084* and *The Queen of Jhansi* project marginalized groups including women, the impoverished and underprivileged caste.

Jhansi, a district of Uttar Pradesh, is an independent state under rule of Maratha Newalkar dynasty and Gangadhar Rao, the fifth king of Jhansi state, marries to Manikarnika (Lakshmibai) who becomes the queen of Jhansi later (47). Lord Dalhousie states in his articles that British Empire does not recognize Damodar Rao, an adopted child of Ganghadhar Rao as a legitimate heir under the doctrine of Lapse because an Indian emperor's realm will "lapse" and be taken over by the British Empire if king passes away without leaving a male heir (102). That is why Lakshmibai, the widow of king and a female character, resists against the British where she ruled in her kingdom as being queen of Jhansi.

*The Queen of Jhansi* defies classification, is at once a biography, a history, and a personal statement that speaks as much about the author as it does about her subject. It is also a significant addition to feminist writers' reclamation of history and historiography through the deployment of body as a site of resistance creating agency and solidarity. Devi underscores legendary heroine Lakshmibai, the Queen of Jhansi, who leads her army against the British in the 1857 Mutiny of British India (94). Her resulting work chronicles the history of the growing resistance to the British while

presenting a thorough portrait of Lakshmibai as a multifaceted, vivacious, full-blooded woman who wears her long hair unbound while preferring a male outfit while riding a horse; who is a calm and foresighted leader of men, full of warm concern for her soldiers; and who worries about the welfare of her infant son. This Novel is a significant addition to feminist writers' reclamation of history and historiography through resistance movement.

One of the key players in the Indian War of Independence in 1857, Lakshmibai becomes a symbol of Indian nationalists' opposition to the British Raj. Along with her childhood companions Nana Sahib and Tatya Tope, she studies shooting, riding, and fencing. Hugh Rose, governor of British moves towards Jhansi on 27 February 1858, when the British force reach Jhansi (170). Even though Tatya Tope arrives with 22,000 troops, the Rani does not get his assistance. Lakshmibai, however, is invigorated by the loss and oversees the defense. Early on the morning of 3 April, 1858, General Rose attacks the fort. The leadership of the Afghan and Pathan cavalry was assumed by the Queen herself. She had prepared women for military service by training them (177). They intend to oppose British forces in Kalpi, but they remain unsuccessful. After that, the revolutionaries head onto Gwalior, where they first achieve success. The revolutionaries are ambushed and forced to flee by the British on 18 June 1858. Lakshmibai perishes in this action. 19 June, 1858, is the day of the last fight.

Lakshmibai falls after becoming trapped by gunshots while riding a horse. Under British authority, the Rani consciously chooses death over life. Her compatriots will never forget that she lived and died for her country, despite whatever flaws she may have had in the sight of the British. She inspires herself to rebel by mistreatment

she faces. Her physical sacrifices are a fitting testament to her unrivaled bravery, courage, and fighting spirit.

Similarly, Devi's *Mother of 1084* portrays the Naxalite movement or Indian leftist movement around 1960s to 1980s. It begins as a revolt against the local landlords over land control, classism, gender and caste-based discrimination has grown to become the greatest threat to Indian national security. It emerges because of poverty, injustice and inequality among the people of the contemporary society. Most of marginalized people are killed in this movement due to state atrocities. It shows the discriminative socio-political situation of West Bengal as the reasons for her son's involvement to the Naxalite organization in the 1970s following and his horrific murder by state power. She discovers several levels of secret information that an upper-class mother may not normally care to be aware of. She explains that her son has given his life because he shares her concern for others and desire for social equality. Because she is not accepted in her own family, she realizes that her life is similar to what her son thinks. In her own home, she must endure the torment of exclusion. She is stronger now and can better relate to the reasons her son gave his life for because of these things. In her work, *Mother of 1084*, Devi thoroughly documents the dreadful actions of the husband and some of the children, the double standard of morality and civil laws, the divide between the bourgeois and the proletariat, the Naxalite movement and its aftermath, the indiscriminate brutal killings of Naxalites, the longing for materialistic living, and the hollow prestige among the upper class society.

The complete developmental route of Sujata Chatterjee's life following the disgraceful murder of her son Brati during a rebellion is depicted in the novel *Mother of 1084*. Sujata never had any suspicions about her son's actions since she loves and

trusts in him so much. When she is abruptly called upon to identify her son's identity at the police morgue, she is completely taken aback by the sight of her son's disfigured identity beside that of his other companions. One of the most moving scenes occurs here when Sujata requests her son's lifeless corpse but is turned away. She understands that her son's individuality as a human has been lost, and that his corpse has been assigned the dehumanizing designation of corpse number 1084 (14). When a mother sees her dead son in such a horrible state, her heart is broken. This gives people the hegemonic experiences and struggle of subalterns that there are still people like Brati who dedicate their life to a cause that is highly objective.

Critics praise Devi and her novels in a variety of ways. Devi's novels are studied against the backdrop of the enduring psychological effects of hegemony, caste-based discrimination and exploitation as a source of fear for the Indian community, and their attempt to escape these evil practices through a physical act of resistance. Devi uses her work to give voice to the voiceless in an effort to elevate their position. As she notes, Devi has "always been driven by a strong sense of history" (321). Ludden admits that Devi writes "histories from below" (15). The subaltern voice is presented by Devi in her writings. Devi states, "To evaluate a war in history one has to take into account the views of the people who pay for that war; emotionally, physically and financially" (320-321). Devi links this work to her later works, including *Amritosanchay*, *Andharmanik*, and "Stanadayini," to the text titled "*The Queen of Jhansi*". She highlights her dedication to resurrecting, retrieving, and investigating "people's version of history" (320). Devi employs awakened self to resurrect, reclaim and reconstruct subaltern history effacing hardships and deadly exposures to the dominating world.

Radha Chakravarty admires Devi as a prolific Indian writer of modern era. Her literary creativity remains immortal as inspiring manuals for new generation to withstand domination, exploitation and injustice. She further illustrates:

*The Queen of Jhansi* presents a spectacular blend of fact and fiction, history and myth. This book was the beginning of a long and prolific writing career, spanning more than 50 years to date. But Devi's talent for combining the real and the imaginary, the facts of history with the promptings of a visionary imagination, of construction remains unchanged. Her creative writings inhabit the borderland between history and fiction, where 'truth' is constructed from a mixture of fact and make-believe. (122)

Devi's works are blend of fact and fiction, history and myth. *The Queen of Jhansi* has always been a prolific master piece that combines real and imaginary, mythical and historical incidence that constructs from mixture of fact and fiction.

Along with gender, class and nation continue to be significant defining characteristics that intertwine to create the intricate alternate histories that are revealed in Devi's stories. Ultimately, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan unfolds:

The challenge to and of feminist writing lies in negotiating women's identity defined in these terms ... women are classed, caste and communal subjects ... at the same time, in the interests of a transformative politics, difference must be managed, if not transcended. (123)

The history of the 1857 rebellion is occupied by the Rani of Jhansi. As a queen, Lakshmibai is fighting to rid the country of foreign domination while remaining committed to her role in politics. We may discuss some important issues about how gender functions in the narrativization of other histories by looking at Devi's portrayal of her.

The shift in the Naxalite movement's ideological convictions is thought to have caused it to progressively degrade into a destructive movement of ideological terrorism. Unjustified policies, such as the annihilation line promoted by Charu Mazumdar's beliefs, caused a movement that first sought to mobilize the masses to bring about a revolution to degenerate into a campaign of terror and slaughter. When asked to discuss the current state of the communist insurgency in India and how it has turned into terrorism, Sanyal would respond as follows:

Revolution and terrorism are not the same thing; while the former thrives on mass support and uses arms only as an additional tool, the latter is solely dependent on arms and ammunitions. Hence, taking to arms for a cause does not necessary mean one is treading the path of revolution; there is always the risk of straying into terrorism and that is what is happening to the Maoists.

Despite the Maoists arguably championing the cause of the farmers, the real peasantry in India is still detached from them. (6)

When Sanyal distinguishes between the "real peasantry" and the "farmers," he says that he thought the movement cannot reach the lowest people and that the Bengali mentality was only embracing romanticism and revolution. Mazumdar's extreme revolutionary methods are out of step with the nation's democratic framework and sociopolitical context.

Devi's major works such as *The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh* (2003), *Mother of 1084* (1997), *Rudali* (1997), *Titu Mir* (2004), *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* (2002), and *Bashai Tudu* (1990) deal with the exploitation of tribal and disadvantaged people. Satpal Singh in "Aesthetics of Protest: A Study of the Works of Mahasweta Devi" asserts:

Reading attentively delivers a real and perceptive peek into India's underprivileged communities; her narrative is a veritable kaleidoscope of Indian subaltern existence. They are a reliable measure of how individuals respond to social pressures and the results that follow. (12)

Devi's narratives present various spectrums of underprivileged Indians of Bengal and Jhansi particularly. Her narratives are reliable sources of how the subaltern people handle pressure and fight against social and cultural domination.

Regarding the courage, endurance, skill, and fighting spirit of the Queen C. A. Kincaid in his article "Lakshmibai Rani of Jhansi" elucidates her need to devote herself to the wellbeing of the state after defeating her enemies. He takes a praiseworthy note as follows:

After the defeat of her rivals, Lakshmibai devoted herself to the management of the state. Her chief minister was Lakshmanrao Bande; but the queen was an educated woman, and often passed written orders herself. She was an excellent and tireless rider, and daily settled boundary and similar disputes on the spot. She collected the revenues, managing them with thrift and prudence. She chose her troopers' mounts herself, as she was deemed one of the best judges of a horse in India; and she always hoped that because of her able administration the viceroy would in the end raise her adopted son to the throne. (101-102)

Rani's character reveals that she has been a diplomatic, clever, accountable, and prudent female agency that embarks upon the journey of redemption posing everything at a huge threat. She feels the necessity of retrieving the snatched identity and dignity of the nation and the particular community of Jhansi. For this she finds her agency to resist and helps arouse the agency among her people.

Kincaid in his article, “Lakshmibai Rani of Jhansi” further illustrates the valor and gallantry of the Queen in reference to the hostile military General Sir Hugh Rose who in the praise of the Queen admits:

I prefer to think of her as a young and gallant lady, who, forced by events beyond her control, joined the Nana Sahib and fell on the field of honour, fighting for a lost cause. . . Still the great soldier, who defeated her and her allies, penned an epitaph that she would not have disdained. Sir Hugh Rose wrote in his general orders after her death as the best man on the side of the enemy was the Rani of Jhansi. (104)

Kincaid eulogizes the greatness of the Queen synthesizing the moves she makes in her life since her childhood to her marriage with Gangadharrao. He finds that Queen falls to the British subject after the defeat of her father’s state; but as she marries she restores her identity as a sovereign subject to defy the British rule. As a consequence, her people carve an epitaph on her name after death as a rebellious figure.

The violent rebellion at Naxalbari, a rural area of North Bengal that would later become the moniker of Maoism in India, in the late 1960s brought the growing protest culture to a head:

It is important to note that Naxalbari and the rise of the Maoist movement in India did not signify a sudden outburst of peasant resistance, but resulted from extensive Communist agitations, not only in rural Bengal but also in other states where Communists had organized peasants from the 1930s onwards (see Ray 1988; Basu 2000). In Bengal, the movement drew on the experience and personnel of mass struggles like the Tebhaga sharecropper mobilization . . . The latter process gave birth to the wider Naxalite movement, which is seen

today as an essential part of this wider post-independence current of Left wing politics. (329)

The historical point of West Bengal faces a peasant revolution initially which later takes the form Maoist insurgency in the form of Naxalbari rebellion. The communist rebellions take extensive shape in rural Bengal that later experience the mass struggles. During 1970s this becomes a wider post-independence flow of left wing politics. This current begs the liberation through subaltern agency and its use to a bloody struggle.

Additionally, Sharma interprets the text in a biopolitical way, analyzing the scenario in the words, "The ruling political system in modern India uses biopolitical technologies, such as killings, incarceration, and surveillance" (57). The problematic connection between the people and the state has been the main topic of Sharma's reading. In order to remark on the use of compulsion on the insurgent's consciousness, Devi has also looked at the historical background. She interprets the poem as a story of pain and bloodshed brought on by the state's feudal system.

Devi uses her literary imaginations to communicate symbolically because she is a subaltern. The author examines her society and provides a discerning evaluation of its current state via the lens of agency. Reconstructed as an empowered political symbol, Devi deploys her protagonists' subaltern agency as the site of resistance in order to create a counter-narrative. Devi's characters use drastic, horrifying methods to gain agency. The indigenous people have lost both their identity and their land. Losing family members, being tortured physically and psychologically, being humiliated, and being reduced to a non-being are all factors that eventually leads to resistance. When forced to the very edge, the so-called "subalterns" finally rebel and speak up. As an agent and site of resistance, the protagonist's journey from a vain

state of helplessness to an empowered quest for agency destroys the repressive ideas against the subaltern, speaks figuratively, and alters the current social order. When forced to the very edge, the so-called "subalterns" finally rebel and speak up.

Brati, Sujata's son, chooses to join the Naxalite movement that was spreading through West Bengal in the late 1960s and early 1970s, deserting this disgusting and outdated code. Sujata is unable to stop her son from joining this movement since she is unaware of his covert goal. In the midst of his fight, he meets Nandini, a young girl who shares his vision of a new social order and is also a part of the underground movement. The police ruthlessly murder Brati and three of his close companions, Somu and Laltu, when one of his colleagues deceives him.

Sujata's long-suppressed personal pain is gradually released into the ever-widening spirals of treachery each time she explores her past or that of Brati, Somu's mother, or Nandini. Sujata is changed from a weak-willed, helplessly reliant, and non-aggressive moral coward to a socially combative, politically intelligent, and morally assertive person. Sujata mostly returns to her inner, private world of personal sorrow, torture, betrayal, and loneliness in the opening chapter namely "Dawn" which is noteworthy. As she navigates the inner time in light of her current family circumstances, she realizes that she and Brati are soul mates as well as fellow sufferers. For Sujata, Nandini recreates every moment of the events leading up to Brati's murder and treachery. She also introduces Sujata to the little-known underground movement, explaining to her the reasoning for a planned uprising and providing her with a firsthand experience of the state's persecution and its numerous shortcomings. Sujata is ultimately able to comprehend the rationale behind Brati's political beliefs and rejection of the bourgeoisie ideology.

Devi's main concerns are the tribal backwaters, the exploitation of the Adivasis by the landed rich or the urban administrative machinery, which insensitively immortalizes a legacy of complicity with the colonizers, prostitution and bonded labor, the poverty and misery of city dwellers who are forced to live on the outskirts and make do with a poor income, the plight of women who are the breadwinners and victims of male sexual violence, dependent widows, mistreated wives, and unwanted daughters whose bodies can command a price, bonded labor, and prostitution. The ceremonies of political awakening of agency helps protagonists' face many challenges and fight too hard against their sufferings. During this stage, characters politically realize their agency to fight against inequity, injustice, and societal disorder. After internalizing subaltern consciousness, the characters dream of a society marked by equality, justice, and transformation.

This study uses the theoretical perspectives of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Antonio Gramsci and Michael Garnett to examine the texts from the standpoint of agency and autonomy in relation to resistance in South Asian literature. While Analyzing the subaltern consciousness, traumatic experience, and suffering of the characters—all of which lead to a stage of resistance—contributes to discussions of contemporary tales from a variety of theoretical angles. The external and internal components of self-awakening in Devi's characters are similar to those in Garnett's agency (8).

By showing how subaltern body may be a political place and how a community might best embrace its marginal groups to extract agency from the dominating, it also sheds light on the relationship between literature and resistance. Due to both internal and environmental factors, the dominant ones in this scenario feel an awakening of agency as they transform. The body's obligation to resist for self-

discovery serves as the primary analytical tool in this study. Although it heavily draws on ideas created in resistance theory, it does not offer a comprehensive examination of the field. Rather, it emphasizes how classism, imperial dominance, and discrimination based on gender and caste are all factors that contribute to physical change and resistance.

This research work analyzes the awakening of self into fighting spirit-agency of characters to resist against the hegemonic power in Devi's novels, *The Queen of Jhansi* (1956) and *Mother of 1084* (1974). In this research work, my focus is how protagonists in these two novels transform into new self and acquire agency and solidarity to preserve their dignity and history. As a researcher, I will use theoretical insights of Michael Garnett, Antonio Gramsci and Spivak to analyze the primary texts, through the lens of agency and resistance. Devi depicts Lakshmibai, Sujata and her son Brati as fighter figures that awaken their agency - a fighting spirit within the self. Similarly, in the novel, *Mother of 1084*, Devi's protagonists Sujata and Breti resist against the authority of state and reject the ideal figure of motherhood promoted by patriarchy. The old self in the form of motherhood is transformed into new self in the form of political activist after being conscious or having agency on her.

In order to give her more female characters' agency and voice, Devi dramatizes their subjugation and dehumanization, even if this empowerment is achieved via bodily pains and occasionally death. What connects these protagonists from different places and contexts is their decision to speak via new agency and confront the self in order to resist suffering and violence. In the face of cultural and gendered violence, the act of self-erasing the feminine body becomes a subversive act of resistance against the oppressive system.

Similarly, in *Mother of 1084*, Devi shows how an altered self with awakened agency act as a site of resistance. Sujata, the mother of Brati, experiences profound shock and sorrow following her son's death, which catalyzes her opposition to the patriarchal bourgeois society and political system that devalues human life, particularly in the context of the Naxalite rebellion of 1960s to 1970s of India, where her son and other students and intellectual thinkers were sacrificed for social justice and equality in the nation.

One aspect of the awakening of agency is the distinct self-formation through arousal of agency deploying the subaltern body. By showing how such subaltern bodies function as political spaces and how communities might best embrace their marginal groups to empower the dominating, it also clarifies the relationship between literature and resistance. In this instance, both internal and external factors contribute to the dominant ones' transformation, causing them to awaken to their agency (8).

This research work makes significant contribution in three areas of critical concern. First, this study brings the political situation and patriarchal bourgeois society of India and their predicaments and way they contrive with such situations in the modern South Asian literature. Second, this study shows the subaltern body, its resistance move and its discovery of the new identity. Third, it will be significant theoretical concern to the canonical literature to show the struggle and sufferings of female character in the patriarchal bourgeois society and the way they cope up with that situation.

This study examines Devi's *The Queen of Jhansi* and *Mother of 1084* through the lens of subaltern agency to resist against imperial dominance, caste and gender-based discrimination, classism, and anti-bourgeois sentiment, which leads to self-consciousness among the subaltern group. By using the subaltern agency as the site of

resistance, the struggle and consciousness of both protagonists establish a counter-narrative by reconstructing themselves as dominating characters. Devi's characters have achieved their independent self to a certain degree through the arousal of their agency. Devi illustrates how the subaltern agency is an active tool for resistance and the establishment of a new social balance via the physical experiences of her characters. Through her writing, she restores the marginal differences by having her characters challenge the hegemonic discourses that are now in place. Her struggle and consciousness in order to generate an arousal of agency is the pivotal internal and external factor to resist against social disorder. These occurrences have a physical and psychological impact on individuals because they stem from the characters' trauma, dehumanization, oppression, and suffering.

The Subaltern Study's collective accomplishments caused the term "subaltern" to enter scholarly discourse. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's concept of subalternity, Ranajit Guha uses the word "subaltern" to highlight the Historiography of Indian Nationalism's elitist bias:

The Historiography of Indian Nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism- colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism...sharing the prejudice that the making of the Indian nation and the development of the consciousness-nationalism-which confirmed this process were exclusively and predominantly elite achievements. In the colonialist and neo-colonialist historiographies these achievements are credited to British colonial rulers, administrators, policies, institutions and culture; in the nationalist and neo nationalist writings-to Indian elite personalities, institutions, activities and ideas (1).

Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist philosopher, coins the concept of cultural hegemony. The concept of hegemony operates through the cultural institution such as school, media and social organization. Ranjit Guha takes the references of Gramsci to refer the historiography of Indian nationalism as a subaltern movement/Naxalite movement of Bengal and anticolonial movement of Jhansi led by Lakshmabai. For Guha, the neo-historiography or the narratives of Devi literally and symbolically poses threat to British rulers, administrators, institutions, culture, and elitist ideologist. It appears to be a resistant move of the subalterns of India.

Devi begins her essay by outlining the Jhansi royal family's genealogy. She also discusses her Maharashtrian ancestry, Lakshmibai's (Manikarnika before marriage to Gangadhar Raom) childhood, and her closeness to Peshwa Bajirao II as a kid. Following the passing of her brother Raghunath Rao, Rani Lakshmibai's husband Gangadhar Rao succeeded to the crown of Jhansi. Since Lakshmibai's young kid does not survive past three months, Gangadhar Rao has no direct heir to the throne. He adopts his five-year-old relative, Ananda Rao, as his son as he has no legitimate heir to the throne. However, the validity of this adoption is not accepted by the Englishmen. With Lord Dalhousie Citing the Doctrine of Lapse as legal justification, they annex Jhansi (103).

Lakshmibai starts fighting the British right away. She makes an effort to justify her allegation. In 1804, East Indian Company and Shivrao signed and two "kharitas" address to the English and even included supporting documentation to prove right to the throne (13). She gives instances of adopted children being recognized by the English as legitimate heirs to the throne. But all of her arguments are mercilessly and without much thought dismissed by the English. These

correspondences demonstrate her caution and position her as a capable administrator who is enough knowledgeable about her position and the law to oversee her subjects.

Harleen Singh has examined how Lakshmi Bai's character has been used in different ways in the literature. The role that the Rani has been given in the Indian society can be expressed by the quotation of S.N Sinha:

Rani Lakshmi Bai's place in history is secure. She was the embodiment of freedom. She showed her countrymen the path of liberty. Although revolt failed, and her great ambition of liberating her great motherland from foreign bondage could not be fulfilled, yet her brave action and deeds have made her name immortal. By sacrificing her life on the altar of the country's freedom, she has become a martyr. (52)

Bengal, India, and the Naxalite political climate of the 1960s and 1970s serve as the novel's settings. Mother of 1084 is written by Shaker. "The play realistically depicts the climactic phase of the annihilation of the Naxalites of the 1970s, set in urban Bengal." (225) Likewise, Sarkar further explicates further:

The 1970s remains an unforgotten decade in Bengal's memory because there was total break that happened in the communication between the people and a popularly elected government of a democratic nation, a situation that bred mutual suspicion and distrust. It took a decade, many lives and a change in political dispensation before a semblance of order could return to the state (255).

Sujata and Brati as the freedom fighters and martyrs die physically but shows the path of liberty and teaches a great lesson of bondage could be long lasting or domination would be failed very soon. Even if the government suppresses the Naxalite movement, the writer poses certain relevant issues in this respect that only consider

negative answers. Devi poses a very interesting query regarding Brati's passing: "Did the authorities manage to put out the raging confidence in disloyalty that Brati and his fellow countrymen had stood for by executing him? Was it pointless for Brati to die? Did his passing represent a resounding NO? (20). It cannot be so for Devi, or for any aware holding person, for that matter.

In this context, Brati's love interest and comrade Nandini poses some pertinent rhetorical questions: "What has changed? Are all males content now? Are the political games over? Is the world better now? (86). She responds, "Nothing has quieted down, it can't!" to Sujata's smug belief that "everything has quieted down." It wasn't quiet back then, and it's not quiet now. Thousands of young men remain imprisoned without being given a chance to defend themselves. You might also state that it's silent now (85–86). Devi is so vehemently opposing the idea that Bengal is normal and content after the Naxalite era. Instead, she thinks that things cannot improve until we personally commit to "everything of everyday life" and speak out against the repressions and oppressions of the weaker members of society. She therefore raises concerns about the society's conscience-keepers' apathy toward the young murders committed during the Naxalite movement in the 1960s and 1970s. She demands an explanation for their illegal silence over the heinous murders of thousands of young people. Why do they never make an effort to examine this delicate subject in depth? "Why did they show kindness to the rest of the world, but their perspective became hazy, unclear, and opaque closer to home?" (60).

With the release of Devi's *Hajar Churashir Maa* (Mother of 1084) in 1974—later translated into English—fiction on naxalism and Maoism became widely available in India-

Among the polyphony of discourses that leftist insurgency literature in India has attracted, one prominent discourse is that of the state, which lays bare the situation of civil strife in India. . . There are not many issues in South Asia that have attracted as much scholarly attention in the last decade as India's Naxalite or Maoist movement. At least 50 scholarly or political books, several novels . . . have been published since 2007.”<sup>1</sup> The insurgency has provided a subject for celluloid as well as literary representation over the years because of its appeal to popular imagination. (380-81)

When taking into account the entire range of cultural depictions of the insurgency in the nation, one fundamental observation is the absence of any particular classification or categorization about whether the protagonist in question is Maoist or Naxalite.

Similarly, Komal Prasad Phuyal discusses the horrors that West Bengal and its inhabitants have been subjected to. He acknowledges that the story of Devi's Draupadi and Sujata and Brati (emphasis added) is among the most remarkable windows into societies during times of historical transition in South Asian literature. Creative authors have often used the story and its protagonist to convey political views about society (171). Devi expands on civic society's demands for transparency, justice, and equity as well as the discussions about social reality that occur behind the scenes of double polarization.

In India's post-colonial era, Devi becomes one of the most prominent writers. She is the embodiment of Bengali culture in particular and Indian culture in general. She successfully attracts the attention of literary critics and scholars worldwide by writing in Bengali in a very clear and plain way. The marginalization of lower class individuals, particularly women, is emphasized throughout her novels and short tales.

Devi's *Mother of 1084* addresses the "power structure of institutions" in relation to political parties and government officials, highlighting how power functions in relation to capitalist landlords and the underprivileged segments of society. It is nearly hard for middle-class people to live better lives as corruption, poverty, and unemployment diminish their standard of living. Middle class society continues to deteriorate as a result of the state's discrimination of Naxalites. Even they are unable to obtain the necessities of life. Although Somu's family supposes their kid to improve their current pathetic circumstances, their hopes have not been met. As a result, in addition to losing a family member, they also hope that their health will improve.

The novel focuses on the complicated issues and painful experiences of a subaltern mother who awakens one day and rebels and resists the situation she is in. The novel also depicts the psychological and emotional collapse of a mother who learns from her son's death one day and discovers that his subaltern body names as corpse of 1084 in the police morgue. After going through an emotional crisis, the mother learns of her son's revolutionary spirit. She awakens from ignorance to knowledge gradually and progressively. Sujata is forced to leave her captivity by her impetuous need to get to know Brati and herself. She first visits Somu's home, which is situated in a colony full of run-down little homes with obvious symptoms of poverty: — "It was a ramshackle house, with moss on the roof, cracked walls patched up with cardboard" (35). Devi thus addresses the post-independence political and economic situation in this novel, when millions of people were compelled to relocate from East Bengal to West Bengal and lived in horrible poverty and destruction.

After facing injustice and inhumane circumstances, as well as marginalization, the Devi demonstrates how Indian women do not dare to display their bravery and

valor and face every circumstance with courage. Her husband treats her with constant contempt and humiliation. She is portrayed as submissive and subordinate and mute in a male-dominated culture. The novel portrays Sujata as a sensitive, critical, and passive at the beginning of the novel but as time goes on, she comes to transform a new self-body with having agency that empowers her to fight against patriarchy in the society and understands the true meaning of her son Brati's revolutionary action of Naxalite movement.

The Naxalite movement began in a small village in the West Bengal during 1970s and extended its influence to nearby States and raised questions on the Constitution of India. The echo of such event can be heard in Devi's novel *Mother of 1084*. "Set in the urban Bengal, the play realistically portrays the climatic phase of the annihilation of the Naxalites of the 1970s". Sarkar further explicates:

The 1970s remains an unforgotten decade in Bengal's memory because there was total break that happened in the communication between the people and a popularly elected government of a democratic nation, a situation that bred mutual suspicion and distrust. It took a decade, many lives and a change in political dispensation before a semblance of order could return to the state (255).

The historical turning point of West Bengal during 1970s remains deep rooted in the memory of every generation as there has been a break between the local folks and the elitist government with a growing distrust that meets the bloody struggle resulting into bodily sacrifice of the violence meted people.

Devi highlights the political situation of West Bengal and Bihar and her contribution through writing. Devi also talks about awareness of urban people and

their movement. G. P. Deshpande uses the following terms to describe Devi's contribution:

Mahasweta Devi, very eminent writer of fiction, has been active with tribal of the West Bengal and Bihar. In this play she looks at the urban Bhadrolok Bengal in the context of the rising people's movement and offers us a view of politics which is both moving and disturbing. (579)

Leftist and democratic ideas are therefore at odds during the 1970s, and the battle has an impact on the political and socioeconomic circumstances of various societal strata. Thus, *Mother of 1084's* theme analysis aims to draw concern of nature on "political" discourse through the exchange between middle-class society and capitalists, as well as the broader power dynamics of institutions. It is necessary to examine many definitions of political theater, as applying these definitions to the play's thematic analysis results in the play being classified as political.

On this specific day, Sujata returns to Somu's home due of her intense sadness over Brati. Sujata begins her trip slowly, moving from ignorance to knowledge and from innocence to experience. She briefly recognizes her own sorrow as being similar to Somu's mother's. "Time had restored the class distinctions with the passage of time" (62) follows the humanistic insight that "the sharp assault of grief had wiped away the class distinctions that normally separated them." Thus, the ongoing quest for self-awareness persists until an identity is ultimately established.

Every person must overcome several obstacles in the process of creating a new identity. Sujata faces similar challenges in her journey. Representatives of the ruling class, Dibyanath and Jyoti, attempt to remove Brati's name from the publication in an attempt to hide his revolutionary character. The actual history of oppression is so

distorted. During her quest for self-identity, Devi permits her main heroine Sujata to learn about the altered past in an apolitical and artistic manner.

Like Dalit writer Joseph Macwan, who in his famous novel *Angliyat: the Stepchild* makes his characters strong, courageous, heroic and willing to sacrifice their personal impulses and desires to uphold high moral values and thereby script a new image of Dalit identity by countering the stereotypical image of Dalit as being lazy, quarrelsome, drunkards, thieves, etc., usually enforced by upper-caste writers, Devi also makes her character progressive and bold to face the voice of patriarchy and her ultimate attacking voice is a big blow on the face of patriarchy : If... you...don't leave...this room... at once, I'll... leave...this house... and never come back again. (94)

Through one of her powerful works of fiction, *Mother of 1084*, which ends with the emergence of an independent, self-reliant woman, Devi redefines the whole idea of motherhood. The protagonist Sujata is awakened with the greater understanding of society and its evils through the concept of motherhood or mothering. This experience gives them the strength to fight for justice and to survive, even in the face of overwhelming odds. Even if they ultimately fail, they leave an impressive trail of a great battle they bravely fought to make their own space in this hostile world.

Thus, Sujata at last discovers her own voice—that of a gendered subaltern who has been subdued by the system for a long time. In *Mother of 1084*, the narratorial voice produces to Sujata's developing voice; this then surpasses the celebrators' voices. Devi has been successful in giving Sujata, a grieving mother, her own voice and allowing her to explore who she is.

In addition to being caught in the intricate links between class and nationalism, class and patriarchy, and patriarchy and nationalism, the female characters have little to no means of taking political action. According to Dhillon, “The tragedy of the exploitation of the landless peasants in India, and particularly West Bengal is an ageless one. Similar is the history of revolt, from the sanyasis and the indigo cultivators to the Naxalbari explosion” (74). Communist Party of India armed revolutionaries staged a victorious peasant insurrection in Naxalbari, north Bengal, in May 1967. They engaged in combat with the feudal class from 1967 until 1972. Even though Naxalism's actual power was limited to a few areas of the nation, its concept remained deeply ingrained in Indian culture.

The term 'hegemony' coined by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci refers to dominance by consent. Following a thorough investigation, Gramsci comes to the conclusion that hegemony aids the ruling class in advancing and controlling its objectives over those of the ruled. Hegemony is linked to the acceptance of colonial imposition through speech and notion.

In this context, Gareth Griffiths, Bill Ashcroft and Helen Tiffin state in *Key Concepts in Post- colonial Studies*:

Fundamentally hegemony is the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all. Domination is thus exerted not by force, nor even necessarily by active persuasion but by more subtle and inclusive power over the economy and over state apparatus such as education and media by which the ruling class' interest is presented as the common interests and thus comes to be taken for granted. (116)

The ability of the governing class to convince other classes that its objectives serve everyone's interests is known as hegemony. Dominance is thus achieved by a more

subtle and comprehensive control over the governmental machinery, including the media and educational system, as well as over the economy, rather than through direct persuasion.

Through physical transformation and the development of resistance, the body expresses its individuality and self-worth. When people are liberated from both internal and external influences, they experience an awakening of agency. Some individuals are blinded by prejudice and superstitions, some have phobias, some have highly illogical compulsions and drives, and some have ideological features that deprive them of their freedom. Being independent or autonomous demands inner freedom, which is not an easy feat. Garnett asserts "The idea that interior states can impair freedom in basically the same way as outward obstacles might, namely by prohibiting the agent from doing what one would otherwise be able to accomplish,"(4). There is no agency since there is no inner freedom, independence, or self-governance. Agency cannot exist when an individual lacks autonomy.

## Chapter II

### Lakshmibai, Sujata and Brati as Embodiment of Subaltern Agency

This section of the research examines how the indigenous people of Jhansi and West Bengal suffer due to imperial hegemony, elitist subjugation, gender and caste based discrimination and state atrocities in contemporary Indian societies during British colonial period and postcolonial period of 1960s to 1970s. This inflicted pain and trauma among the people. To deal with such dominance, they demonstrate a subversive act of resistance in the interim by exposing their sensitive bodies as a location of resistance. Devi's *The Queen of Jhansi* and *Mother of 1084* foreground the bodies of Lakshmibai, Sujata and Brati as the spaces of resistance.

By challenging the prevailing societal discourses, the concept of subalternity, subaltern consciousness and urge to resist exhibits growing awareness and enlightenment among the marginal groups and their subaltern agency as a site of resistance.

Resistance is the act of refusing to accept or comply with anything. In postcolonial/subaltern studies, resistance has a broader meaning that includes resisting or fighting against any threat to one's survival. To attain agency, Uday Chandra views the phrase "as negotiation rather than negation of social power" (563) in the context of the larger hegemonic framework. Further Chandra says as the study of "a wide range of contentious politics from foot-dragging through protests to social revolutions under a single analytic umbrella" (563) is made possible by resistance as negotiation. It adds resistance as it can be deduced that resistance is not a static condition either, but rather a dialectic process, a continuum, in which opposing forces and subjugating forces continue to actively participate in various degrees of pursuit of rights and socio-political situating. Feminine resistance may be observed speaking and taking part in

resistance throughout Devi's stories, such as *Mother of 1084* and *The Queen of Jhansi*. Sujata and Lakshmibai react to their circumstances and resist in different ways. Due to the incommensurability of subjective experiences, these circumstances and reactions cannot be defined.

Lakshmibai, the historical persona of Mahaswata Devi's *The Queen of Jhansi* and Sujata and Brati the persona of *Mother of 1084* pass through a phase of subaltern consciousness. In the stage of awakening of consciousness, she exhibits the complexity and ambiguity of either resisting colonial power authority or being a slave and submitting to colonial power. In the stage of arousal of agency, she presents the protagonist character Rani, who separates herself from her previous social status. In the phase of resistance she rebels and signifies the return to a new, relatively stable, and clearly defined status in the present society.

Devi illustrates how an awakened agency serves as a center of resistance in *Mother of 1084*. Brati's mother, Sujata, is deeply shocked and saddened by her son's passing. This causes her to rebel against the patriarchal bourgeois society and political system that devalues human life, especially in light of the Naxalite uprising in India in the 1960s and 1970s, in which her son and other students and intellectuals lost their lives fighting for social justice and equality.

They rebuild themselves through such subaltern consciousness experiences. By positioning subaltern agency as a focus of resistance, they transform into dominating "selves" and create a counter-hegemonic narrative. Devi rewrites the history of exploitation and agitation attempts to use agency to fight. The consciousness of each of the aforementioned novels' protagonists is further revealed by this study. It closely examines the painful experiences of the subaltern characters' and minds in connection to society. They suffer on a social, political, and economic

level. It forces individuals to participate in a ritual of resistance. They refuse to concede. Instead, they dare to rebuild themselves as self-aware, enlightened beings. They attempt to overthrow the hierarchy based on societal norms that force them to endure painful events throughout the transitional period, a ritual of political self-transformation into agency to fight against social injustice, despite their suffering. In the end, they are successful in doing so. Through acts of transformation and redefining their lives in a new community, the oppressed characters turn their subaltern consciousness into places of resistance.

Devi does not see the 1857 Jhansi's revolution not merely as a singular incident. The Faraiji rebellion in Barasat, the Faridpur rebellion of 1847 led by Dudu Mian, the Mopla uprisings of 1849, 1851-52, and 1855, the Santhat Revolt of 1855-56, the Kol Revolt of 1831-24, the rebellion at Bareilly in 1816, and several uprisings in Chhotanagpur and Palamau by the tribal people living in these areas are among the rebellions she links to that are carried out by "ordinary agricultural people" (93). Long-term conflict with Hugh Ross gradually made Jhansi weaker. The palace is eventually burned down. Every Jhansi person battles for their territory. Blood makes the "ground slick" (208). To demonstrate their imperial strength, the English troops committed horrible crimes that were documented. For two years, human killing persisted and violence turned into a show. They enjoyed and documented their act of barbarism out of racial hate. Along with her young son, the queen of Jhansi fled the court to join the uprising. She died as a result of the wounds she sustained during the protracted conflict with the English. She has attained immortality as her name and notoriety endure in folktales, songs, and stories that are sung during rituals or at work:

That Queen, so very great was she,  
Said she would never let go of Jhansi.

She fought for the sake of her soldiers,

And took bullets herself.

As long as water in India flows

The Queen of Jhansi will live. (69)

By emphasizing people's perceptions of history, Devi re-interprets and re-constructs the historical queen of Jhansi in the biography named *The Queen of Jhansi*. The way that people view their beloved monarch is also included in her narrative. "Rani margay nahouni, abhi to Jindahou" is one of their songs and their faith that embodies her. (15)

Sujata experiences subaltern consciousness as she suffers her son's execution for a virtuous purpose. She gains an agency to combat against her rivals likely- social, cultural, economic and gender exploitations. Devi affirms:

The cry set oblivion itself, the present and the future atremble, reeling under its impact. All the contentment in every happy existence cracked to pieces. It was a cry that smelt of blood, protest, grief. Then everything went dark.

Sujata's body fell to the ground. Dibyanath screamed: The appendix has burst.  
(127)

Sujata shows her aggression against the bitter truth that Brati is denied an identity, rather is given a numeral recognition of corpse 1084. She assimilates this denial as the denial of entire community and fight against state atrocities. She sacrifices her family, happiness and puts her future at the threat. She is shot and is covered in blood. She feels dark before her eyes and falls on the ground. Her husband Dibyanath realizes the end of another subaltern cadet.

Devi depicts a middle-class mother in *Mother of 1084* who transforms after the death of her son Brati by coming to understand his purpose against the perils of

exploitative society. Devi (2011) explores and emphasizes Sujata's challenges and character prior to Brati's passing in her book, writing, "Nobody cared to understand why Sujata wants to work, why she had made all the inquiries and found a job for herself... She was subservient, silent, faithful, and without an existence of her own" (9). But after losing her kid, she doesn't care about the traditional boundaries that society and her family impose on middle-class women.

In Devi's (2010) novel, Samik Bandyopadhyay notes that "if Devi is concerned, that would be the one aspect that could rationalize the movement and Brati's death to a fairly affluent, sensitive, and enlightened mother, who had read in her son's special concern for her daily humiliation as a woman and her quiet, determined struggle for self-assertion and independence, which ironically gathers force and momentum from Brati's death" (xv). Dibyanath exerts patriarchal control on her, and she becomes resolved to avoid it. Even the lack of concern she shows at home following Brati's passing indicates the start of her hostility toward the whole family. Despite her husband's insistence that she quit her job, Sujata continues to work. Devi (2011) writes, Sujata's second act of defiance was her refusal to quit her employment. At the age of two, Brati committed her first act of rebellion. This was her seventh refusal to become a mother (47). As Gayatri Devi correctly notes, Sujata and Nandini in this book develop as natural intellectuals as they attempt to comprehend the intricacies and conundrums that define subaltern decolonization. Sujata's parenting and her responsibilities as a wife juxtapose with these sociopolitical complications in Gayatri Devi's portrayal. In many patriarchal societies, she believes that "motherhood is the most ethically persuasive mode of subordination" (15). After waking via her subaltern agency, Sujata changes from a true mother to a political activist.

Sujata is compelled to learn more about Brati's life's purpose and driving forces since he and his mother both believe in the importance of genuine connections. The death of her son forces her to examine the faces of human existence that link politics to the experiences of common people. She constantly asking herself the following questions regarding her son:

As she stood holding on to the bedstead, Sujata screwed up her eyes as she tried to think out how, maybe even indirectly, she had been responsible for the killing of Brati. Was there anything in the way she had brought up Brati that had made him into number 1084 in the decade that headed towards liberation?

(14)

Sujata was somewhat taken aback by Brati's participation in the Naxalite movement. He was still a young kid to her. She was unaware that her young kid had developed into a matured man with strong opinions and independent mind. Because of his affiliation with the Naxalite movement, Brati was able to get a deeper understanding of the many types of exploitation, oppression, and repression. He tried to give his mother whatever comfort he could because he was fully aware that she was being neglected at home. Additionally, he might have witnessed the opulent and extinct family ties that fueled his animosity. This was one of the factors that led him to join the Naxalite movement as he was at a loss for how to protect himself and his mother from all of the systemic injustices in our society.

When Sujata learns about the harsh reality of the society her son has been living in, she grows even more resentful. Her problem is made worse by her powerlessness to alter the cruel mechanisms that prevent the deaths of other people's sons and the resulting unrest. She is aware that her kid did not pass away like a coward. She is also aware that her son loved her without conditions, felt her suffering,

and wished to protect her from the terrible facts of life without even telling her. She feels empowered to fight against all forms of oppression of disadvantaged groups in society since she is the mother of a boy who is so sensitive and courageous. She now resists the exploitative, hypocritical ways of her husband and denies accepting her inappropriate orders. The mother-son relationship becomes stronger after death than during life. In the course of the novel, the death of 1084 becomes a symbol of countless nameless young men and women who are killed by government machineries due to their alleged involvement in revolutionary activities during Naxalbari movement. Sujata too does not remain the mother of only Brati, but becomes the mother of all those men and women who sacrifice their lives for better human life on earth.

Brati's passing awakens to her mother from the delusion of a sophisticated, upper-class existence. She now wants to find out what happened to her son and the other members of her comrades the night they were brutally murdered. She explores uncharted areas of her son's life via reading his books, notes, trips to his friends' homes, and conversations with Brati's girlfriend Nandini. Sujata is assisted in meeting the soul of her deceased son by Nandini, a vibrant and active member of the movement. Sujata discovers a revolutionary in Nandini who rises above her own issues to become an unyielding opponent of the crimes committed by the police and other government apparatuses.

As part of an epiphanic movement, Sujata is urging people to speak out against the horrific deaths of young people by the untrustworthy government apparatus and against the injustices done to the general populace. The writing primarily accomplishes two goals: first, it depicts the remarkably unusual transformation of a mother from modest, considerate, and devoted to furious, self-

assured, and nearly rebellious, now demanding justice for all. As she investigates the reasons behind her son's dedication to revolutionary causes, she learns about the exploitative social structures and discovers that, due to the dominant social and cultural norms in modern urban Bengali society, she is herself alienated as a mother and a housewife. Second, although though she herself came from an educated, wealthy, upper-class family, it portrays her main concern, which is the long-standing oppression and exploitation of tribal people and landless peasants in rural regions. At the expense of many innocent and revolutionary lives, the story concludes with a glimmer of hope for a brighter tomorrow amid oppression and agony, violence and vices, suppression and suffocation, and more.

Lakshmibai realizes a need of Indian home rule liberating the nation from the grasp of British Raj. She unusually grows a resisting agency within the self and imparts this among her people. She becomes successful to arouse agency among her downtrodden people due to which they stand in the warfronts against the British. Regarding this Devi asserts, “The whole regiment stood still as painted figure. Thus, began of 1857 struggle for independence which shook the foundation of the British Empire for two whole years” (105). The people of Jhansi fight against British Empire for their own identity and cultural independence.

Lakshmibai worries about the securities of the nation as the Kingdom of Jhansi lacks troops, artilleries and courage in the beginning. But she succeeds in filling her people with valor, and enthusiasm in the face of adversity. Devi contends:

Jhansi was utterly unprotected. The English 65 in number counting the women and children, and were unarmed, too. The sepoys were 600 in number and armed. Everywhere anti-English feeling were rife . . . The queen herself had no soldiers apart from the 40 private palace guards. She sends 40 guards to the

fort to keep watch over the English. She had no military power, yet under such condition she did not lapse from what she deemed to be her duty, despite knowing that she could be in peril from the sepoys if they caught her helping the English. (109)

Despite of having very weak number of security, Lakshmibai has awakened power to have agency on her to fight against military mighty British Empire. Lakshmibai is a leader of freedom fighter, although she is Indian widow historical character in colonial period of Uttar Pradesh. She has not more number of soldiers and does not have very diplomatic relationship with neighboring but her agency helps to develop new self on her to challenge against British Raj.

The last combat took place on June 19, 1858. The Rani was riding a horse when he was struck by gunshots and went down. The Rani reportedly lives for around twenty minutes. As soon as she passes away, plans were made to burn her body. The Rani, according to General Rose, is brought off the field and given a funeral pile, which she ignites on her own, rather than being murdered on the field. The Rani has been briefly discussed by Bose and Jalal in their book *Modern South Asia*. She leads her people in a bloody battle against the British and perishes on horseback when the Rani's kingdom, Jhansi, is conquered in 1853 (45). They have also detailed other revolutionaries immediately following a brief account of the Rani's actions.

The following quote from S.N. Sinha encapsulates the role that the Lakshmibai has been assigned in Indian society:

Rani Lakshmi Bai's place in history is secure. She was the embodiment of freedom. She showed her countrymen the path of liberty. Although revolt failed, and her great ambition of liberating her great motherland from foreign bondage could not be fulfilled, yet her brave action and deeds have made her

name immortal. By sacrificing her life on the altar of the country's freedom, she has become a martyr. (52)

Lakshmibai follows the procedure that transforms a historical person into a myth or legend. The will power of liberation and on Lakshmibai is the courage for Jhansi people. That is why people of Jhansi are always ambitious for the liberation of their Jhansi Kingdom. After their death, a martyr will inspire poetry and music, and the legend will then be incorporated into plays, sculptures, artwork, and films. If a tale becomes ingrained in folk and popular culture, it will eventually become a part of the nation's collective memory.

*Mother of 1084* is the novel of Naxalite movement against social injustice and inequality. Raju Praghi writes, "Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084* is set in the background of the Naxalite movement in West Bengal focusing on the economic and social exploitation in rural as well as urban areas" (63). The crux of the narrative lies on an anarchist social structure where the people are confined in a claustrophobic environment. Landless people from Naxalbari begin their leftist movement against elite landlord. There is gap and discrimination between landless and landlord people.

The main cause of Charu Mazumdar's ideological stances, including the annihilation line, was the chaos associated with the Naxalite movement. "The assassination of class enemies involved the use of covert squads to assassinate specific police officers, spies, and landowners. It was recognized not just as a tactic but also as the start of guerilla warfare and a crucial strategic line (9). Mazumdar supports clearing the class enemies and forming small combat groups. The movement's trajectory was permanently altered when this strategy of brutal murder and insanity spread. The narrow line between terrorism and revolution is now blurred, and according to the state's rhetoric, the Naxalites are no different from terrorists

going forward. Small armed gangs of teenage Communists start attacking the police and other top government officials in nearly every Bengali province and district (11). Individuals target include judges, presidents of educational institutions, businesspeople, and political party leaders. The people disregard everything associated with the bourgeoisie, including lifestyle and education, as a result of Mazumdar's resonant voices. Devi's narratives serve as an example of the lighter shade of red by using the protagonist's travels to symbolize Naxalism.

Sujata delves further into Brati's life's purpose and motivations. The death of her son forces her to examine the facets of human existence that link politics to the experiences of common people. She knows the bitter reality of gap and discrimination between elite and poor people. After being enlightens, she has courage to revolt against patriarchal bourgeois West Bengali society. She continues to ask herself several concerns concerning her son:

I was asleep as if nothing has happened. Why didn't I feel anything when he was dying? Did I know my son the way he was? ...What made him choose a path which has never related our family? (64)

For Sujata, Brati's participation in the Naxalite movement is somewhat of a shock. He still seems like a little child to her. Her little kid has developed into a man with strong opinions and independent intellect, but she is unaware of this. Because of his involvement with the Naxalite movement, Brati is able to see the different ways that oppression, exploitation, and repression occur one after another. He makes every effort to console his mother because he was fully aware that she was being ignored at home. Additionally, he might have witnessed the opulent and extinct family ties that fueled his animosity. This is one of the factors that led him to join the Naxalite

movement as he is at a loss for how to protect himself and his mother from all of the systemic injustices in our society.

Devi shows the patriarchal voice in her novel, *Mother of 1084*. Brati is three years old, Sujata is going through the most difficult financial crisis. Her husband has sent her to work in a bank at the time, but she is fired as soon as the crisis ended.

Dibyanath told Sujata, "You needn't work any longer. Why don't you give up the job and look after the household? Mother is dead" (46). Sujata does not accept to quit her job, but her husband does not want to hear her.

The Naxalite movement seizes the life of the vulnerable peasant who fights for the liberation of the people of his community. His sacrifice is recognized in term of numeral entity- corpse number 1084, hence the novel is entitled *Mother of 1084*. Devi chronicles the incident as:

Brati whose name appeared after one thousand and eighty-three names in the list of the dead in what was known as the Decade for Liberation. But if you collected the names of the dead in the first two years and a half of the decade, would you come across Brati's name? If you relied on the newspapers for your source of information, you would never know about Brati. Brati's father had seen to it that his name did not appear in the newspapers. (10)

Resistance is achieved through subaltern consciousness effacing the self into death. Autonomy, identity and history can be created through a bloody struggle. The tribal deploy their consciousness and the family happiness in forefront in the course of insurgency.

Brati has written slogans on posters. Sujata had noticed the slogan texts when the cops raided his room. Each one was written by Brati:

The Prison's our University.

From the Barrel of the Gun . . .

This Decade will be the Decade of Liberation.

Hate the Moderate, mark him, destroy him,

. . . is turning into Yenani today. (18)

She has heard that before writing their slogans on the walls, Brati and his buddies first scribbled them down on paper. In the darkness of the night, they scrawled on the walls. This shows the resentment of local people against government, feudal order, prejudice and exploitation imposed upon them.

Devi becomes furious with the execution of Brati and his friends who die for the sake of the social wellbeing and judicious order. She challenges the authorities whether they have ended the passion, zeal, and the feeling of patriotism from the heart of the subaltern Naxalites. She contends further:

The question that followed his death was whether by killing him the authorities had been able to destroy the burning faith in faithlessness that Brati and his compatriots had stood for. Brati was dead. His friends were dead. But did that mean the end of the cause? The question remained: Was Brati's death futile? Did his death stand for a massive NO? (20)

Sujata and Brati are the epitome of resistance through change. They are in the state of consciousness where they struggle with the dream of new society. The death of Sujata's son transforms awakened new self on her mother. Devi here acknowledges that they struggle to discover their identity where all her physiological experiences enable them realize an intellectual change in development of her new identity.

Devi illustrates the dire situation, gender discrimination, and ongoing subjection of the Santhals, often known as subalterns, during the 1976–1970s. She portrays the sociopolitical lives of marginalized Adivasis and peasants, including their

participation, hardships, and triumphs in intellectual, political, social, and other domains. In order to provide a larger space for the newly revealed self, the abused or traumatized subaltern body actively undergoes subversion in addition to being passive. Devi's suggested novels, *Mother of 1084* and *Queen of Jhansi*, depict the struggles of marginalized or subaltern individuals and their awakening of agency to oppose the dominance of imperial hegemony and elitist superiority. In a racist environment, the protagonists' conscious go through several stages before finally finding their new identity and dignity.

The subaltern body and agency serve as a medium to create equilibrium in the society. An awakened agency challenges and overthrows the prevailing socio-political discourses and institutions through an act of resistance. In relation to the unique identity formation, Devi depicts the experiences of her characters passing through stages of resistance. Devi illustrates the effects of instilling such ideals in the subaltern body, focusing on tribal people's attempts to dominate space. She also discusses how people of West Bengal and Jhansi might reclaim their agency and overcome the bonds of servitude.

Devi's protagonist Lakshmibai has encouraged her helping hands with her own pain and difficulties. She has the patriotic feeling towards her own land and reminds the duty of guard to the nation in front of rivals. She further says:

She assembled her chiefs and sepoys. Her eyes were red and tearful as she addressed them, saying, 'peshwa's soldiers . . .' she cleared her voice and said loudly, 'My brave sepoys, chiefs and friends – we did not start this struggle in the hope from the Peshwa's soldiers. So far we have guarded Jhansi with our own might. Today we must fight the enemy in the same spirit. (202)

Lakshmibai with her red and tearful eyes wish the soldiers to go ahead in the war to fight against enemies. She herself has the pain and trouble and goes ahead with such painful situation. She further appreciates sepoys with mighty spirit to guard Jhansi at that movement. She has new enlightenment stage of consciousness and that supports for agency on her and others.

Devi's characters use their vulnerable bodies to stand up to societal injustice and fight for their identities. Resistance is a subversive act against all forms of exploitation, discrimination, prejudice, and subjection. It's a process that involves both rejection from below and dominance from above. Without agency, resistance is impossible. Michael Garnett links enlightenment, which occurs when consciousness are overcome, to agency and inner freedom. The ability to act in a certain setting where tension arises while generating it is known as agency. Furthermore, agency is not an individual endeavor but rather a result of historical and communal processes. Garnett explains that "Losses of inner freedom are not explicable in terms of failures of deep agency, that is, in terms of motivation by alien desires," (3). Agency is intertwined with inner freedom. To seek inner freedom is to seek true or profound agency. Overcoming fear and both internal and external limitations is necessary to develop agency and become an independent person. Enlightenment is the result of inner freedom, yet people are not free because of external and internal forces.

An act of subversion against all forms of exploitation, discrimination, prejudice, and oppression is called resistance. This method combines rejection from below with dominance from above. In the absence of agency, resistance is impossible. According to Michael Garnett, enlightenment, which occurs when limitations are overcome, is associated with agency and inner freedom. Agency is the ability of a doer or agent to act in a certain situation where tension arises while generating it.

Furthermore, rather than being the result of individual effort, agency is a historical and communal phenomenon. As explained by Garnett, "Losses of inner freedom are not explicable in terms of failures of deep agency, that is, in terms of motivation by alien desires" (3)... Agency and inner freedom go hand in hand. The pursuit of inner freedom is a quest for true or profound agency. In order to develop agency, one must overcome fear and both internal and external limitations in order to become an independent self. Internal freedom results in enlightenment, yet external influences also contribute to people's lack of freedom.

Sujata persistently re-enacts the trauma of encountering Brati's corpse in the morgue, with all its stark clarity and urgency, as though time and space were being summoned anew. The blue edges of the wounds, the burnt and cracked skin, and the chocolate-colored blood are memories that shone brightly, hard, and luminescent like a diamond knife (11). The maternal body of Sujata is waiting to decipher this knowledge encoded in memories. She searches for a reason to preserve the memories of her son's loss by questioning why he and his associates sought death and what greater significance their murder held. Narrator's remark, ingeniously designed to resemble conveyed a manual for instruction. This structure highlights that only a mother has the power and authority to read and interpret what others cannot. As a mother, she can confront what others do not have the courage to: "Who is Sujata? Just a mother. Who are the hundreds and thousands whose hearts are still being eaten away by questions? "Only mothers" (51), comments the narrator.

Rajeshwari Dasgupta emphasizes the traits of the revolutionary who emerged under the Communist Party of India-Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML) party's leadership:

The features of the new revolutionary personality included but were not limited to personal qualities such as self-sacrifice, the ability to endure

suffering and hardships, bravery in face of adversity, self-abnegation and the ability to practice self-control. The student and youth as the revolutionary exemplar resembled soldiers who were supposed to exhibit unquestioning obedience to Naxalite party directives as well as to the teachings of Mao Zedong. An important step in the youth's realization of their revolutionary consciousness was their giving up of all comforts and going to villages to integrate themselves with the peasantry. Indeed, integration with workers and peasantry was held as an important marker of the new revolutionary personality. Finally belief in armed struggle and a violent resistance to the status quo was the defining characteristic of the Naxalite youth's revolutionary personality. (8)

Some of the new members of the CPI-ML—especially educated, upper-class youth—made the group's image into a "party of martyrs." They were so committed to radicalism that they were willing to "leave their homes and give up their careers in a bid to declass them and become professional revolutionaries, voluntarily giving up the comforts of their old environment and throwing away the tempting and useful rewards that came with social positions in a bourgeois world.

Dasgupta also highlights the numerous examples of peasant and urban radical cooperation, writing: "Villagers frequently gave these young Naxalite cadres food, lodging, and protection in return" (12). Cadres get affection, cooperation and motivation from the local people to continue the rebellion. It was the need of the society to overthrow such a decayed ruling system. Dasgupta further elaborates - in one case, the people from neighboring villages came prepared with bows, arrows, and clubs to defend the young Naxalites after learning that the police would be retaliating against them. In order to assimilate into the life of the peasants, the Naxalite

youngsters would also work alongside them as agricultural laborers (12). The entire marginalized community rebelled against the armed state authorities. It was not only a personal war of any Royal family, rather it was a war of independence of an entire community of backward folks.

Charu Mazumdar is right when he says in 1967 that "hundreds of Naxalbaris are smouldering in India . . . Naxalbari has not died and will never die" (12). Despite the fact that the 1967 uprising was put down by the middle of the 1970s, its twin legacy of unbridled idealism and unrestrained violence (on both sides) continues to inspire an unbroken trajectory of radical political activism well into the present. However, in addition to the legacy of ongoing political action, the movement also brought to a brief but unique tradition of "Naxalite fiction" in Indian literature, which is the main focus of this study. Given that vernacular literatures circulated within a tightly local orbit and are rarely documented in a coherent manner, it is challenging to track the exploits of such fiction in any conclusive way. In a sense, Naxalism was an intellectual movement, but Maoism has evolved into a movement that includes the nation's tribal and adivasi populations. Under the current conditions, the Maoists in India have established a parallel government that appeals to the oppressed because the apparatus of law and order is solely obedient to the hegemonic forces that it is composed of.

Devi speaks up so fearlessly that she presents her protagonist in her own revolting image. Her protagonist of *The Queen of Jhansi*, Lakshmibai shows unusual form resistance against the British. She arouses agency among her people, soldiers and even children and aged people to rebel against British. The people of Jhansi keep the Queen in historical documents, textbooks, literary artifacts and their perpetual

memory as an intriguing catalyst to enlighten and empower them further. Devi recites the sentiment of common folks in the following ways:

That Queen, so very great was she,  
Said she would never let go of Jhansi.  
She fought for the sake of her soldiers,  
And took the bullets herself.  
As long as water in India flow,  
The Queen of Jhansi will live. (69)

This excerpt show that the Queen, while alive ingrained the revere for her and fighting spirit among her people which will never fade up. Even after the death of the Queen the rebellion continues.

In a similar vein, Spivak elaborates on the definition of "subaltern" and examines the history of oppressed women. Women are more marginalized than males in India. In Spivak's argument, the subaltern "have no history, are mute, and are even more thoroughly shrouded in shadow because they are female" (13). Spivak examines gender difficulties, especially those that Indian women encountered during colonial times, in order to solve the problem of subalternity. She sheds insight on the situation of Indian women by analyzing Sati customs during British colonial rule.

The spokesperson for the subaltern, Spivak claims, serves as both their master and their lifeblood. "The little peasants' proprietors cannot represent themselves, they must be represented," she says (71). In her struggle to give the working class a voice, Spivak opposes intellectual elites who merely offer their elitist interpretation of the subaltern voice. In a discourse, subalterns are positioned as passive subjects rather than active participants. According to Spivak, academicians should look at how their intellectual dispositions impact their capacity to fairly portray the disadvantaged. She

makes the subaltern's inability to speak out quite clear. The underclass is always impacted by the bias of the thinkers at the top.

The novel of Devi presents an alternative discourse on female empowerment that demands women's historical status. This counter-discussion has its origins in Devi's interventionist, emancipatory politics, and the materials for this rendition of the Rani's tale are typically found in popular yearning. For, as Devi declares, "I have always tried to explore people's version of history ... In all my writings I have tried to present the subaltern point of view" (275). As Spivak reminds us, the subaltern perspective tells the story from the viewpoint of those who are not on the fringes of society, such as the destitute and the outcasts. There is a strong desire to include people who have historically been left out of history throughout Devi's writing. She is particularly interested in the predicament of indigenous people, particularly tribal women. Since writing itself serves as a kind of activism in Devi's fiction, her works about the tribal plight are inextricably linked to her activism. However, as Spivak notes in her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" there are many levels of subalternity, and the disadvantaged woman frequently holds the lowest place in this hierarchy of exclusions. For example, the impoverished tribal lady experiences three forms of oppression due to her gender, class, and race. Devi is especially interested in this severe degree of subalternity, when gender serves as the most important and definitive indicator of discrimination. Ironically, gender frequently serves as an enabling aspect as well, playing a key role in the self-assertion and resistance that Devi's protagonists frequently demonstrate their capacity for.

Mahaswata Devi presents the plight of her marginalized and socially oppressed people through her narratives. She depicts the resistance move of Queen Lakshmibai and her followers through these striking lines:

Lakshmibai from behind the screen uttered four definitive words with control articulation. Her voice was familiar to Ellis, but completely unfamiliar in its strength tinged with the deep sadness. ‘Meri Jhansi doongy nahin; ‘I will not give up my Jhansi’. It was historic utterance, because it was the first and only protest during the a time when rulers of Indian kingdom, which were gradually disappearing into the terrible, ever-widening maw of the English all over the subcontinent, never offered any resistance at all. (68)

Lakshmibai offers definition of resistance through her own awakened agency to her people in the time when tiny kingdoms of India were dissolving and being annexed. British Raj spread its dominance all over the subcontinent where people accepted that hegemony from below. But the Queen and people of Jhansi showed their resistance against the British Raj for the first time giving the new generation and insight to set fire of rebellion in order to restore the Indian home rule.

In Devi's tale, the ravished Lakshmibai is transformed into a terrifying embodiment of female retaliation. Furthermore, the people in Mahasweta's other past, who said that "The Queen hasn't died! Baisaheba jarur jinda houni" (15), continue to imagine the vanquished queen. According to Mahasweta Devi, this is the real meaning of the Rani of Jhansi's life—an iconic figure who embodied the spirit of the people during a pivotal period in the history of the country,

Rani Lakshmibai was an expression of what India felt in those times. One truth rises above the countless mistakes, flaws, weaknesses and defeats of those days, and that is of the first conscious rebellion taking place against the stranglehold of foreign rule... As long as people insist, 'Rani margay na houni'—'The Queen did not die'—the Queen will be alive. (16)

The rebellious spirit of the people denies the fall of the Queen even after a long span of time. She is alive in the heart and memories of her folks. The truth that the Queen fights against British Raj and their stranglehold of the foreign rule despite timely failures do not remain so long. A praiseworthy action to defend the nation and sovereignty gets worshipped forever. Lakshmibai remains as a political icon for the Indians forever.

Rani preaches to her soldiers and people with an indomitable spirit to resist the British hegemony. She fills her people with courage and valor. Devi asserts:

During last period of battle the Queen had lost numerous soldiers and had suffered very heavy damaged. But until now her enthusiasm and will to fight had indomitable. Today she was haunted by an unknown apprehension. She rode that night to each of the bases and towers of the city to inspect everything personally and to cheer up her soldiers. She rewarded them with money and jewellery and inspired them anew with her words of hope and assurance. (196)

Despite the heavy damage that Jhansi suffered, Lakshmibai keeps on fighting against the British along with her tiny military. She travels each and every bases, towers and forts to inspect personally, and to cheer up soldiers rewarding them with wealth. This act of the Queen gave assurance and courage to her soldiers.

Conversely, the realism of *Mother of 1084* is notable—both physical and psychological. This realism manifests not only in a precise depiction of the everyday world as it exists materially, but also in the objectification of Sujata's emotional states: her experiences of loneliness, alienation, and anger. Sujata, Brati, Somu's mother, Nadini, and all other characters exist within a space and time that are fictional yet clearly defined. However, Sujata also exists as a fundamental motherly self within an inner world of Brati's memories, mapped out in an alternative asocial space and

ahistorical time. The space is asocial because it is purely cognitive, free from values and opinions. This is the reason Sujata is perceived as moving back and forth through chronological time and arranging a sequence of events according to historical time markers such as dates, in order to identify them as events that would otherwise remain unrecorded. By doing this, she comes to see them from a certain viewpoint, grasps their moral and political ramifications, and ends up acquiring knowledge about herself. To summarize, she preserves the memories.

Sujata's consciousness gradually awakens from the "Morning" to the "Evening," allowing her to restructure her disjointed and disorderly existence in pursuit of a unified identity. Her long-suppressed personal loss or sorrow is gradually released into the ever-widening, eddying spirals of communal framework of betrayal, shame, and pain every time she visits either her own past or that of Brati, Somu's mother, or Nandini. Sujata's transformation from a weak-willed, hopelessly dependent, and non-assertive moral coward to a morally assertive, politically enlightened, and socially defiant person is made possible by any number of factors, whether it is becoming acutely aware of other people's suffering or her own, or simply developing a more enlightened understanding of the circumstances that leads Brati to make the decisions he does. And this is the goal and ideal state of our fair sex, as expressed by our activist author. Only women, who are politically informed, socially combative, and morally aggressive, in her opinion, deserve and can be better moms. Because of this, Sujata, Brati's mother, discovers after her daylong search that "She might have been able to change the course of events even if she had the courage to confront Dibyanath and reveal the truth while Brati was still alive." (40) Therefore, Mahasweta believes that a person should already possess the political and moral sensibility that Sujata acquires during the daylong awakening. She views political

naiveté as a social crime and sin on par with political apathy or unethical political decision-making. Sujata asks herself, in order to pose a rhetorical inquiry. "Was this why Brati left home that evening in his blue shirt—so that Sujata would recognize the defaults in her nature and in her mind?" (76). For this reason, Nandini informs Sujata, in reference to Brati's passing. "I know you people never know anything... but now you know that it's wrong to carry on presuming that one needn't know why and how such things happen." (72)

Historians may view Naxalites as vicious terrorists, but Devi focuses on the young intellectuals who were pulled to the cause by their idealism as well as the peasants and tribal people who were drawn to it because they had been oppressed for generations. This is the background behind Devi's novels. *Mother of 1084* portrays the youthful, idealistic student intellectual Brati Chatterjee is betrayed to the police by a mole in his revolutionary organization. Only Corpse Number 1084 is used to identify Brati. Unwilling to be linked to the revolutionaries, his father pays the police and keeps the death a secret from the press; the novel tells the tale of his mother reconstructing Brati's previous life, his real existence.

Devi's self-imposed duty was to document modern history. Although the five pieces address diverse topics, *Mother of 1084* is similar in both drive and style. Uma Parameswaran further highlights the literary techniques as a vibrant document to revive Indian history. She adds:

The novel *Mother of 1084* is the original prose version of the play. Fiction lends itself to development of inner action and characterization. There is also more poetry in the novel, and it lilts with the rhythm of the original: Time was stronger than grief. Grief is the bank; Time the flowing river, heaping earth

upon earth on grief. . . . Someday maybe Sujata would mention Brati casually to anybody and everybody, and shed tears openly. (458)

The drama was first published in prose in the novel *Mother of 1084*. Characterization and the development of inner action are encouraged in fiction. The novel also has additional poetry, which blends in with the original's cadence: "Time was stronger than grief." Time is the river that flows, grief is the bank, and grief is piled on top of sadness. Perhaps one day Sujata will openly cry and nonchalantly bring up Brati with everyone.

Sujata corporeally replays the memories of the ruthless suppression of the Naxalite movement from 1971 to 1974 to achieve a moral understanding, while her husband Dibyanath has kept them suppressed all along. Her affluent family has also kept a cautious silence regarding this issue. The civil society and the state have also supported and maintained this calculated amnesia. Brati's name was never mentioned in the newspapers among the youth who were killed. The police oversaw the quick and secretive cremation of their bodies. With mordant irony, the narrator observes, "Exactly a year and three months later, the writers, artists, and intellectuals of Calcutta turned West Bengal upside down out of sympathy with and support for the cause of Bangladesh" (50), but surely the youth were worthless and their self-sacrifice insignificant. The narrator continues with the addition:

If they had been important, wouldn't the artists, writers and intellectuals of this legendary city of processions have picked up their pens? ... Sujata's vision was surely wrong. Surely, the poets, writers, intellectuals and artists are honoured members of society, recognized spokesmen for the country at large. (50-51)

Brati is never named in official records; as a disembodied and abstract figure, he is reduced to just the number 1084. He has never existed, so to speak. Mahasweta Devi illustrates the way society colludes with the state to keep a guarded silence regarding the fate of Brati and others like him. She indicates to us that the claims of civil society regarding transparency, equity, and justice are unfounded. Through the act of her remembrance, Sujata reveals that public culture is manipulative and closely aligned with the oppressive bio-politics of the state in denying the presence of intractable elements. In response to this politics of invisibility and amnesia, different strategies of radical memory through the mother's body are employed.

## Chapter III

### Rewriting Resistance through Devi

This study investigates the ways in which the subaltern consciousness among marginal groups in Jhansi during colonial times and Santhal tribals in West Bengal from the 1960s to the 1970s serve as sites of resistance against various forms of subordination imposed by dominant elite culture and colonial hegemony, as depicted in Devi's works *The Queen of Jhansi* and *Mother of 1084*. In the current setting, the topic of the subaltern bodies and their resistance has gained significant attention from researchers. According to Antonio Gramsci, a subaltern is any "low rank" individual or group in a society that is subject to the hegemonic dominance of a ruling elite class that denies them the fundamental right to influence local history and culture as engaged citizens of the same country (66). The group of persons at the bottom or on the outside of society is referred to as "subalterns." They have little chances in a variety of fields. In addition, they are the ones who have few rights and no independent agency. The individuals in the center disregard and disregard them. Subalterns are non-canonical, underrepresented, and undereducated groups in society. Despite being at the bottom of society, they have the ability to rebel against the majority.

The subaltern consciousness sets fire among the marginal groups and arouse agency to counterfeit and resist the subjugation. In the process of awakening agency among the subaltern groups they undergo certain experiences that enlighten them to preserve equilibrium between old and new social order as part of their search for social justice. The awakened agency creates a new identity that challenges the prevailing ideology that oppresses specific social classes. The characters' physical and

intellectual transformations are noteworthy because they create a new ideological self that acts as a catalyst for resistance.

The emergence of post-colonial feminist critic Spivak has made the word "subaltern" increasingly controversial. In her article "Can the Subaltern Speak," Spivak draws attention to the issues facing subalterns in light of recent historical events. She concentrates on how capitalism politics ignores labor divides and revolutionary voices in today's globalized society. She deconstructs Gramsci's idea of the subaltern groups' independent self. Spivak explores the past of marginalized women and expands on the first definition of the subaltern. Guha and the others initially sketched the history of disadvantaged women by investigating the hardships and experiences of women from the upper middle class, peasants, or subproletariat. Subaltern women in India face more marginalization than men. "Subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as a female is even more deeply in shadow," as Spivak contends (113). When addressing the subalternity domain, Spivak considers gender issues, particularly those facing Indian women during colonial times. By analyzing Sati customs during British colonial authority, she illuminates the situation of Indian women. The status of women in Indian society in the twenty-first century is not the same as their status during Sati practice. Nowadays, women are in better situations than they were during Sati practice in the social, economic, and political realms. Because the term "subaltern" is relational, women who are classified as subaltern in one context may not be in another.

Spivak highlights subaltern awareness by mentioning the awareness of the working classes is the main topic of subaltern studies. Additionally, Spivak contends that subaltern consciousness is never fully regaining its independence and is continually influenced by those in positions of authority. The subaltern is objectified

by some ruling classes, who use knowledge as a source of power. Subaltern awareness is the "peasant consciousness," according to Dipesh Chakrabarty (372). He asserts that there is no influence on the subaltern's religious awareness. He emphasizes the two competing forces—the feudal system of power and the current community system—such as the elite and the subaltern.

The study has examined how marginal communities position themselves and use their consciousness to confront discriminatory social, political, and economic challenges through self-governance, interpretation, and resistance in order to assert their independent selves. In both novels, the protagonists' subaltern consciousness reconstructs their identities through an awakened agency. This study contends that the subaltern consciousness can serve as a source of agency and an active site of resistance against societal injustices. In support of this argument, the study draws on the insights of Antonio Gramsci, Michael Garnett, and Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak to further examine the lives of individuals situated at the lowest levels of social, economic, and political hierarchies within the constricted society of colonial and postcolonial India.

Devi employs subaltern figures and subaltern consciousness in her narratives concerning colonial and post-colonial India to rewrite their history and create a new reality capable of influencing their subjective experiences and identities. Such actions help in addressing social change related to caste and class-based, injustice, colonial domination, violence, trauma, and other similar issues. When it comes to such differences, it is necessary to comprehend how elements like identity, history, trauma, and narrative interact within the context of seeking justice and peace in present-day India. The experiences of subalterns have varied across different historical periods and generations.

Devi allocates considerable space for marginalized individuals in her writings. She depicts marginalized individuals, including women, the impoverished, and people of lower social strata, who are denied their rightful position in the current societal structure. She tells her story from the viewpoint of those who are marginalized. In her texts, she allows marginalized characters to express themselves freely. She seeks to break down the hierarchy between the center and margins, as well as between rich and poor, ruler and the ruled, colonizer and colonized, by raising awareness among the oppressed about their situation and encouraging them to come together in the battle against injustices.

The modern critical scholarship views Devi's novels as texts that raise a voice against injustice and prejudice. Numerous critics have explored caste, class, gender, regionalism, and various other biases in Bengal and colonial Jhansi to uncover how governmental authorities, elite culture, and British Raj oppress marginalized individuals. Critical scholarship fails to address the shift of the subaltern consciousness, which aims to reevaluate historical and geopolitical contexts in terms of agency and inner freedom. Devi employs the historical figure of Lakshmibai along with other subaltern characters to examine the evolving context of their civilization. Devi's personas that are aware of political issues resist power and aim to redefine it through violent conflict. Vulnerable subaltern groups literally and figuratively dismantle social hierarchies.

This research takes insights from the subaltern and resistance movement, but it does not provide a thorough analysis of the theory. Rather, it emphasizes the impact of domination as a crucial element in cultural change and the importance of opposition for self-discovery. The primary aim of the study is to demonstrate how subaltern consciousness with awakened agency could serve as a locus of resistance.

The subaltern agency confirms its identity and self-worth through physiological changes and the acquisition of resistance skills.

Garnett explicates, "Waking of agency is not possible without self-sacrifice," (3) in his book *Agency and Inner Freedom*. An agency that targets the weak social structures is said to be awakened (6). Devi examines how the ego and society interact in her works. He shows how the demands of marginal groups have been ignored by the dominant groups in society. In addition, Garnett highlights the "public self" and "secret self." For Garnett, "those in power govern the public selves of marginal or subaltern persons" (8). Devi's tribe has long been at the bottom of the social hierarchy. They do not have their own public space and are not included in the values, behavior, or recognition of the majority society.

In India, the ruling class still maintains influence over the public image of the underclass, as this research illustrates. They have pondered about their feeling of independence. Individuals who have been hated have put in a great deal of effort to become independent on the inside as well on the outside. They are still vulnerable to both internal and external forces, though. Consequently, they have not gained profound agency. Internal or external constraints should not prevent marginalized people from exercising their agency completely, putting a stop to injustices, and forming relationships. For them, agency comes from subaltern consciousness. In order to undermine the social structures, persons who are conscious of their social subordination may engage in both overt and covert opposition.

This study examines Devi's *Mother of 1084* and *The Queen of Jhansi*, both of which deal with the idea of political, social, and economic strife that leads to enlightenment or consciousness. In a prejudiced culture, the stage of class consciousness can be seen as a political arena to reawaken agency in the dominated

ones. By using their consciousness as the site of resistance, both protagonists recast themselves as dominating characters in order to create a counter-narrative. With the awakening of their agency, Devi's characters have achieved their autonomous self to a certain degree.

Devi illustrates how agency may be an active tool for resistance and the establishment of a new social balance via the physical experiences of her characters. In her writing, she reestablishes the distinctions by creating characters that experience physical changes to create an arousal of agency to resist, so subverting the dominant discourses of class, gender, caste, and culture. Devi dramatizes the oppression and dehumanization of her characters in order to give them agency and voice, even if this empowerment is attained via physical change and occasionally death. Their choice to speak via the new agency and face the self in order to oppose violence and grief is what binds these characters together in disjunctive settings and circumstances. The subaltern's self-erasing, which eliminates the gendered and cultural violence inscribed on it, is a subversive act of resistance against the oppressive system.

Devi's shift to leftism enables her to inspire Adivasi youth to take charge of their own lives and stand up for their rights. Devi uses Lakshmibai, Sujata, and Brati to tell the story of Jhansi during the 1850s colonial era and the 1970s Bengali transition, when East Bengal was fighting for its independence and West Bengalis were fighting against economic exploitation and caste-based discrimination. In a same vein, *The Queen of Jhansi* subtly asserts that the British Raj has not restored the social order. As a political ideal, the Kingdom of Jhansi had pledged to uphold justice, equality, and freedom in society; but, the people were unable to take advantage of the system's promises following British oppression. Lakshmibai wishes to blend in with society since she has politically woken herself to her rights and equality.

To sum up, Devi provides the marginalized people a sense of identity and reclaims the past of the oppressed through *The Mother of 1084* and *The Queen of Jhansi*. In order to disrupt the situation of national forgetfulness, she gives her characters voices and shares their unexamined tale. Through her tale, the author exposes the cruelty and crimes of the ruling class, elite culture, state, gender issues, and their effects on the minds of the oppressed. In order to rebuild a new identity distinct from the previous one, they transform their traumatic experiences, grief, and terror into power. People who are marginalized use their consciousness as a site of resistance against hegemonic forces throughout their lives. These subaltern figures go through a political rite of transition with an emergence of subaltern consciousness creating an agency to resist. After getting enlightened, the subaltern agency re-incorporates into a new social space where it defines its own identity and dissolves into a society of equilibrium.

Devi depicts Lakshmibai, Sujata, and Brati, three subaltern characters from the underprivileged community, boldly and generously pursuing their entire agency while opposing the ill- social practice of imperialism, caste, and class-based discrimination. As Devi is a member of a marginalized community, she depicts the awakening of the impoverished groups and, as a result, their inner selves in the novels described above. The story of the protagonist speaks the triumph of marginalized and subaltern society. Finally, they see that they can awaken everyone with self-asserting agency and the ability to oppose the evils that divide society against the backdrop of universal humanity.

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