

Resistance Against Cultural Erasure: A Study of Mahasweta Devi's

The Queen of Jhansi and Chotti Munda and His Arrow

By

R. Deepika

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A thesis submitted to Avinashilingam Institute for Home
Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore – 641043
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master's Degree in English

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Mahasweta Devi, born in 1926 in Dhaka was raised in the rich milieu of Bengali high culture. Her father Manish Ghatak was a renowned poet, novelist and prose writer of the Kallol era, who used the pseudonym Jubanashwa. In 1920, he broke new grounds by writing about realist stories which dealt with the life of slum and the unpleasant side of Indian society. Her mother Dharitri Devi was also a writer and a social worker. When the famous American author visited Bombay in 1934, Dharitri Devi was gifted with a copy of one of Buck's books. She loved the works of Pearl S Buck and translated some of her works. She also promoted literacy among under privileged children.

Mahasweta Devi's family members were also noted persons; the film maker Ritwik Ghatak was the youngest brother of Manish Ghatak; the noted sculptor Sankar Chaudhury and the founder-editor of the Economic and Political Weekly of India, Sachin Chaudhury were brothers of Dharitri Devi. Devi was eldest of nine children. She loved books and developed interest in music, theatre and films along with her brothers and sisters. She did not have any bar on her reading because everyone kept reading in her family. While she was young, she read about Charles Dickens, Anton Chekhov, Balzac and Mukundram Chakravarty who wrote *Chandi Mangal*, one of Bengali classics. Thus her interest in fiction and history started.

The promotion of western education and social reform of Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) inspired Devi's grandparents. They were involved in many movements led by 19th century Bengali leaders who shaped not only Indian nationalism but also Bengali literature. Every woman in her family taught literacy to poor people

voluntarily. Her grandparents never allowed them to wear expensive clothes; they preferred them to be like poor children so that the poor could feel comfortable to mingle with them.

Devi's family moved from one place to another due to her father's job; so she got her education at different places. She finished her elementary education at Medinipur Missionary Girl's School in West Bengal in 1935. She attended her Middle School in Shantiniketan (1936-38) and finished high school at Beltala Girl's School in Kolkata (1939-42). Her father was a friend and admirer of Tagore. Her stay at Shantiniketan left a deep impression on her life. She developed a passion for literature and arts. She was so lucky that she watched Tagore's dance dramas, listened to famous Bengali writers. She also served Tagore during his last years and he took classes for Devi's class in Bengali.

When Devi was thirteen, she wrote an essay on Tagore's *My Boyhood Days* in Bengali for Children's Magazine. Here she recorded many impressions about Indian cultural nationalism. The whole world was in great trauma; there were battles, violence, fight for freedom everywhere. In India, many movements had been started not only for freedom of India but also to establish rights for every individual. In order to expel British from India during 1942 campaign of 'Quit India' movement many nationalists were arrested including Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and even Devi's Uncle Sankar Chaudhary. Widespread violence broke out among Indians.

During 1942- 1944, there was a great Bengal famine and Burma stopped to supply rice during the war. After this, during 1946, the Great Calcutta riots broke out. There was conflict between Hindus and Muslims. The communal riots unleashed by Hindu parties and Muslim League spread to Punjab and Bengal after Calcutta. When

India got Independence on 15th August, 1947, a government mixed with British and Indian leaders was formed. At the same time, tragedy waited in the wings in the form of partition of India, that is, India and Pakistan. Western Bengal and Eastern Bengal were also parted. There were many bloodsheds and violence by communalists for dividing the two nations. Gandhi was assassinated by a young man of Hindu extremism on 30th January, 1948 and the cities were bathed with blood and passions were inflamed.

When Bengal was hit by famine, Devi with her college mates took up relief work. She practically saw the violence and its effects on innocent women and babies. Many families died because of the famine. These incidents of sufferings and death were imprinted on her heart and deeply affected her. She started to realise some change in her and wanted to live away from her protected middle- class family during her teens.

Devi later married the renowned playwright Bijon Bhattacharya who was one of the founding fathers of the IPTA movement and script writer in films who worked under her uncle Ritwik Ghatak. In 1948, she gave birth to Nabarun Bhattacharya, one of Bengal's and India's leading novelists whose works are important for their intellectual vigour and philosophical flavour.

Devi's husband was a member in the communist party. She faced many difficulties to earn her daily bread. She earned her living by selling dye-powder and through her job as a teacher in Puddopukur Girl's School, during 1948-1949. She also worked as a clerk in the upper-division of the Deputy Accountant General of Post and Telegraph, during 1949-1950. Accused of being a communist, she was retrenched from her government job after someone planted books of Marx, Engel and Lenin in

her office drawer. She began to write under the pen name Sumitra Devi for a Bengali weekly, *Sachitra Bharat* and contributed light fiction such as romantic stories, ghost stories, family stories, etc.,

Mahasweta Devi produced her first masterpiece *Jhansir Rani* (The Queen of Jhansi) in 1956 and translated that into English later. To write this novel, she faced a lot of difficulties, especially, financial crisis. She also walked a long way to collect every detail of Jhansi Rani and about the transformation of the young widow into a Rani who gathered common people to wage a war against the British. She didn't write Jhansi's life exactly as a history but wrote it partially as a biography. It is a fictional reconstruction of Rani Lakshmibai in which she focused on the social aspects of life. Then she got her reputation as a writer. Then she wrote *Nati* (1957), *Madhrey Madhur* (1958), *Yamuna Ke Teer* (1958), *Etotuku Asha* (1959), *Premtara* (1959) - all these novels were based on romances of Indian lives. She wrote these works in order to earn money for running her family. Later she got divorced from Bijon in 1962 and left her fourteen year old son with his father.

After her divorce she attempted to commit suicide and luckily, she was saved. She finished her Master's degree in Literature at Calcutta University, in 1963. Then she started to serve as a lecturer at Bijoygarh Jyotish Roy College in 1964. During those days, it was a forum working for elite female students. This lasted till 1984 and then she served in a private college for poor students in a refugee area. Again she got married to an aspiring writer but it was also a failure, in 1975. She began to do what she wanted to do with her life. She also worked as a journalist, editor (of a quarterly, *Bortika*) and as a creative writer. She started to publish novels, stories and articles, even plays, textbooks and children's fiction, adapted folklore for young readers;

translated works in other languages and also wrote biographies of her father, Manish Ghatak, and the famous Chinese writer Lu Xun.

Because of her strong literary tradition and her fortunate education at Shantiniketan, writing came to her early and easily. Her experiences in life turned her later into a social activist. Palamau, a remote district in Bihar changed the life of Devi in 1965. She saw a complete imbalance of India's development. She witnessed the savage impact on indigenous society of absentee landlordism, a despoiled environment, debt bondage and state neglect. She also observed the same dismal conditions in other nearby places she visited. She witnessed no education, no health care, no rail roads and no income.

Inhumanity prevailed in those villages which exploited and neglected tribal people. The experience which she had got from Palamau village was mostly excluded from official, mainstream history. In many of her novels, she depicted the struggles and sufferings of tribal people. She produced a stream of narratives, fusing indigenous oral with contemporary events to uncover the bitter and often bloody relationship between tribal communities and India's dominant classes and systems. History has always fascinated her. Shubha Tiwari quotes Devi saying "I think being conscious about history is a primary condition of being a writer."

Devi wanted to highlight the acts of local resistance to aggression and oppression. Her interest in history is not backward- looking but strongly contemporary. She renders scenes of the past in their physicality, as if they were contemporary and creates characters evolving through their interactions with a historical process. While she turned to the past for materials, her vision is not exotic but historical. It is always trained on realities of the present. In an interview with Devi

in 1983, Mojares notes of what she said: “It is my conviction that a story writer should be motivated by a sense of history that would help her readers to understand their own times. I have never had the capacity or the urge to create art for art’s sake” (4).

Devi has critically reflected on her own class position in works exploring the dilemma of the bourgeois intellectual’s social loyalties. Her works deal with the position of women in India also and they are powerful tales focusing on exploitation and struggle. Devi is clearly influenced by the Marxists ideas ascendant in India during her formative years. Her fiction is driven not only by a strong sense of identification with the oppressed and the excluded but by a faith in their capacity for self-emancipation. The cause of the tribals has become a part of Devi’s life mission because she has seen their sufferings.

Devi’s writings render the plight of this invisible population of the tribals. She has explored in her fiction the history of Santhals, Hos, Oraons, Kurunis, Mundas and the other tribal communities. Since 1976, she has been actively involved in the struggles of tribals and underprivileged communities in the border areas of the three adjacent provinces of Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal, especially in the districts of Mayurbhanj, Medinipur, Purulia and Singhbhum.

Devi got a great opportunity to travel and learn the conditions which prevailed in the countryside, when she joined Jugantar, a Bengali newspaper, as a roving reporter in 1964. She ranged through topics such as police atrocities, failures in the implementation of government programmes, exploitation of share croppers and miners, unemployment and landless, environmental degradation and the need to protect and foster tribal languages and identity. She has embraced journalism as social

advocacy instead of as a trade or profession. Her practice for 'journalism-from-below' is quite innovative. She has located herself, marked out her vantage point at the peripheries, in the rural districts, instead of writing out of the capital or metropolis.

Devi did not stop with writing about the problems of the tribals; she also worked to resolve their problems. Her literary works are commentary on the simplistic lifestyles of the tribes as well as on their sufferings and exploitation. She believes that the people she writes about should be aware of and write about their own problems. All her writings are based on real life experience, facts and figures. She helps them with questionnaires and guides them for conducting surveys in their own areas and makes them write.

Devi along with Gomasta Prasad Soren and Gopiballabh Singh Deo founded Paschim Banga Kheria Sabar Kalyan Samiti (Kheria Sabar Welfare Society) in 1983. The welfare organisation was formed for the Kheria and Sabar tribes who were the poorest of the poor in India. The organisation aimed at defending the rights of tribals and promotes their material and cultural well-being. It has taken initiatives such as handicrafts and farming, irrigation and water, forestation, health, savings and literacy projects. The two tribal groups constitute over sixteen thousand population and around ten thousand directly benefited by this organisation.

Adim Jaati Aikya Parishad (Ancient Tribes Union) was founded for common voice for tribal group in 1986 by Mahasweta Devi. This organisation consists of thirty-eight West Bengali tribal groups. It gave voice for tribes to claim their rights for socio-economic and civil liberties. It also promoted co-operative action among both big and small tribes; reduced the incidence of intertribal violence.

The Shabara Mela, an annual fair was instituted by Devi in 1990. It was based on traditional Indian country fairs held after winter in Rajnagar, thirty kilometres away from Purulia, West Bengal. The fair has some features which enhances the tribe's dignity and autonomy. It features crafts, exhibits, contests and theatrical performances dealing with social themes such as literacy, anti-alcoholism. It has influenced other rural areas.

Devi has been involved with numerous other initiatives in grassroots organising, even serving as president of the Berhampur Municipal Sweepers Association in her district of Murshidabad. She took initiative in founding a few organisations like Paschim Banga Munda Tribal Samaj Sugar Ganthra (Mighty Union of West Bengal Tribal Society), Paschim Banga Bhumij Tribal Samaj Kalyan Samiti (West Bengal Tenanted Tribal Welfare Society- Medinipur and Purulia districts), Paschim Banga Oraon Tribal Kalyan Samiti (West Bengal Oraon Tribal Welfare Society), Paschim Banga Sahis Scheduled Caste Kalyan Samiti (West Bengal Sahis Scheduled Caste Welfare Society), Paschim Banga Harijan Kalyan Samiti (West Bengal Harijan Welfare Society-North 24 Parganas district), Bharat Ker Adim Jaati Samiti (The Indian Ker Aboroginal Tribal Society-North 24 Parganas district), Adibasi Kalyan Samiti (Adibasi Welfare Society-South 24 Parganas district), Paschim Banga Baul Fakir Sangha (West Bengal Baul Fakir Union-Murshidabad district).

Devi wrote about the people and lived with them; she even participated in their struggle and gave voice for them through her writings. She calls them her own people and they call her in turn, Didi (elder sister). They come to her with their problems, like, seeking jobs, violations of government norms for jobs reserved for tribals, unjust action of the police or the administration, government recognition for

running a school, someone needing admission to a hospital immediately, land, irrigation, drinking water or SOS from a small tribal group fearing violent attacks.

Devi as an advocate listens and gives advice. She tirelessly writes several complaints or petitions addressed to the government. She also publishes many columns and articles documenting abuses by police, landlords and politicians. She believes that her social activism is a matter of expiation and duty. She criticised the failure of political parties from all the sides to change the system very fiercely. In the article “Writing as social service: The Literary Compass of Mahasweta Devi” by Shubha Tiwari quotes, “Devi says, impatient with ‘mere party politics’, ‘Life is not arithmetic and man is not made for the game of politics. I believe that it should be the object of every kind of politics to fulfil man’s craving to live with all his rights intact..”

Devi got deeply stirred by the sufferings of tribal and the poor. Shubha Tiwari in her article “Writing as social service: The Literary Compass of Mahasweta Devi” quotes the words of Devi, “Bengali literature has been far too long a field for retraction from objectivity and an atrophy of conscience... A responsible writer, standing at a turning point in history, has to take a stand in defence of the exploited, otherwise history would never forgive him.”

Devi’s contribution to literature is very great. Through her novels, her short fictions, her children’s stories, her plays and her activist prose writings she raised question on contemporary politics, gender and class, especially tribal’s welfare. She communicates with tribals and comes to know that there are no written scripts for them but they have their history in songs. Then she begins to write for them.

Devi is more famous for her work related to the study of the Lodhas and Shabars, the tribal communities of West Bengal, women and Dalits. She is also an activist who is dedicated to the struggles of tribal people in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. In her elaborate Bengali fiction, she often depicts the brutal oppression of tribal people and the untouchables by potent authoritarian upper-class landlords, money lenders, and officers etc.

Devi has recently been spearheading the movement against the industrial policy of the government of West Bengal, the state of her domicile. Specifically, she has criticized the taking away of large tracts of fertile agricultural land from farmers by the government and ceding the land to industrial houses at throw away prices. She has connected the policy to the commercialisation of Shantiniketan of Rabindranath Tagore, where she spent her formative years. Her lead resulted in number intellectuals, artists, writers and theatre workers join in protesting the controversial policy and particularly its implementation in Singur and Nandigram. She is a supporter of Budhan Theatre- the theatre group of Chhara De-Notified Tribals of Gujarat.

Devi is the writer among those irresistible voices who puts a question mark on the so-called progressive, democratic and civilised nation called India. Even after so many years of independence, the marginal are deprived of their basic rights. She exposes the feudal system which is anti-tribal women, anti-poor and anti-tiller. She received knowledge not only from her parents but also from her entire family and relatives.

In this contemporary world among other writers she stands unique by writing about the De-Notified people and their life. She has devoted her life for uplifting

tribal and adivasis. She roamed everywhere to collect information about her heroes and heroines who were given least importance but whom should be praised and known by all people. She mingled with the tribals and won the hearts of those adivasis and became one in their families.

Mahasweta Devi's 40 years of contribution to literary career ranges almost in many languages and many genres. Her creative productions were nearly 100 novels in Bengali and 20 collections of short stories. Many of her works had been translated into major languages such as Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, English, Italian, Japanese and French: *Jhansir Rani* (The Queen of Jhansi, translated by Sagaree and Mandira Sengupta), *Hajar Churashir Maa* (Mother Of 1084), *Aranyer Adhikar* (The Occupation of the Forest), *Agnigarbha* (Womb of Fire), *Bitter Soil* (translated by Ipsita Chandhra), *Chotti Munda evam Tar Tir* (Chotti Munda and His Arrow), *Imaginary Maps* (translated by Gayatri Spivak), *Dhowli* (Short Story), *Dust on the Road* (translated by Maitreya Ghatak), *Our Non-Veg Cow* (translated by Paramita Banerjee), *Bashai Tudu* (translated by Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak and Shamik Bandyopadhyay), *Titu Mir, Rudali, Breast Stories* (translated by Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak), *Of Women, Outcasts, Peasants and Rebels* (translated by kalpana Bardhan), *Ek-kori's Dream* (translated by Lila Majumdar), *The Book of the Hunter, Outcast, Draupadi, In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (translated by Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak), *Till Death Do Us Part, Old Women, Kulaputra* (Translated by Sreemathi H.S.), *The Why-Why Girl* (Tulika) and *Dakatey Kahini*.

Devi has received many awards. *Aranyer Adhikar* won Sahtiya Akademi Award in 1979. She received Padma Shri Award in 1986. The highest literary Award of India, The Jnanpath Award was won by her from the Bharatiya Jnanpath in 1996. In the same year she received the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism,

Literature and the Creative Communication Arts. Indira Gandhi National Open University honoured her by awarding Honoris Causa in 1999. Government of India awarded the second highest civilian award, Padma Vibhushan for her in 2006. During 2010 she received Yashwantrao Chavan National Award. She got Bangabibhushan which is the highest civilian award from Government of West Bengal during 2011. She got the most prestigious first Lifetime Achievement Sahityabrahma award for Bengali Literature during 2012. She is the first person to receive Mamoni Raisom Goswami National Award for Literature constituted by Assam, Sahitya Sabha and sponsored by Numaligarh Refinery Limited, Assam during 2014. She gave away her prize money of \$ 50,000 for the development of tribal people who would be happy for her and says, “I get tremendous inspiration from them.”

One could have read about Jhanagir, Akbar, Krishnadevaraya and so many rulers from north to south and east to west. One also might have read about Freedom movements and about freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives for Independence of India. History is a record through which future generations will know about those incidents and pains. People will know only about the fighters who stand in front of the battle or the freedom movement. But many fighters are not known to the people. Similarly, there are regions which are covered by dense forest, hills, mountains, rivers, etc., where innocent adivasis and tribals live; they also have raised their weapons for their freedom from upper-class people and government officers. In an interview with Spivak, Devi says, “I have also seen resistance... *Chotti Munda* or my other stories and books depict a continuing struggle ... Tribal history is not seen as a continuity in Indian historiography...” (*Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, ix)

Tribal history is divested of authority as it is considered alien to Indian historiography. The low castes and the tribal communities are dehumanised by the

elites of the society and this marginalisation influences the making of historical records. The official history of the Indian elite has contravened the ethics of history writing by bypassing the records of the subalterns in the history of India.

The history which studied at school as a subject dealt only about certain happenings, may be the upper class but Mahasweta Devi's works mostly dealt with history from below line or the base levels of society. Her works reveal her dedication for the betterment of the tribals of Bengals and the Denotified Tribes of India as a whole. Spivak points out, "Mahasweta articulates tribal history with colonial and postcolonial history...one of the most striking characteristics of the novel is the sustained aura of the subaltern speech (*Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, vii-viii)

Sujatha Vijayaraghavan in her article "Postcolonial Historiography: A Case Study of Mahasweta Devi's *The Queen of Jhansi*" says:

Historiography is the study of the history and methodology of the discipline of history. It is closely allied to subaltern studies in its interests and applies itself to those gaps and silences focusing on what happens among the masses at the base levels of society, i.e. 'history from below.' The historic uprisings of 1857 elicited different views from its different chroniclers, British and Indian. Today revisionist history attempts to re-read these events from the post colonial angle, bringing to the fore those gaps and silences in inscription which open up new and hitherto unnoticed facts. (13)

Mahasweta Devi's first novel on tribals, *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, articulates the tribal tale, placing it within the wider canvas of India's colonial as well as postcolonial history. Though the novel is actually set in a Mundari village during

the post- Independence period, more often it swings back to the colonial phase when the Mundas were evicted from their land, and to their legendary leader Birsa Munda who sacrificed his life for their cause.

Bhabani Bhattacharya was the most famous historical writer and Devi falls into this category. The use of history in the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya has been quoted in the article “Novel as History – A Study of Bhabani Bhattacharya” by Manmohan K. Bhatnagar:

Quite a few Indo-Anglican novelists have set their narratives in the recent political and historical milieu, weaving significant political happenings therein. Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar and Nayantara Sahgal are replete with ready instances of this. A novelist opts for a factual background only with a view to find an order in the seeming welter of history. . . . Sensitive to the human reality, they present the political happenings in a wider human framework. They give their novels a strong empirical basis and despite focus on individuals rather than incidents, the historical veracity of these novels stands out. (171-72)

Bhabani Bhattacharya, R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao are considered to be four pillars of the Indian novel in English. He belongs to the older generation of the novelists. His themes were social reality, clash between tradition and modernity, East- West encounter, exploration of the self and identity crisis of the post- independence Indian nation. He is rightly called the doyen of the Indian-English novel in modern India because of his futuristic vision, humanistic outlook and

historical perspective of the Indian social reality and well defined theory of the craft of fiction.

Current political happenings and personalities are obviously part of history. History is the story of humanity which records a string of events bound by chronology and the chain of cause and effect, sometimes, immediate, sometimes remote. What is contemporary is political, what is past is historical. Social concern – concern for the poor, the hungry and the destitute has been a prominent theme in the post-romance phase of Indian literature in English. As Sudhakar Joshi in his article “An Evening with Bhabani” remarks, “Bhattacharya believes that novel must have a social purpose” (87).

A few writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Arun Joshi and Ruth Pravar Jhabvala give full vent to their smouldering resentments against the economic and social evils in fictional terms. Works such as *Untouchable* (1933), *Coolie* (1936), *The Guide* (1958), *So Many Hungers!* (1947), *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1956), *Nectar in a Sieve* (1956), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971), *Heat and Dust* (1975) have given powerful voice to the problem of hunger, starvation, human degradation and the social evil of casteism with sympathy for the victims and resentments for the victimizers.

Devi in her first novel, “*The Queen of Jhansi*”, rewrites the biography of the Queen using the local legends, tales and songs that are told and sung by the local people of the area till date and to her they are as much as the authorised historical records. Her fiction dramatises the historical, political, economic and cultural encounters between these marginalised tribal groups and the dominant mainstream

populations spanning the pre-colonial, the colonial and the post-colonial periods. Her fiction seems to narrate some of this lore which embodies the living cultural traditions of not only the royal family but also the tribal groups of India.

Vandhana Sharma and Quleen Kaur in the article “Mahasweta Devi’s Chotti Munda and His Arrow and Louise Erdrich’s *The Round House*: Historicizing Race in Indian and American Context” point out,

Mahasweta Devi as the crusader of subaltern emancipation has attacked the elitist marginalization of low classes, rural communities and tribals during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial India. The elite factions responsible for dehumanizing the aboriginal minorities of India included: feudal landlords, imperial forces and native bourgeois. The common factor which was built up as an excuse to marginalise the subaltern was caste system. Mahasweta Devi has exposed these skeletons of racism in the novel. . . (118)

Devi has exposed the inhuman practices of caste system that exploits the tribals and other marginalised communities of India.

Mahasweta Devi should be claimed for her attempt to address the subaltern point of view in her writings also as a historiography. The history of the tribal and the low casts is falsified to yield power to the elites. She declares, “I have found authentic documentation to be the best medium for protest against injustice and exploitation.” (Musings on Indian Writing, 205)

Devi’s aim is to rehabilitate and to recover the identity of the tribals. The emergency behind her endeavour lies in the backdrop of the criminalisation of the

adivasis society by the British. She intends to cleanse the modern India of this recurring colonial 'stigma.' It has been proved that she has made history an identifier of a community abused by the domination of discriminatory authoritarianism.

After the end of the Colonial rule, English language still occupies an important place in modern literature. Even the efforts to decolonise literature in the third World Countries have affected the popularity of literature written in English only partially. Whatever is written in regional language is made available in others languages for readers through translation. It also represents a significant point of convergence in the multi-racial, multi-cultural and religious country like India. A number of Indian writers have used English language as a medium of creative exploration and also as an expression of their experiences. It shows how various streams have enriched Indian literature in many ways. With her contribution to Indian writing in English, Mahasweta Devi stands tall among writers as she has rewritten history and also has given a shape and form to the tribals' oral narratives.

The researcher has taken up two novels of Mahasweta Devi namely, *The Queen of Jhansi* and *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* for her study. Though Mahasweta Devi has written more than hundred works, she is remarkable for her activism and her voice for voiceless. These two works are taken for the study as *Queen of Jhansi* is rendered in a new light by Devi; and the Munda tribals have a champion in her with her novel *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*. Since the tribals have a rich cultural tradition, she wants to bring them into the pages of history and is against their erasure.

The study entitled "Resistance Against Cultural Erasure: A Study of Mahasweta Devi's *The Queen of Jhansi* and *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*" is divided into five chapters. The first chapter – Introduction deals with the making of the artist

Mahasweta Devi, her influences, major themes of her writings and her place in literature. The second chapter – The Life of Natives deals with the natives' culture, oral tradition and their way of life under the British colonisers and the tribals. The third chapter – Colonialism deals with the British ruling over India during the period of Jhansi Rani and also about the natives and tribals being suppressed by the mainstream community influenced by the colonial imperialism. The fourth chapter – Resistance deals with the resistance of the Indians who refused to be slaves under the British and also the resistance of the tribals against their oppressive landlords and others, so that they could get emancipation and save their rich cultural tradition. The fifth chapter – Summation sums up of the arguments given in the previous chapters and drives home the message offered by Mahasweta Devi that human beings need to be given their due love, dignity and respect.

Chapter 2

Life of Natives

The lives of human beings are composed of different customs and practices. They follow their own linguistic, territorial, class, religious, ethnic and cultural ideologies given to them by their forefathers. Nativism is primarily cultural-linguistic. India has a very rich, heterogeneous culture, pluralistic religions and traditions and Indians are always proud of their rich cultural heritage. Writers like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan have written about the Indians and their way of life in a historical perspective. During the British rule, many writers emerged but they wrote about the condition of India and Indians under the foreign rule. Mahasweta Devi, who champions the cause of the tribals writes about the natives of India and their cultural behaviour.

Devi's works offer a criticism of civilization, the dichotomy between nature and culture and the threats posed by the forces of modernization. Her writings originate from her intimate knowledge of the ground realities. Her association with nature and ecology plays an important role in her creative output. She has developed a very close link with man and nature. She strongly believes that human beings should acknowledge and give respect to Mother Nature and they should not usurp her for their personal profits. Nature can only make mankind survive and sustain.

Devi clearly stands as an eye witness for experiencing pain and sufferings of the most crucial periods of India: colonialism, pre-colonialism and post-colonialism. In her first novel *The Queen of Jhansi*, she has depicted the geography of Jhansi, Bundelkhand, Kalpi, Panna, Mau, Hridaynagar, Sagar, Jalaun, etc., Particularly, for Jhansi and Bundelkhand she has given the most detailed description. Thus, she helps

the readers to know how Jhansi was before 100 years. Then Jhansi was an independent unit of Bundelkhand and a part of Tehri Orchha kingdom. The extent of Jhansi was 100 miles from east to west and 60 miles from north to south. She, like many other Indian writers, has depicted the lives of the natives of India. She says how people from neighbouring places come to Jhansi during the drought:

Hoping for water in the drought of Baishakh, peasant women vainly wandered with ritual baskets on their heads, singing *bhadoo* songs. Yet, all kinds of people had made their homes there. Brahmans, Rajputs, Ahirs, Bundelas, Baniyas, Chamars, Kacchis, Koris, Lodhis, Kurmis- all had come to Jhansi. Food grains, loaded on donkeys, horses and camels, came annually from outside. They were brought in by three roads: the one that ran from Mau to Jhansi, the one from Jhansi to Kanpur via Kalpi, and the one from Agra to Sagar. (2)

The inhabitants are proud to belong to the district of Jhansi: “Down there is Poona; up there, Kashi. The best of all is in between Jhansi” (3).

India is known for its unity in diversity. This is depicted through various differences that existed even within the same community or state. Devi mentions about the dressings of Maharashtrian women and Bundelkhand women to show how different they are, even though living in a single state: “Maharashtrian women wear nine-yard saris, but the women of Bundelkhand wear ghagras, or long gathered Skirts” (12). While looking for a worthy Queen who will ascend the throne of Jhansi, the royal family found it very difficult to find a suitable lady from the same community. Devi talks about the classification within the same community. Mostly Maharashtrian brahmans were divided into three groups: the Konkanasthas, the

Deshathas and the Karheras. The Newalkar line falls under the group of Karhera. It is difficult to find suitable girl within the same caste. Ambassadors were sent to various places in the north and south to find a suitable girl who would be worthy enough to become the Queen.

In *The Queen of Jhansi*, Devi elaborates the customs practised in India like early marriage. This was later banned when the Sati act was passed. It was a very good law as many young girls' life has been saved by this. It was a custom to make a girl to get married when she reaches the age of eight. The worst thing about it is that those young girls will often be married to men who already got married or who would be elder than 15-20 years. When the girls reach the age, their fathers have to get them married. This particular custom has different names according to the language or religion, but the custom was practised commonly. In Tamil Brahmin culture, this custom is called as *kaniyadhanam*. This has been described by Devi when Manu (later Queen of Jhansi) reaches the age of eight. "Moropant was naturally worried when Manu's eighth birthday approached. In those days, brahman families of Maharashtra practised the custom of *gauridana*, or the giving away of an eight-year-old girl in marriage" (25).

Devi discusses the marriage and the attendant rituals done during that time. Though most of them are more or less the same all over India, some rituals and customs vary according to the languages spoken and religions practised. In this novel, during the marriage of the young girl Manu or Lakshmibai to Gangadhar Rao, King of Jhansi, the King holds the young bride's hand in his cupped palms and poured ghee, honey and laj into the scared fire which burns in front of them. Having the fire as witness, he marked vermilion mark on her forehead as a sign of her status as a married woman and put mangalsutra around her neck. Designs were painted on her

hands and feet which were adorned with red lac, golden anklets and toe rings. During those days, only royal brides wore golden jewellery on their feet. Then the priest sprinkled Ganga water on them and later King Gangadhar ascended the throne led by the palace ladies and with his new bride by his side.

There is a special ritual which will be conducted by royal families. From those performances it is proved that royal families especially the Queens don't show discrimination among their subjects. The divisions existed only among the subjects:

The Queen introduced a special new ritual for the *Haridra Kumkum* ceremony. Turmeric and vermilion were put in a huge vessel in the royal palace. All the ladies of the city were invited. Among the Queen's companions, the names of Kashi, Sundar, Mandar, Heera Korin, Jhalkari Korin, Juhi Moti Natakwali, and Gangubai have been recorded. At the Queen's invitation, many Marathi women of the brahman, kshatriya, and vaishya castes came. She entertained them hospitably without any discrimination. She had never believed in discriminating between high and low castes. (146)

Natives of Jhansi wore new branded dress and jewellery on special festivals and rituals conducted by royal families. Some high caste women would come to the palace according to their family position in their state. During these rituals the Queen would receive many gifts. The women would arrive in fancy carriages and palanquins guarded by armed men and attendants. Some used to come on foot and some in litters carried by four bearers. Everything was decorated and great brocade umbrellas were erected. There were many garlands and bouquets. The Queen received so many presents and gifts which include Bundelkhand's brass and copper utensils, Kari

artist's paintings, wooden furniture, dolls, pottery vases and silks. These were distributed among the women of private quarters by the Queen. The umbrella glitters in the sun and palash petals wilted in the women's coiffures. These celebrations continued till nine at the night.

The other customs that are followed after marriage are also presented in the novel. The Maharashtrian woman's name will be changed after their wedding. While talking about marriage she talks about the practice of the child marriage prevalent in India for very long years. It is an Indian custom that the girl children will be married when they reach eight years of age. In this novel, Rani Lakshmibai was married to Gangadhar Rao when she was seven and half years old. Soon after the marriage ceremony her original name Manikarnika or Manu was changed to Lakshmibai: "The priest uttered a blessing, as if to personify all their hopes and desires: 'From this day forward, the new bride will have the name of Lakshmibai in her husband's abode. With this name, O blessed one who bring well-being to all, augment the glory of your husband's lineage'" (27). Even Lakshmibai's father Moropant got married twice. Her mother died when she was two years old and he remarried after making his daughter the wife of Gangadhar Rao. He was 32 years old with and perfect in his health. He married the daughter of Basudev Shrirao Khanwlkar and her name was changed as Chimabai and she was a few months older than Lakshmibai. They both became closer as mother-daughter and friend-confidante.

When a girl is married to a man, she has to quit all the relationships with the family she is born to. Devi described that in India it is common for every woman whether they are born in high, middle or low class family. The status of woman in India during those days was expressed in the novel. Gangadhar was 29 years when Lakshmibai was eight. After her marriage, her name has been changed from 'Manu'

and she gave up her connection with Bithur where she was born and brought up. Married girls have to adopt and follow the customs of husband's lineage: "The Queen was obliged to learn the many different customs and rules of a Maharashtrian brahman family" (29). Though Lakshmibai is a Queen, she carried out her responsibilities as wife and daughter-in-law as well. While talking about the women and their virtues, Devi also mentions about the religious faith of Rani Lakshmibai. She strongly believed in God and performed all rituals along with the common people. She rarely refused the invitations given by brahman women who performed some or other ceremony or ritual everyday. She also would visit every common woman's house accepting their invitation. She would even supply them with provisions when they lacked:

During the month of Chaitra, when the year-end vows were performed after worship of the Goddess Gauri, the Queen received many invitations to participate in different homes as a *subhasini*. Wherever the host lacked the proper means, she would send complete supplies for the rites beforehand. Women enjoyed the festival of *Haridra KumKum*- with turmeric and vermilion- and gave each other flowers and coloured powder. The women of the palace praised the Queen for her charming manners, and often the delighted Gangadhar Rao would ask her with amused affection: 'Are you trying to live up to your name Lakshmi?.' (32-33)

During festival days, Rani Lakshmibai would ride in a palanquin specially made for her by Gangadhar Rao. It was a silver palanquin made after his own design by an artisan from Kashi. It had a cushion of red velvet embroidered with gold threads inside it and on all four sides it had gold thread tassels and curtains were embellished

with fine designs: On special festival days, the Queen would ride this palanquin to worship at the Mahalakshmi temple. Rani Lakshmibai never hesitated to help the needy and beggars. Especially, Lachhmi Gate beggars near temple tower located on the Lake Lachhmital received much kindness from the Queen. The whole district would be enjoying the festival days forgetting their sorrows and difficulties. She was always filled with everyone's blessings and wishes.

The Queens will be seated in the court only behind the screen. They were never allowed to come out of their veil. In this novel also, Rani Lakshmibai was seated behind the screen talking to Englishman Ellis:

Suddenly Major Ellis arrived and everyone at court was startled. A long row of the court and he started walking up them. He drily greeted the Queen sitting behind the screen and then proceeded to read aloud Dalhousie's order and Malcolm's notice. . . As soon as he stopped reading, Lakshmibai, from behind the screen, uttered four definitive words with controlled articulation. (68)

Another important custom and tradition of India has been portrayed in *The Queen of Jhansi*. She mentions about the Indian's belief in astrology and horoscope. Most of the Indians-both males and females believe that whatever the astrologer predicts about their future life would become true. Through the character Lakshmibai, Devi presented the natives' belief in astrology and horoscope. Moropant like every father wanted to know about his daughter's fortune and showed her horoscope to Tatia Dikshit who was searching for a bride to Gangadhar Rao. On seeing it, Tatia got impressed because her astrological calculations predicted that she would become Queen and would bring fame to the clan of her husband.

The rites and rituals that are followed when death occurs in a family vary according to caste or religion. Generally, the Hindus burn the dead bodies. When someone is on the verge of death or in death bed, they will be made to hear songs or mantras. Devi describes the last minutes of Gangadhar Rao's life before his death: "The Bhagavadgita slokas recited in the priest's voice could be heard clearly in the stillness of the night. The Queen sat by Gangadhar's bedside like a figure carved in stone. She kept counting the gold and glass beads on her mangalsutra as if under a spell. She listened to the Gita recitation." (43). Through the recitation of Bhagavadgita, Devi brings out the common philosophy of life suitable for all human beings: "As death is certain for one who is born, death is also certain for one who is dead. So you should not grieve about this unavoidable event" (43). The rites that followed the death of Gangadhar Rao were observed according to Hindu Maharashtrian brahman Culture:

At the royal palace, the arrangements for the last rites for Gangadhar were carried out with the pomp worthy of a king. A grieving mass of people followed the corpse to the funeral site. Then the boy Damodar, bringing fire to the mouth of the corpse, performed the mukhagni ceremony. Gangadhar was cremated by Lachhmital Lake, on the opposite shore from the Mahalakshmi temple. (44)

Devi gathered information on dependents of the Peshwa to show how the native commoners were living their lives. During 1838, in Bithur around 10,000 people lived. But they were dependants of the Peshwa either directly or indirectly. Moropant brought his daughter Manu near the ghat of Bithur and lived there. There were enormous shrines to various gods supervised by Moropant and he also maintained the ritual fire-pits at the Peshwas.

Even after the Queen of Jhansi died, the songs of local inhabitants are still sung. They do not know what happened to Jhansi Rani but they know only one thing - that she is a great woman. They are not ready to believe that she is dead. Even now they believe that she hides herself somewhere and survives. For instance, the old man who roasts corn over a charcoal fire in winter in the outskirts of Jhansi does not know anything about the death of her. He used to recite songs about the Queen to his granddaughter; that the Queen was so great and would never give up Jhansi; she fought for the welfare of the people and soldiers and gave up her life. He mentioned that till water flows in India, Queen of Jhansi will live. This shows how the inhabitants of Jhansi loved their Queen.

The life of natives can be seen in the lives of tribal people. Since they live with nature, the writers portray them as people of innocence, pure-hearted and kind people. Writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Gabriel Okara, A.D. Hope, Sharon Pollock, Alan Paton, some of them who described the life of the native people. They wanted to narrate the cultural behaviour, tradition, rituals, religion and manners to tell the future generation about the richness of their glorious past. Their works throw light on the life of the tribal people and how they try to preserve their culture.

Devi's next novel, *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* brings out the customs, manners, rituals, festivals and oral narratives unique to the tribal people. As Devi spends most of her life time among tribal people, she is able to mingle with them and becomes one among them. This novel like her other works deals with the tribes and their problems. The tribal people always wander in search of their food, shelter and occupation in the forest. They clear the forest to settle down in their homes near river beds. The very opening of the novel attests the fact: "It seems that mica or coal came out of the ground wherever his forefather Purti Munda went. As a result stories grew

about him as well. Purti brought his wife and kids from Chaibasha to Palamau. Cleared the forest and settles a home. This time weapons of stone emerged from under the soil of his fields” (1).

The tribes of Africa are more or less similar to Indian tribes. They also follow their own religion and rituals, customs and tradition; most of their behaviour and manners are similar to Indian customs and tradition. They also worship nature as God. They never allow outsiders to enter their forest because they are afraid that their innocence along with their customs and traditions may be spoiled. They work hard. They never covet others' properties. They live like one family. They allow boys and girls to talk freely. Their culture, behaviour and manners are known from folk and oral narrative songs as they do not have any written manuscripts. Their weapons are bow and arrow. They are interested in archery and like to hunt animals and birds. The forest provides them shelter, food and secures places to live in and they develop a close relationship with nature. They know about the forest very much and they can identify where the animals hide in the forest. They live among dangerous animals and surroundings but they live happily and in peace; but they are afraid to live among people who are not of their community. They feel that humans are more dangerous than animals.

In African literature, many writers have described the festivals and occasions of the tribal people of Africa. They would have mentioned that they like to dance, drink liquor etc., but never allow non tribal men to come and dance with them. The tribal women also help the men in all their work.

The mythologies of the different tribal groups in India begin with narrations of the origin of the world, of God, of man, the genealogy of the particular tribe, and an

account of how they received their traditional occupations and habitats. Though many of these myths and other cultural practices have reportedly died out as the lives of tribals and their livelihoods were overtaken by the dominance of other cultures, many of them are still kept alive and are narrated and performed on festive occasions. Their mythical past and their historical present impinge on each other, making oral narratives records of their lives in transition. The tribal community has a deep seated awareness of these partly historical and partly mythical accounts of their encounters with other communities, through their oral lore and rituals. The novel also brings out the myths and legends that are current among the Mundas of the village. There are several myths related to Munda god, Haramdeo: “All the local adivasi, worshippers of god Haram. Followers of a priest, the pahan” (2). One of the local myths about Haramdeo is related to the geographical background of the village of Chotti. The two hills with a gap of one mile which is a distinct geographical mark of the village are considered to be the wives of the demon who fought with Haramdeo: “Half a mile gap in t’ middle, two hills on two sides, we used to say two step- wives. Forever! Our elders had said, when t’ world was made t’ wives of t’ demons went ta Haramdeo fightin’. Haramdeo threw’ em down, and so t’ hills were made. But they didn’ have to spilt t’ hill here. They put t’ rail in between. Many tales!” (250).

Mundas have their own stories about the formation of earth too: “How the earth was made, how that earth was burnt in the fire of Shengeida, how a man and a woman survived, how a new earth was created – these are the perennial stories in Munda life” (8). Among tribal group they name themselves after the name of the river that flows near their settlement. There is also a reference, “In our line one is named after t’ river” (43). Purti Munda’s two grandsons were named after the rivers Chotti and Koel: “But river names keep inscribing themselves as the names of his

descendants. That is the reason why the two great-grandsons of Purti Munda are named after rivers- Chotti Munda and Koel Munda. Their home is still on the banks of the Chotti” (2-3). They celebrate the Hindu festivals like Holi and adivasi festivals like Hunt festival as they were settlers like Biharis, Bengalis, and Punjabis. Whatever be the festival, the archery contest is an integral part of their celebrations: “Why an archery contest at every fair? In answer he opens the Gazetteer and sees that such contests are an ancient tradition. It’s an integral part of adivasi festivals. Supported by rajas and landowners” (59).

During the Chotti fair tribal people of all the villages gather and enjoy themselves dancing and drinking. On this occasion they carry animals with them to dance: “Once a year the place named Chotti fills with adivasis. At the Chotti fair on Bijoya, the high holiday celebrating the Hindu great goddess’ triumph. Adivasis from thirty villages nearby come to this fair on that day. They make huge tigers, elephants, horses of paper stuck on bamboo frames” (3). The tribals, especially Mundas of Chotti village incorporate their own traditional festive items like dancing and archery competition and thus keep up their identity, even while celebrating the festivals of Hindu goddess in their own way. Dancing and archery competition are the chief items in their celebrations:

They carry the animals and dance. Women dance too. They drink moua, the adivasis’ berry liquor. Non-adivasi men are forbidden to go near these dancers at the fair. If they do they might harass the adivasi women sexually and the State dislikes fires in dry grass. Police come from the Tohri thana to avoid such incidents. The dance goes on from eleven in the morning to three o’clock. Then the real fun of Chotti fair starts. The fair is held in a spacious field. There is an adivasi archery

competition there in that meadow. The target is gradually moved back. Hitting the final bull's eye is exceedingly difficult. Two iron rings are tied onto two successive bamboo poles. There are three such rings. The bull's eye must be hit through all these rings. (3)

The Mundas were the first people to settle but they were dominated by “other Bihar sects and caste. Poor upper-caste, rich upper-caste” (6). So most of the people in the village were bonded labourers; some herded cattle, delivered milk of cows and goats themselves; some worked in the fields and barns of the Hindus. Parmi's mother-in-law used to sell goat's milk. Chotti often milked the cows and goats alone when everyone in Parmi's house went to do bonded labour. He worked very hard which impressed his sister-in-law very much. The tribals of Mundas used machetes and the blacksmiths of the village made their machetes, wooden works and other sharp weapons by themselves. Devi notes:

All Mundas have machetes. Dhani's machete is incredibly sharp and some random marks are inscribed upon the wooden handle. Dhani worked wood all day and made lovely toys for the Munda children. He spoke to no one. He cooked his own rice. Did not eat mixed meal, ghato. The village blacksmiths made machetes, floor-knives, scythes, spades, trowels. Dhani sat in front of the smithy and put together wooden handles for them. (7)

Devi even depicted how the tribals find their age. She describes this in the novel where Dhani Munda calculates his age by measuring the cycling ages of trees. Similarly, in other tribal groups they use nature to calculate their age: “Dhani must have been close to ninety when Chotti saw him. Dhani counted his age by the measure

of the two maturing and aging cycles of the sal and teak trees in the forest – from his childhood to this day” (5).

The word ‘Diku’ is used to refer to non-tribals. In the novel *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* ‘Diku’ refers to moneylenders, landlords and others who are outsiders, people from whom they wanted to maintain distance. The following line will agree the word and its meaning: “Diku import. Diku brings, Gormen supports. We know Diku - Gormen’s father’n son” (109). The death rites performed by Mundas are of a peculiar nature. They bury their dead and mark the place with a gravestone, which they call a Shonshan-Buru. As Dukhia Munda’s body was burnt after hanging by the jail authorities, he was given a proper burial later. When Dukhia died it left the village in great misery. Something good had been done for him by the establishment of Shonshan- Burn. Pahan comforted himself and then he uttered the words to mark the rites of death. He also blessed with some rice and a quarter rupee for Dukhia’s soul, so that it would rest in the other world. If a Munda is not buried in the proper Mundari way by erecting a Shonshan-Burn, they consider it an insult and unluck. Here Devi also talks about the improper burial done by the government for prisoners. The prisoners were normally tribal revolutionists; so they were hanged by the government and given an improper burial.

Oral narratives are sources of tribal history. The historical events in the life of Mundas are preserved in these forms of narration because Mundari language has no written form: “Munda language has no script. So they turn significant events into story, and hold them as saying, as song. That’s their history as well” (23). Devi has used this oral narrative to describe that even in olden days, before freedom of India, there were struggles in tribal groups for their freedom; but no one knows who they are. People know only about Mahatma, Nehru, Tilak, etc., but no one knows about

Santal, Dhani, Birsa etc., so through her writing, she wants them to be known by everyone.

Everything in Chotti Munda's life is a series of stories. Like many other stories of Munda life this narrative is also epic. . . . Chotti didn't know that the new epic of Munda life had been created twenty years ago. Dhani tells him. As a result of the relationship that grows between him and Dhani, Chotti also become a part of the epic, and his ultimate destiny becomes as enormous and suggestive as that of epic heroes. (8-9)

The distinctive way in which the oral narratives of the Mundas present their legendary figures as superhuman is evident from the manner in which they celebrate Chotti's prowess in archery. Every achievement in his life is turned into a song or a story: "All is story in Chotti Munda's life; everything becomes a tale. Story and song" (104). Devi wanted to write down the moments which have been recorded as songs orally. She used this sentence often in her chapters to show that every incident in the tribal life, especially Chotti Munda's life is made up of stories: "YES ALL'S A STORY IN CHOTTI Munda's life" (23). The tale of legendary hero, Birsa Munda, is transmitted by word of mouth. Chotti Munda hears it from Dhani Munda: "That is a tale. Ye are a Munda. A man came to this world for all o'ye. Father Earth. Lord Birsa..." (10). After Dhani's death his tale too turned into a song.

Devi gives every detail of the tribals, so that the life, culture, behaviour, religion will be part of history. In the folk imagination of the tribals, Chotti can even turn a blade of grass into a spear with which he saves the Daroga from a wild boar.

According to them, it is Chotti's magical power that compelled Daroga to lift the ban on his use of bow and arrow. Chotti's victory is turned into a folk song:

Ye picked a blade of grass
 Grass become spear
 Ye pierced t' boar
 He died right away
 And Daroga?
 He said, Go ye brave man,
 Join all games
 I was punished in this way
 Cos I banned yer play. (104)

There are lots of stories surrounding the life of Chotti. Through them Devi wants to bring out the life of tribals. She also mentions about the older generations through stories said by the characters in the novel. The best example is where Dhani Munda wanted to share his memories regarding his young age where there were many revolts led by his mates. His talk with Chotti shows how Mundas were under Dikus and other officials. "It's a long story. I want to tell t' tale, but there's no one to listen. And t' Munda folk here are broken-backed, livin' on t' kindness of t' Diku – Hindus" (9).

The tribal worldview is revealed here. They merge the natural and the supernatural, fact and fiction in their oral literature, which is history to them. The novel thus brings out the aesthetics of the oral traditions of the Mundas. Mahasweta Devi's fiction reveals a deep understanding of the tribal's need to hold on to their cultural identity amidst the loss of much of the material base of their lives. The tribals

were so innocent. Devi talks about the tribal's belief regarding the death of their leaders; their leaders would not die and they would come back to the world. As said in Tagore's *Gitanjali*, the body only gets destroyed and soul will live for ever. "When lord Birsa was in the je-hellhouse, Dhani Munda alone knew that the lord will return. This body will die, but his kernel and his spirit will not perish. He is the Earth Father, the engenderer of the world. Dhani knew it. The lord's body dies. Dhani slaves in the je-hellhouse" (23). Tribals don't lie whatever the situation is. They were innocent and honest people. "Munda don' lie" (37). On one occasion, Chotti refused to accept the amount given by the police to him for arresting his father. Devi depicts this to show how they were innocent and honest: "Pahan said in melancholy and serious voice, T' money's on yer behalf, lettin' ya know. Now we must return it to whoever's it is" (38).

During 1915-1916, the railway was extended up to Tohri and many people began to live there. It was the time when rupees were considered as great amount. For example: "Chotti brings twenty-five rupees in a year just playing the arrow. In 1915-1916 twenty-five rupees is a lot of money. . . . At this time the rail line goes up to Tohri and the shelters are put up for the railway people. They are outsiders" (31-32). They did not like the Moneylenders. According to them, the word is "most deplorable." Mundas never lend money and never allow any landlord to use the word against them. They think that money lending is something which irritates and tortures the life of the people. Because they were used as bonded labour for borrowing rice or money by getting thumb prints on paper: "Lord? Munda borrows but doesn' lend. Doesn't suck his brother's blood by moneylendin'. You've abused me" (32).

In olden days, people used stars to find their way during night time. "See that star in t' North. It's no' movin'. We knew our way, forest and hill by that star" (15).

The occupation of tribals was agriculture. But they were never allowed to hold even a tiny piece of land. The landlords made tribals to work very hard in the dry lands and then the land would become very fertile. It's the magic done by the hands of tribals. Devi says in her novel "Munda are agricultural by blood" (19). This line can also prove that the Munda tribals are farmers by birth. They are very close to nature and they love their land very much. To emphasise this, Devi says how Dhani Munda before resisting against the Police and Dikus says: "Lemme eat dirt, lemme eat home dirt! Home soil has t' sweet smell of rice lads! Lemme eat earth! In truth he rubs his face in dirt" (23).

Like other people, tribals also give more respect for the Mother. Devi has detailed this also in her novel that they not only give respect for their mother but also for their fathers: "In Chotti's society the mother's respect is equal to the father's" (27). There will be always some head in nation, state, district, city or village. Similarly, tribals also have their head and he is called "pahan" and he is like village panchayat head. He will settle the problems of Munda community. For other tribal groups also, pahan is the head but he will be taken from their community only, such as, Mundas, Oraons, Kurmi, etc., Devi wrote in the novel about this: "according to the adivasi social system, the pahan or the priest is the chief of the village community. They sit with the pahan and settle any problem that comes up. It is in fact possible that the pahan and the village headman are two separate people" (34).

Devi elaborates on the thinking of the tribals in the eyes of government or administration. They are not even considered as human beings:

It is not the wish of either the foreign or the indigenous administration that real relationships grow up between the officers and subject groups.

It is more auspicious for the administration to keep the relationship completely unreal. Then in the officer's eyes, the humans can remain a mathematical calculation of supplied census statistics. And in the eyes of the people the administration can remain the king's elephants.

Elephants that are no use to them, yet must be reared by them. (35)

Devi writes about bonded labour in all her works especially in *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*. She points out the existence of the bonded labourers: "I know me great-grandfather took four pice worth of maize from his great-granddad with his thumbprint. I still give him bonded labour for that" (50). Archery competition plays a vital role in the life of tribals. This is described by Devi in this novel: in the ground a tall wooden pole is planted. An eye is painted on the pole and a wooden plate is placed on top of the pole. Holes are made on the rim of the plate. Through those holes a connection of coloured ropes are hanged. There are paper birds the end of the ropes and the plate is turned around by a pulley below. At the full speed, the birds tied to the ropes are whirled and the arrow is pierced through the eye painted on the pole.

Tribals have the habit of saving their money for future. But their way of saving is old and different. They use to hide their money in land so that no one will steal it. This is done generation after generation. Devi says: "Whatever they get by selling kids to the tishan or to the forest contractor they put in a tin box and bury by the clay oven. If money is buried close to oven it will never be stolen" (62). Devi writes about the typical thinking and behaviour of the tribal people. Before 1930, for the tribals, the train is something to be admired. The prevalence of untouchability is practised even in trains. Trains were allowed only for the Britishers, high-class people, police, other government high officials, etc., So for tribals – train is "modernity, power, machine" (62). They were never allowed to get into the trains

until many years after Independence. Due to the invention of trains, the outside world of tribals became close to them. They could get news from city or town. When the train crosses their place, they watch it with childlike innocence. At first, the trains never stopped by their place and after 1930s they stopped for the sake of officers. Then they were also allowed to travel later.

In Wole Soyinka's play *The Lion and The Jewel*, the author has described about the dressing of a tribal girl called Sidi. She was just wrapped in a broad cloth just folded above her breasts and her shoulders were left bare. In Mahasweta Devi's *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, Devi describes Chotti wearing a dhoti of yellow colour and had stained it with the dye of the yellow colour kusum flower on the occasion of Chotti fair. Another common ritual and custom is giving something as sacrifice before prayer if they buy a new land or have any special occasion. They sacrifice hen or goat as offerings to Goddess Durga and they shower the blood of the animals.

In India there are many castes and religions. The tribals are also having many castes within their community but they are different from non-tribal people. They have oneness among them and help each other. They just need a contented life. They don't cheat anybody. During famine or drought they go to landlords and work as bonded labourers for very low wages. When they don't want to continue this, they ask Chotti's advice and act accordingly. The forest plays a crucial role in the lives of natives. The tribals started their life in forest and they wanted to end their life in the forest only. Devi depicts the forest as the source of everything. In the novel *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, the forest serves as shelter, provider of food and gives them sustenance. The tribals can be compared to forest as it is dense and dangerous to walk through it. But it is a safe and secure place for them to live in peace and happiness. To mingle with tribals is very difficult and dangerous for outsiders as they don't trust

people from outside. They feel that their culture and tradition will be spoiled by the outside people even though they would be amazed to watch the outsider's life and behaviour. Once they have contact with the outside world, they would come to understand that a lot changes are taking place.

In tribal community, especially in India both men and women are given equal importance. Men discuss their problems or situations with their women. But the so called high caste or upper caste men never give importance to women. Women are considered to be machines for giving birth to children and do all sorts of household work. Since tribals give equal rights to the women, widow remarriage is accepted. They allow their women to express their feelings freely. All major rituals or ceremonies are being done by the women. This shows how they are civilized even though they are not educated. Devi highlights how women should be regarded and given importance through the depiction of the Queen of Jhansi. Rani Lakshmi Bai was first ignored for being a woman but later was given importance. Every soldier got his inspiration from the Queen and was filled with enthusiasm and energy. This shows that women are also equal to men even in military skills.

Thus the chapter brings out the ways in which the natives have been living their lives under colonialism. Before independence, the Indians were living under the British and native Indians suffered a lot under them; but after independence, the plight of India did not change; the sufferings continued; but the cause of suffering changed. Instead of an alien, suppressing a native, a native in the name of a landlord, politician or diku started oppressing the tribals. Moreover, they have certain customs and practices which cannot and should not be erased.

Chapter 3

Colonialism

Mahasweta Devi's works cover two different periods of history and focus on the themes of colonialism, sufferings of natives, betrayal, resistance, etc. She describes how colonialism prevailed before independence along with the struggle for independence and how Indians made use of the independence. This chapter discusses colonialism in general; colonialism in India and the favours offered by the colonial rulers to Indians, the motto behind and how their true colour got exposed and their exploitation of Indians. It also deals with the influence of colonialism on the Indians who were supposed to be cultured and also the uncivilized tribals who in reality are cultured and innocent.

The Queen of Jhansi and *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* stand as good examples for colonialism and the effect of colonialism in India. They clearly help the readers to know the exact incidents that happened during the British rule. Devi's fiction talks about the exploitation of indigenous people by the mainstream Indians and the adivasi resistance. Chotti can be said to have lived through the most crucial times of History of India like the British rule, decolonisation, Independent India, Indira Gandhi's government and the Emergency, 1977 elections, the defeat of Indira Gandhi and the congress party.

Devi's other works can also be taken under the concept of colonialism as the common men are controlled or governed by non-natives of the land; yet for these two novels there is a difference even though they deal with colonialism. In *The Queen of Jhansi*, colonialism was that of the Britishers who belonged to foreign land who later started to govern India under them firmly - the period of Rani Lakshmibai and the

most crucial event - the great revolt or sepoy mutiny are covered in the novel. But in *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, it is the native Indians who controlled their own people especially tribal people who fall as victims to their selfish and cruel actions. Here the stick of colonialism was in the hands of Non-tribal people: the police, landlords, Government officials, dikus, politicians, etc., who wanted to see their own profit at the cost of the tribals. The development programmes for tribals framed by the Government are misused by the corrupt officers who worked under the Government.

Colonialism means establishment of colonizing nations through their military, economic and political control over them directly. This makes a complete change in colonized state affecting the lives of people, society, behaviour and architecture. The main motto of colonialism is to create wealth for the colonizing nation. Colonial governments generally make changes in the lives of local people, particularly in rural areas. It is the establishment, exploitation, maintenance, acquisition and expansion of colony in one territory. Hence, it brings about unequal relationships between the colonial power and the colony and often between the colonists and the indigenous population.

India's awareness of its history and culture was manipulated in the hands of colonial ideologues. India was still rooted in medieval ideas of theocracy and authoritarianism. Modern ideals like rationalism, nationalism and scientific temper, were yet to make inroads in India. The common people of India were hardly concerned about British expansion in India. The struggle of native princes against the colonial powers was perceived as their effort to hold on to their personal beliefs. There were no emotive sentiments that could have incited common people to rise against the British.

During 1600's, English East India Company came to India. They entered India for trading purpose and they were stunned to see the richness and wealth of India. That time most regions of India were conquered by Mughals. The Northern part of India was mostly under the control of Akbar, the greatest mughal emperor. They gave permission for English to set up their trading centre in India. Later English started to stay here and then they observed how Indian rulers ruled their regions. Then they began to put emperors in their hands and they used Indians for their sake.

British rule over many colonies had effects on colonized religions, cultures and ways of life, business activities and languages. Their aim was to set up colonies for economic purpose: to keep their raw materials, export goods and markets for selling their goods. After that they began to bribe using treacherous means massacre and enslavement. The colonialism generated certain changes and reactions all over the world and in various fields - political, cultural, educational, philosophical and racial. The cultural changes that took place in several aspects of life of indigenous units harmoniously integrated to the native culture created many problems such effects are clearly seen in novels of V.S.Naipaul namely, *The Middle Passage* and the *Overcrowded Barracoon*.

During the first half of 19th century, India was ruled by the East India Company very effectively and many reforms and improvements took place in British circles. The famous historian Thomas Macaulay, a member of the East India Company's Council during 1835, brought about many positive changes in the field of education. The British however became envious as soon as they found out that India was a land of rich resources. Most part of resources was taken by Britishers for its armed forces. Even though it ruled effectively, Indian economy faced no progression.

Indian towns especially Calcutta, Madras and Bombay felt the strongest influences of Europe. These are the places where new Indian intelligentsia started to bloom.

The first Christian missionaries who came to India started to open schools and colleges. They also forced Hindus and Muslims to convert to Christianity. The Britishers changed the traditions of Indian intellectuals by imposing their western thoughts and manners. They began to gain control over the lands in the countryside and raised the tax amount for the peasants. Even for their outlet of crops they fixed the prices. In course of time, the Britishers caused more of problems for the Indians: aristocracies lost power, new rulers were influenced, high taxes were levied, laws for holding lands were changed, etc., The British were the main reason for the Great Revolt which broke out during 1857.

The revolt first broke out in Bengal, later in the south and other places. As the British started to annex kingdoms and deposed the Indian rulers realised their plight. The British grabbed the power of estates from many landowners. During the middle of the 19th century, the rises of upheavals were more intense among the soldiers or sepoy of Bengal army. For many years the Bengal army had been very loyal and fought for the British faithfully. However, they would not go overseas and fight. This irritated the British. The use of cartridges for the new rifles was another trouble caused by British for the both Hindu and Muslim soldiers, as the cartridges were greased with the pig and cow fat. So the soldiers refused to use them and they were hanged to death or killed by the officers.

During the second half of 19th century, the British introduced many western technologies in India but in 1850s they were limited. Lord Dalhousie wanted modernisation and Europeanisation of the colony. Thereafter a great railway system

was constructed and laid for around 28,000 miles of track by 1904. Major canal schemes were also done by them. The Ganges canal was built to irrigate most part of central India. It helped the markets to a high level. Industries were also developed in India. Universities, colleges, schools also flourished in towns and cities. Under the constraints of a colonial order, there emerged a modern India at the end of 19th century with all modern technologies, western knowledge and culture. The postal system was also set up and upgraded. Metalled roads were also laid. Lord Dalhousie encouraged everything for the benefit of the Britishers. He implemented the act 'doctrine of lapse' which was infamous among the Indians. The principle of this is to annex the kingdom of any Indian ruler who died without having natural heir or one who was manifestly incompetent.

When the Bengal army refused to go overseas to fight, the British authorities regarded the event as a mutiny by large sections of the Bengal army. It was Bengal which took the lead in the initial mutinies but the soldiers could not do it powerfully. Among the soldiers of all places, the East India Company had good reputation at the beginning. They used soldiers for their personal profits and had no concern or regard for them.

The East India Company held Indian soldiers on behalf of British rule. Many families relied on the financial support provided by the British. Even many rulers depended on the stipend amount provided to them by the British. Devi in her novel, *The Queen of Jhansi* describes the fact that many Indian rulers depended on Britishers stipend amount as they faced problems such as amount for battles with other Indian rulers, famine, drought, scarcity of water etc., Common people depended on their rulers and they inturn depended on the Britishers. Devi explains one such situation in her novel: "Peshwa Bajirao II had been living there on a stipend from the British

government since 1818, and along with the Peshwa, many Maharashtrian subjects dependent on him also lived in and around Bithur” (19).

The British rulers very clearly managed to rule over the Indians. On many occasions, the loyalty of Indians was tested by the Britishers. The English rulers were so intelligent that they provided many benefits for Indian soldiers and Indians. They were very keen on not allowing more number of Indian soldiers to guard the state: “The English rulers were quite careful about not allowing too many Indian soldiers under an Indian state in power. Jhansi had 3,240 soldiers under its command, with 300 infantrymen, 200 more in cavalry and 40 in artillery” (31). They helped native rulers by giving their troops for battle. They saw that the Indians were not united for their cause. They used the disunity among the Indians for their own purpose. They gave bribes to Indian rulers and brought them under their control.

Devi gathered the information for the readers to know how India became colony for Britishers. During 1804, there was a pact made between Shivrao Bhau and the East India Company. Shivrao Bhau wrote an official letter or kharita to John Bailey, the governor General and the political representative of Bundelkhand, where mentioned in detail about the mutual military help along with seven conditions:

The Governor General accepted the conditions and signed the treaty. Since several conditions had not been mentioned in the original treaty, Shivrao Bhau submitted them in 1806. John Bailey handed these conditions over to the Governor General George Barlow in Kothra. In return for their loyalty, the Company acknowledged Shivrao Bhau’s and his heirs’ right to the throne of Jhansi; they were granted freedom to rule the kingdom as they wished. (14)

The right to the throne of Jhansi for Shivrao Bhau and his heirs were acknowledged by the company only because of their loyalty to Britishers. The Britishers allowed them to rule as they wished and Indian rulers also allowed the English to take over the authority on them for their current benefit or favour. Britishers were very intelligent that they always made pacts with Indian rulers or princes in order to avoid problems in the future.

In 1817, Peshwa Bajrao II agreed to let the East India Company have complete authority over Bundelkhand. In the same year, the Company accepted the 11- year- old minor Ramchandra Rao's accession to the throne according to the agreement established with him, and approved of his subedar slants. Gopalrao, Ramchandra Rao's guardian, died in 1822, and Naro Bhikaji took his place. (15)

As a colonised nation, the rulers had to get permission from Britishers to rule their own country. It was too pathetic for the natives to be under the control of someone who came from an alien land. However, the Indian rulers were really so loyal to the British even though they got only insults and disappointments.

Devi shows how the Indians were so loyal to Britishers that they did as the Britishers instructed them without asking a single word. They always signed pacts with Indian rulers as a symbol of bond between them. Gangadhar Rao's loyalty is brought out by Devi: "In his dealings with the English, Gangadhar maintained the sense of independence and self-esteem. Various tales about him circulated among contemporary English residents and army officers" (34). When the English asked why Gangadhar Rao wore women's clothing, he replied that in India, men failed to behave like men and in such a case why couldn't he wear women's jewellery. His tone shows

his incapability to behave like a native king and his loyalty to the British did not let him speak against them and it is described as the following lines:

As the outfits and ornaments for the actress of his theatre were executed under his supervision, Captain Gordon once asked him, ‘Is what wicked people say true, that you occupy yourself in your free time with women’s clothing?’ Gangadhar replied, ‘You came from distant shores and took over all the kingdoms of India. We have no other responsibilities, so why can’t we wear jewellery if we feel like it.’ (34)

According to the policy of doctrine of lapse the first state to be annexed was Satara, and then Jaitpur, Sambalpur, Nagpur and Jhansi would follow suit. Indian soldiers blindly followed the orders placed by their officers of East India Company. Later they saw that their land had been annexed by the British. They started to acquire most of the lands through this policy. They ill-treated the native Indian rulers or princes of the regions which were annexed by them. This policy was thought prudent lest the newly acquired people rose up against their new masters. Devi talks about this merciless policy which made the rulers join along with the soldiers to raise a war against the British rule. For instance, when Ramchandra Rao was in his death bed, Colonel Sleeman chose Raghunath Rao to be the next King above the obstructions of Sakhubai. “At this time, Colonel Sleeman arrived in Jhansi. In spite of all Sakhubai’s obstructions, Raghunath Rao was chosen to be king. The year was 1835. But Raghunath Rao was afflicted with leprosy, and died in 1838. He had no legitimate offspring” (17). When Raghunath Rao died of leprosy again confusion for the throne came and East India Company chose the King by selection commission:

After Raghunath Rao's death, the question of success to the throne of Jhansi arose once again. Four claims were made by, respectively, Raghunath Rao's legal wife, Ali Bahadur, Krishna Rao Vinayak Chandorkar and Gangadhar Rao, the youngest son of Shivrao Bhau. A select commission from the East India Company investigated these claims and selected Gangadhar Rao. (17)

If they don't have confidence on any ruler of India, English took power in their hands without any hesitation that they were living in some other country. Yet they tortured many Indian soldiers and officers who supported English officers:

Taking note of this unruly state of affairs, Gangadhar Rao notified the current political representative of Bundelkhand, Sir Simon Fraser. Fraser himself came and had troops brought in from Sagar under the leadership of Sir Thomas Aubrey. Besieging the fort, Fraser gave notice to Sakhubai to surrender within 48 hours." (17-18)

Gangadhar was loyal to the English rulers. He did how they asked him to do yet they did not trust him completely. First they gave respect to him as he followed their orders and acted in favour of them. After that they held all the control over the native Indians. They began to insult the natives and tortured them like slaves. Gangadhar Rao decided to visit the town on the feast day of Dusserah. The British army refused to give him security as the feast day fell on Sunday. According to their religion and culture Sunday was considered to be a holy day on which they never go out. The refusal of military band for Gangadhar Rao and his prestige had been insulted. The British government was not ready to give any excuses for the discontent which prevailed among the feudal state rulers.

A few native Indian rulers often supported Britishers in order to make their positions and money safe and secure. If natives had supported the British they would have got awards and titles: “During the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857-1858, the sons of this same Rajendra Mitra, Barada and Gurucharan, helped the British and earned the Raibahadur title for their loyalty” (35). All these details are clearly portrayed in this novel by Mahasweta Devi. The British came first for trade; then they slowly started to interfere in the business of native Indian rulers. They framed even the principles for Indian rulers to rule over their kingdom. The annexation of Jhansi by the British was not accepted as an act of justice by many historians who supported the British rule completely. They cancelled the adoption of Gangadhar Rao to rule Jhansi by his heirs.

Dorin made a draft to be signed by Dalhousie for the annexation of Jhansi along with his assistants. In that draft, he also mentioned that Jhansi would never be an independent state even if it was a part of Tehri Orchha. The annexation of Jhansi invited only troubles. As “Rice Holmes has said, ‘It is certain that if Jhansi and Ayodhya were not taken over by the British, most of the problems that the British government had to face in 1857-1858, could have been avoided’” (65). As soon as Jhansi came under the rule of Britishers, they dismissed the old soldiers of the king by giving them two month’s salary. Many old officers of king were dismissed and the system of army was also changed. Jhansi was annexed on the grounds of the Doctrine of Lapse.

Everything had to be reported to the officers regularly. All the happenings were reported to authorities at various levels and they waited for the orders to be given to them by the Governor General. In the highly centralised system of British administration, everything had to be committed to paper and no action could be taken until it had been approved by a higher authority. A torrential flood of papers flowed

endlessly towards the Governor-General's office, silting up the channels of communication, stifling all initiatives.

The English cancelled the adoption case of Gangadhar Rao and Rani Lakshmibai. Rani Lakshmibai wrote many letters detailing about the necessity of adoption of an heir in order to maintain their lineage. Those letters were passed to many officers of different levels for approval but they were rejected by the Governor General by the act of doctrine of lapse. Major Ellis was the one who forwarded all the letters to Malcolm from the King and the Queen. After the death of Gangadhar Rao the whole chapter, that is seventh chapter fully about the annexation of Jhansi on the basis of doctrine of lapse.

Letters played an important role as everything written elaborately by the Queen for the case of adoption was translated by Ellis to his authorities. Devi quoted from the *History of the Indian Mutiny* by T.R. Holmes to make a strong point against the Britisher's injustice in annexing Jhansi which paved way for the great revolt. Those letters stand as evidence for what happened during those times but still much information have remained unrevealed for the reason that the fame of Britishers should not be reduced.

Even the war between British and the Indian soldiers had been written down in a letter and passed to the higher officers immediately. Each and every detail had been recorded. In incident English men, women and children were surrounded for assassination; but the Queen helped them escape; yet she could not save some of them though she tried her level best to save them. She was called as the main cause for the massacre of Jhansi. The sepoys were angry with the Bengali postal clerk who provided shelter for Mr. Fleming and due to the threatening created by the sepoys the

Queen gave 1,000 soldiers to them; but she tried to rescue the English from the sepoys. Even the historians Kaye and Malleon did not support the Queen for her indirect support in the massacre. They also know that she did not do it purposely:

But Kaye and Malleon had already said, ‘In our personal opinion, the British government had treated the Queen with great injustice, and she protested naturally in her own instinctive way.’ ... While they overwhelmingly praised the Queen, they did not hesitate to blame her for the massacre, and even pointed out her logic for cooperating in the carnage. (121)

The letters which had been sent between rulers and British officers show how rulers followed the proper procedure to communicate with higher officers regarding their rule of kingdom and other official matters.

Devi portrays the medium of communication which prevailed during those days. She has also detailed the war incidents with references provided in the book *History of the Indian Mutiny*. These references provide the information which is true and believable. The bravery of a Young Lady who led 10,000 soldiers behind her for the great war of Independence is the remarkable incident in the history of India. The letters from the battle field mentioned about the bravery of a Young lady who resembled like a man in the war field. Hugh Rose wrote about Rani as “Although a lady, she was the bravest and best military leader of the rebels. A man among the mutineers” (289). The English soldiers were stunned to see her sword fight and her horse riding. The last minute of her life was so critical that either she had to be killed by the British or kill herself. She chose to kill herself in the battlefield rather than being tortured and killed by the foreign man.

The British soldiers killed many innocent Indians who belonged to Jhansi and her family and dependent of royal family when they came to know about the involvement of the Queen in the massacre of the sepoy. After the death of Rani also they searched for her son Damodar Rao and her other maids and men who guarded her son. All of them ran away from Jhansi to save the life of prince Damodar. They faced starvation for many days and they hid themselves in the forest and caves to save their lives. In order to save the life of prince, some men gave their life to the British. They also sold all the jewellery given by Rani to save their life but they used that amount for the prince.

Then the revolt started to slow down but many lives were lost and many lost their families, houses and other belongings. The great revolt by the sepoy was the threshold of the freedom of Independent India. Failures are the stepping stones for success. The great revolt had been a failure for Indians but this made a major impact on the lives of millions of Indians to break out for the huge and great battle against the British for the freedom of India. This made Indians to become as one and it terrified Britishers. Indians again proved that unity is strength by gathering together for the war of Independence.

Devi shows how the same colonialism had its effects on the Indians and started prevailing among the Indians even after the British left our Motherland. The aspects of colonialism had been practised by Indians on their own people. While Britishers left India they divided it. That is separation of the Hindus and Muslims which still exists in India. People fought and killed each other in the name of religion. Moreover, the murder of innocent tribal people and low caste was very cruel. Women were tortured, raped and brutally murdered by the non-tribals. These incidents were never known to people outside the forest. Like the forest which is too dense and

dangerous, the lives of tribals were also secretive and in danger that might come due to the brutality of non-tribal people.

Devi in her other novel *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, talks about the colonialism of the native Indians who started oppressing the tribals in the name of Bonded labour. They bound them as slaves' generations after generations. They provided very less wages, got a lot of hard work, tortured them, beat them, etc., Their plight can be explained by comparing Indian tribals with Africans who were taken as slaves to America and tortured. Many African writers wrote about their poor condition. For instance, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and James Baldwin are a few writers who dealt with the plight of the black.

In Devi's *Chotti Munda and His Arrows*, the Mundas of the Chotti village, who in the pre-colonial era were owners of their village land in accordance with their Khuntkatti system of land tenure. Then their lands were taken away by the Hindu landlords who made them their bonded slaves. It is found that most of the tribals and Hindu untouchables in the village were bonded labourers to their landlords. Their indebtedness to the landlord passes on from generation to generation. Parmi's mother-in-law gives a bonded labour to the landlord for ten seers of rice taken from him by her great grandpa-in-law: "For some famine on some faraway day yer brother took ten seer rice at country measure – which comes to less – gave free labour for that bond, his son me granda-in-law gave it, me father-in-law gave, we are givin' - okay..." (11). However, Dhani Munda could not bear "the bonded sweated work of the Mundas for an infinite debt repayment" (10).

Parmi's in-laws told Chotti not to go to Dhani Munda and said about his past life of bravery: "I still say, when t' bow's in his hands, Munda society and families

are in danger” (7). The problem is not for the Munda community but for the landlords, dikus and police. So, they tortured the Munda community instead of Dhani. Munda people were afraid of him when he raises bow. Dhani Munda was never allowed to take bow and arrow in his hands as the police and other landlords were afraid that something bad would happen to them when he raised his hands with bow. The colonial aspect is very clear in this aspect. They had all the control over them. They are the ones who gave orders to them. They never allowed Dhani to go anywhere as he was the main cause for the rebel.

Colonialism here is different. The heartless and selfish people still prevail in the world. Same was the case of tribals during those days. Devi could not tolerate this and has written in her work so that millions of people would come to know about the war for independence even in tribal community. Many know only about the struggle for independence of India but there was also struggle in the forest against the landlords who had controlled the tribes for many years. For many generations they were controlled by landlords, dikus, police and moneylenders. They controlled them in all situations even in their traditional functions by restricting their game and fun: “Now even more police pressure. We’ll eat game and ha’ fun, but now they scare even if they see t’ Munda dance and sing. Right away t’ polis come to see what’s up. And t’ polis’ll charge board, lodgin’, travel” (13).

Dhani got deeply disturbed because of the bonded labour. When Chotti asked him whether he would die, he replied that he was not interested in his things as the Mundas worked as bonded labourers. They got tortured by the moneylenders and no police or anyone could speak for them. Mundas were killed mercilessly. He also said that his lord had told him that he would be born for any Munda mother but that never happened as Mundas were under the control of moneylenders or landlords. He felt sad

for those who sacrificed their life for the freedom of their community people from the moneylenders and other non-tribal people:

No Hul, no Mulkoï struggle, no Ulgulan. Me lord said I'll be born again in t' belly of a Munda mother, Dhani! No trace of that either. T' Mundas now work bonded labour with down-low heads, they die at t' hands of t' moneylender. All's become t' train line, t' polis watch, t' muscle force of King-Emperor and Daroga – no end in this – me mind's not in such a world Chotti. (16)

One day suddenly Dhani disappeared. The police started to wonder where he would have gone. Then it struck them that the anniversary of Birsa's death where they would be sharing their memories in Sailrakab with all the Birsa's old comrades. They knew that the meeting was totally secret. The police went to that place and arrested the people who had the name of Dhani. They could not arrest the real Dhani. So the police beat everyone in the market and tortured them to know about Dhani Munda: "In the month of June, as Birsa's death day approaches, many Dhani Mundas are captured. Many of them are called 'Dhani'. Unfortunately, none of the captured ones is the sought-after Dhani. Over-enthusiastic police beat the markets and, capturing scores of Dhani Mundas, they exhaust the station officer" (22).

When in the case of the other story it is the loyalty put to test and here it's the hard work which had been used by the landlords. The landlords provided very low wages to the Adivasis and regarded them as untouchables. They saw the tribal people as low creatures and made them do all sorts of household works. Mundas never talked against their masters. They did whatever work was given to them. They made even

the barren land to yieldable land. They were never allowed to get a land of their own. If at all they were provided the land it would be rocky or barren.

The Mundas worked very hard to make the land fertile for vegetation. Once the landlord knew that the land was fertile, again he would get back the land: “Even then barren land. If I buy fertile t’ Lala’ll grab” (39). They forced the Mundas to return the land. Sometimes beating or making them to get arrested by the police. In this novel, Devi explains this with the incident where a man named Lala Baijnath was a landlord in Chotti’s village. He could not accept the peaceful life lead by Chotti’s father Bisra Munda. Chotti won in all the arrow competition and won prizes such as, rice, meat, coins, pig etc., so Bisra did not go to work in the land of Baijnath. The landlord became furious and insulted Bisra by calling him “moneylender for Mundas”. He preferred the tribals because they would not demand more money; if they got them under debt they would make them as bonded labour:

Lala Baijnath was not pleased with the well-being in Bisra Munda’s household. . . Adivasis work for incredibly low wages. Don’t like bickering. They work as they give word. . . It’s much more comfortable to work with untouchables and Mundas, with whom Baijnath has a creditor-debtor relationship. In whatever way, it is right that untouchable and adivasis should remain poor. (32)

The Mundas and other tribals of the village sought the help of the landlord and moneylender Tirathnath, especially during seasons of drought, when there was nothing left for them to eat. The landlord demanded their thumbprints and made them bonded labourers forever, before giving them food grains. The tribals had no escape from this vicious system. For the small quantities of grain that the moneylender gave

the tribals, he took their thumb impressions on blank pieces of paper and made them bonded labourers.

This novel like many other works of Devi, especially *Doulati*, describes the sufferings of the bonded labours. They are easily got as slaves because they would work for very low wages and give their generations also as bonded slaves: “It’s very easy to bind the adivasis in debt. If they once put their thumbprint on paper, they give bonded labour for generations. Of course this is just as applicable to untouchables” (32). The bond is for ten years and before that no one can escape from this. To get some rice to eat during any famine or drought seasons, many people became bonded slaves and labourers:

Ye’ll gie bonded labour for a thumbprint, f’r a bit of rice- wheat to eat, I’ll not say ‘yeah’ to that. Tis bonded labour won’ be quit in ten generations. Everyone falls into this trip. Sell all t’ Ganjus, Dusads, Chamars, Dhopas – all the oppressed, tribals and outcastes – tied up in bonded labour. I won’t say ‘yeah’ to no one. But thing is, can’t say ‘no’ neither. Why not? Then ye’d say, If we put thumbprint on paper at least we’d eat. (48-49)

The landlords gave work for Mundas during drought and famine. So there were no reports regarding famine or drought to the government. During such critical periods, the Mundas would rush to landlords; but the government was not aware of it. They did not locate the tribal areas as drought or famine hit regions and thus never allotted any funds for those areas.

Bonded labourers were given less money and often the landlord’s managers would not mark things in the book. Hence it would seem that they did not pay any

money. These Mundas are uneducated and their credulity was used by the managers who always cheated them. They used to take cuts at the market for their crop or anything from their farm. Dukhia another Munda, was also a bonded slave as his grandfather borrowed money from the Nakata King's grandfather. Nakata King's manager always took cut from him at the market and noted nothing in his book: "Dukhia says in a dry voice. Bonded labour pays nothin' back in his book. Me father's father borrowed and bound our whole line" (65). When Mundas or Oraons or any tribals had money they would snatch it from them. The tribal people work very hard but their difficulty never ends. In all the arrow competition many Munda and other young boys would participate to win and received rice instead of money. When they received money, it would be taken by the manager of the landlords. Dukhia won the fair contest but requested them to give him paddy as the manager will snatch money from him. After few days again the manager would come to the market to take cut from Dukhia at the market. The manager with his shoes hit Dukhia's hand and asked his peon to take his basket. He called him disloyal as he grew pepper in his own field when he was a bonded slave:

he says, Ye said he wouldn't badmouth no more. But then he comes to take his cut from t' market. I'm sittin' here with red pepper—come to take his cut why does he move me hand with t' tip of his shoe? Like a pigeon guards her young I was guardin' me basket, mate. Hittin' me hand with his shoe he says to his peon—t' peon had a spear in hand—he tells t' peon, lift his basket. He's a swelled head with arrer play, t' fucker shirts work, he's a disloyal bastard, he gives me bonded work with no will and grows pepper in his own field with all his soul. Gie a bit o' water here. (69)

The sufferings of these bonded labourers thus were endless. Non-tribals tortured the innocent tribal people because they belonged to low caste. The government allotted many funds for the development of the tribals but they were looted by many officers in the government. The politicians came to see tribals only for their votes and not for their development. After Independence, the contractors came to the forests for cutting timber and asked the tribals to work for them. The contractors gave them more salary than the landlords.

Many Mundas and other villagers moved to other places for their survival. Many villagers converted to Christianity for the purpose of food and money given by their new masters or Christian Missionaries in other villages. They were so innocent that they got converted so that they would not only get their bread, but also escape from the landlords. Chotti felt sad that their culture would be destroyed soon and it could be seen only on traditional festival days.

The mundas were afraid of the landlords and each one in the family had to go to the landlords as bonded slaves while other men would go to work in the forest. The contractor was a good man as he got lot of profit and so he gave more wages. Soon this news reached the landlord Tirathnath, other landlords and Lalas. They arranged a meeting with the contractor so that they could ask him not to give the tribals wages any more. Chotti had contact with the officers in the town especially English officers behaved well to him. Through the contact with the outside Chotti came to know about the exact wages that should be paid to them.

Chotti informed his entire tribal group about this and they went to their landlords asking for more wages. They demanded that if they did not raise their wages they would not come to work in the fields and instead would go to work in the forest

for the contractors. The landlords got angry and got help from the politicians like Romeo and his men who belonged to the Congress party. He came to the forest and threatened that he would kill everyone if they did not work for their landlords; he killed Pahan and his wife mercilessly; he hit women in the village when men went to work in the forest. He also burnt huts of the villagers and by all these ways he spoiled the peace which prevailed in the life of the tribals.

The police often visited the forest with their men to catch the Naxalites. They also killed many innocent people in order to get the Naxalite. The Police and Daroga knew very well that the riots caused in the forest were by the members of the Congress party. Chotti even though uneducated did everything according to the law. He gave complaints on the congress members. They were arrested and thrown out of the party. Enraged they again came to the village and destroyed all the huts and killed many innocent people.

The colonialism in *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* can be understood in a very simple way by making comparison with the Tamil film 'Paradesi' by director Bala. It is taken from the English movie 'Vagabond'. The film is based on real life incidents that took place before independence in the 1930s. The main plot related to this chapter is where the Kangani offers work for the villagers at the British tea plantation at the hillside. He promises them proper accommodation and high wages. Many villagers hoped that he would send money to their family as promised. When the villagers finally arrived at the tea plantation, the things were different. The Kangani and henchmen ruled the plantation. The British plantation manager did not care for the workers. It was soon revealed that the wages of the workers' went for their food and lodging. The workers finally realised that they had been slaves to the British businessmen.

The workers were converted into Christianity rather than being treated by the doctor for their sickness. They were never allowed to escape from their place. At the end, when it was the hero Rasa's time to leave the tea plantation, he saw that his wife and son come as slaves to that place. He cried loudly saying that they had fallen into the pits of hell. There is slight difference between the film and Devi's novel. It is to show that colonialism prevailed in India and that it was practised by Indians on their own people. Devi's works based on the real life incidents of the tribals before independence are still prevalent in this modern India.

The cruelty of colonialism still prevails in India in some forms directly or indirectly. The foot prints of British did not fade and it still lives in the forms of such selfish persons such as politicians, police, landlords, dikus, etc., The innocent people can bear the torture and violent actions only to some extent and one day they will turn against the persons who hit them. Devi, through her writings resists the efforts of the mainstream community which tries to suppress the tribals by using all means. She records the oral narratives of these tribals so that they too can have their place in history.

Chapter 4

Resistance

In viewing subaltern historiography Mahasweta Devi focuses on the events happening and also the indigenous culture. According to Beniwal and Vandana, in their article “Subaltern Historiography and Literary Aesthetics: A Reading of Mahasweta Devi’s Fiction”,

Mahasweta’s subaltern historiography undertakes to uncover the lives of the subaltern/ marginalised group, which includes those who are mentioned in the annals of history (albeit in passing references), and also the ordinary men and women. It expresses disenchantment with the dominant/ official historiography which focuses on the ruling personae and the events surrounding them. While exposing the hegemonic politics of the elite, she highlights the instances of indigenous resistance that provide the subaltern not only their very own historical tradition but also their own role models. (28)

After being patient for very long years, the colonised nations started to raise their voice against the British rule. The natives were happy at first with the comforts and other benefits provided to them by the British; Britishers began to exploit the native and took their lands, cultures, religions, customs and their traditions. Later the natives decided to rise for retaining their culture and land. Indians were so loyal that they were put in many horrible things to do. They were tortured by the Britishers to the extent of hell. Then slowly Indians started to protest against the Britishers. First, they did not listen to whatever the English say to them and then by waging war against them. There were many battles for getting freedom. This chapter deals with

the two aspects of resistance: one by waging war against the British and then by raising their voice against native Indian officers.

Mahasweta Devi brought how patient Indians were under foreign rule. Their loyalty was put to test. To be under someone itself was shame for Indians but Indians were ruled for more than 300 years and that was a great shame for Indian rulers. The two novels deal with how Indians resisted the foreign rule and after independence they resisted the Indian politicians, selfish leaders, etc.,

In her first novel, *The Queen of Jhansi*, Devi talked about colonialism and its impact on Indians. When the loyalty of someone is tested to the core, one may not want to prove one's loyalty instead would start raising one's voice against who tests them. Indian rulers and people were very loyal to the British in the beginning but they were insulted and humiliated rather than rewarded. The Queen was so loyal like her husband Gangadhar Rao to the British. They legally applied for the adoption of a heir to continue their clan. After the death of Gangadhar Rao, the adoption case was discussed by the panel of members. It was rejected on the basis of the doctrine of lapse.

The legal authority to rule Jhansi was cancelled and it was annexed by the Britishers. The soldiers of the King were dismissed and many changes were brought in Jhansi. Many were given three months salary and dismissed. They agreed to provide Rs. 5,000 as a monthly stipend for the Queen. Major Ellis was sent to announce the news of the annexation of Jhansi to the Queen. The Queen was sitting behind the screen when the notice was sent by Malcolm with the order of Dalhousie's and was read aloud by Ellis.

The people who gathered in the court along with the Queen were shocked to hear the news. It was the first time that the Queen protested against the British by

uttering such strong words like “‘Meri Jhansi doongi nahin.’ ‘I will not give up my Jhansi’” (68). It was the first time of protest against the English when many of the lands disappeared from the rulers. No one had the courage to resist so far. But the Queen could not do anything so she accepted the stipend amount. The British asked her to surrender everything and even the treasure of Jhansi was also to come under the control of the English.

When the English annexed Jhansi, they started to control the people under them. The Queen spent Rs. 60,000 for the expenses of Umeshchandra Banerji, a Bengali lawyer, to go to London for her adoption case. There was no answer from them. They also declared that adoption of Gangadhar Rao was rejected and Damodar can claim his property when he reaches the age and the Queen is not eligible for it. Even Ellis was transferred from Jhansi because he might help the Queen and his people. Major Erskine of Jabalpur was appointed to do the administrative duties of Malcolm and Ellis. After this incident, the Queen prepared herself mentally to protest against the British.

Colvin, the Governor of the North Western Provinces, ordered the Queen to repay the past debt of Rs. 36,000 as monthly instalments from her monthly stipend. Captain Gordon and Skene did not provide the maintenance amount for the Mahalakshmi temple. They felt that the amount was too much for doing the ‘meaningless idolatry’. The evening lights were never lit in the temple from that day. Many people, holy men and ascetics were sent out from Jhansi. The Queen protested for the purpose of her people but nothing happened by her protest. The Muslims and Hindus felt that their respect and faith for the religion, sacrament and cultural heritage had been belittled. Skene opened a slaughterhouse where cow and pigs meat were supplied to the military camp. In the open avenue on yokes, the blooded animal skins

were carried. For this also the Queen protested against the British again but it was also dismissed. These seem to be small incidents but keeping all these incidents three years later the leaders started to raise their voice against the British.

Upto 1855 the Queen never had personal insult. On the Seventh year of Damodar, the Queen wanted to perform the sacred thread ritual for him. She asked the Government to grant her one lakh rupees from the fund. But they rejected her request saying that in the future Damodar may claim his money. It was a deep humiliation and it made her heart break. Many wealthy people came forward to help and she did her duties by keeping the rage of fire in her heart. A great protest erupted because of the tortures and oppressions which were tolerated by the millions of people so far.

When the British wanted the Muslim soldiers under them to fight against their own people, they refused because it is prohibited by Koran to fight against their own men. So the Muslims raised questions regarding fighting against their own kind. The Muslim subedar, named Maqbul Haidar of the 27th Native Infantry raised his voice to show his protest. But he was soon ordered to be shot to death by the officers. Then in the 64th Native Infantry, the soldiers protested that they would not go far away from their homeland for fighting. It happened in the Afghanistan where all the people were Muslims. The soldiers were both Hindus and Muslims who had some dissatisfaction with the Britishers. They both had abhorrence for animal skins as they were made to wear sheep skin coats for the bitter winter cold. The officers ordered twenty five of the soldiers to be hanged on the main street of Lahore and forty soldiers to be dismissed.

During 1856, a young sepoy was fogged to death before his team of sepoys for his disobedience. Then the use of cartridges which are greased with cow and pig

fat caused major discontent among the Indian sepoy. Mangal Pandey was the one who first refused to use the rifle and cut the heads of two officers. This infuriated the officers and they killed him. The British threatened the sepoy that unless they use the rifle they would lose their life.

There were frequent rebellions by the Kols and other tribals, the Ferajis and the Moplas against the English. Millions of people were oppressed, tortured and killed. When a rebellion was putdown by the Britishers in one place it started in another place. All these things are recorded by Devi in *The Queen of Jhansi*, “The revolution of 1857 was not just a unique and isolated event against the colonial empire” (93).

The expansion of the British dominion in India and the growth of an Indo-British administrative system, compounded with ruthless extortion, fraud and oppression by up-country merchants and moneylenders led to economic, social and political discontent, particularly in agrarian and tribal society throughout India. Agitations and militant movements started in different regions- the most notable among these being the Bareilly Rising of 1816; the Kol Rising of 1831-32 and other uprisings in Chhotanagpur and Palamau; Muslim uprisings like the Faraiji revolt at Barasat on 1831 headed by Syed Ahmad and his disciple Titu Mir, the Faridpur revolt led by Dudu Mian on 1847, the Mopla outbreaks in August 1849, 1851, 1852 and September 1855, and the Santhal Insurrection of 1855-56 led by Sidhu and Kanhu. There were also revolts made by the elderly Muslim farmers from the village of Pabna during 1937-38.

The Englishmen had done many injustices to the soldiers or sepoy. The sepoy position was uncertain as they belong to the peasant class. Many of the soldiers lost their land and hence dissatisfied with the policies of Britishers. The main

leaders of the Sepoy Mutiny were Ahmedullah, Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, Nana Saheb, Aijmullah, Tatia Topi, the Rani of Jhansi, Kunwar Singh and Feroz Shah. Malleson had even said that the secret codes of the rebellion were circulation of chappathi and lotus petal which were introduced by the Queen in the most part of Northern India.

The sepoys gathered under the King Bahadur Shah in Delhi. They were flaming with the rebellions spirit against the English. In Delhi, the sepoys won the English. Then the sepoys of Jhansi were spied by the English army officers. Even though the Queen was angry with the British, she tried to help them by informing Skene to take all the English men and women to leave to Datia. She also informed that it was not safe for English but Skene was not ready to listen to her words. The 600 sepoys with arms surrounded 65 English men, women and children. The Queen gave her 40 private men to guard the English. After three days Captain Dunlop and Ensign Taylor were killed by the sepoys. Lieutenant Campbell got wounded and escaped.

The common people also tried to help the English women and children. In one case, a Bengali postal clerk helped an Englishman, Mr. Fleming by giving shelter to him. The sepoys got very furious. They killed Mr. Fleming and plundered the houses of Bengalis. The sepoys asked help from the Queen. They asked her to give Rs.3,00,000. First she hesitated and then she gave her jewellery to them. She also informed about the massacre to Erskine but he thought that the Queen had secretly helped the sepoys. The Queen did not have any involvement in the massacre. The English suspected her and put commission of enquiry on her. Erskine played a double role. He made the Queen to rule Jhansi on behalf of the British.

The Queen brought Jhansi back to normalcy. She gave soldiers their jobs and the taxes were reduced. People of all castes were invited to stay in Jhansi. The

Muslims, Afghans and Pathan soldiers were made to join in the army. The measures taken by the Queen were:

First the Queen exempted the poorest farmers of Bundelkhand from the previous year's taxes and thus earned their trust and affection. The 3,240 soldiers, dismissed in 1854 and unemployed since, were recalled. People from higher castes, like the Bundelas and Thakurs, as well as communities such as the Kachhis, Koris and Telis, came to join her army. During those times of fierce loyalty to one's religious faith, the Queen invited Afghan, Pathan and Makrani Muslims to join forces with her and inspired them with her trust. Thus her army started taking shape. (124)

She ruled the state efficiently and wrote letters to Erskine about the state affairs. There were no replies from him. He did not help the Queen when she needed it and she also understood that he could not be depended on because of his double role and hence "she declared herself the guardian of the minor heir to the throne of independent Jhansi and introduced currency in her own name. Her own flag was raised over Jhansi fort, above the original Jhansi flag with the insignia of a kettledrum and fly-whisk" (138).

Devi gives all these things in a detailed manner to prove that the Indians were very loyal but they had been exploited, tested and betrayed by the Britishers. So the Indians too started resist against the colonial power. The Queen prepared for the war against the British and there were many uprisings all over central India. The King of Banpur and the Queen organised the resistance by uniting the leaders from Rathgarh and other places: "The military preparations in Rathgarh Fort were sufficient for a long-drawn battle. Rations were enough to provide meals for 3,000 people for a year

and a huge mould for casting cannons was in stock. There were also numerous horses, cows, and camels and a huge pile of correspondence regarding the anti-British resistance” (167). In spite of all arrangements, the Rathgarh revolt proved a failure. On the Indian side 127 members were hanged and around 200-300 were dead whereas on the British side, only five were killed and 16 wounded.

The next resistance took place in Barodia organised by the Queen and the King of Banpur. The battle of Barodia is very important for the Indians because of their military strength. The resistance of Barodia brings out the counselling skill of the Queen of Jhansi and the King of Banpur. All over Bundelkhand the Queen had her military divisions and also with Tatia Topi and Rao Saheb in Kalpi. It was a great struggle against the English after 100 years. In that battle Captain Neville was killed. The villagers of Barodia resisted against the English when the English approached the Barodia. Many Indians left the battle field afraid of approach of the English. Some soldiers fought till their death. Many of them sacrificed their life by not allowing the English to enter into Barodia. Hugh Rose wrote about it: “The Valaities and Pathans fought with their accustomed courage, several of them, even when dying, springing from the ground and inflicting mortal wounds with their board swords” (170). Around three died and 20 were wounded on the English side but 500 died on Indian side. More than 300 members were farmers who sacrificed their life with the weapons such as rocks, bows, arrows and spears. Again Indians gathered many soldiers and strengthened their military bases.

The forests were used as places for Indians to hide and gather strength for the war against the British. The mountain passes between Sagar and Shahgarh districts were also places chosen by the King of Banpur and Shahgarh to struggle against the English. There were uprisings of Marathas. The Queen prepared her army in the great

way in Jhansi. She was able to organise a large number of soldiers for the struggle of Independence. She was also keen that nothing should be left for the enemy while preparing for the war: “Then, the fields under cultivations were burnt, trees were chopped down and the water in wells and ponds were poisoned. The Queen’s intention was to see that no food would be available to the enemy, no fodder for horses or beasts of burden, no drinking water to quench their thirst” (177). This, she hoped, would weaken the enemy’s force.

The King of Banpur with 8,000 soldiers waited in the Narut passes. Hugh Rose headed his army and they won the battle. The Narut resistance was much stronger. The Indian soldiers hid in the nearby forest to escape the notice of the English. The spirit of Indian soldiers was weakened after the death of Khudabaksh Khan at the Sainwar Gate. The Sainwar Gate resistance was strong until his death. Another hero, Gulam Ghaus Khan had died in the war. Many lives were given in the last few days of battle. The Queen felt sad for the dead soldiers. The soldiers’ spirits became disheartened because of the many deaths. The Queen revived the spirit of the soldiers by encouraging them and rewarding them with money and jewellery. She also gave hope and assurance for the soldiers. The words of the Queen encouraged the soldiers and they became very active. Tatia Topi headed the army but his army lacked good leadership. He suddenly fled from the battle and the large numbers of soldiers were left in the battle without the leader. At the time, the Queen started to take the leadership and gathered the soldiers and told them that they were not dependent on the Peshwas when they started this resistance to safeguard Jhansi from the English. Her voice was loud and clear:

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 sepoy, chiefs and friends – we did not start this struggle in the hope of help 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.' (203)

Devi describes this to show how a young lady with her indomitability and loyalty inspired the numerous soldiers. Even the English knew that the Queen had all the capabilities to rule the Kingdom. They also knew very well that the sepoy mutiny was little successful because of the Queen and so they suppressed it in the beginning itself. Before the Queen joined with the sepoy to resist against the English, the English spy gave all the details about Jhansi's state. He also got bribe from the English to open the gate of Jhansi.

The English set fire to Jhansi and killed many innocent people. They also plundered each and every house in Jhansi. Even in the midst of their death, many soldiers fought to save their state from the English. The bravery of Indian soldiers was noted by the Hugh Rose in his military despatch:

They were half-burnt. Their clothes in flames,
They rushed out, hacking at their assailants with
their swords in both hands, till they were shot or
bayoneted, struggling, even when dying on the
ground, to strike again. (207)

Devi describes the bravery of Indian soldiers and their performance in the war stunned the English. The English never appreciated the Indians but in many places they got appreciations from them. Devi presented all these details to tell about the self-sacrifice and patriotic feelings among the soldiers and the Queen. Many heroic figures were unnoticed by the modern Indian people. They know only Gandhi, Nehru,

Lala Rajpat Rai, etc., but there were many Indian women who also fought for the freedom of the country. They were still under the veil.

Devi also mentions about the people who sacrificed their life for saving the Queen so that their Jhansi would be saved by her. This is brought out by an instance where the wife of Puran Korin dressed herself as the Queen and faced the English with the sword. She did not want the English to follow the Queen and to distract them she did so. The English found out the truth and killed her. This is a sort of resistance shown by the Jhalkari Korin. During those times women never came forward for such activities. Only few women like her showed their resistance:

When Jhansi was taken over by the English, she went on horseback to meet Hugh Rose, dressed up beautifully as a Marathi woman, sword in hand, to prevent the English from following the Queen. She said, 'I am Lakshmibai, the Queen of Jhansi. I've come to surrender, hoping you might pardon the citizens of Jhansi the penalty in exchange for my capture.' But Gopalrao observed her and told Hugh Rose that this was not the Queen, but Jhalkari Korin. Hugh Rose issued an immediate sentence for her death. Jhalkari said, 'so kill me. Do you think I am afraid to die? I am just like one of so many sepoys who are dying'. (224)

Again the Queen gathered many soldiers to fight against the English. Tatia Topi arrived at Kalpi again to join the force. The Queen did not show any of her personal grievances as her only aim was to defeat the English. They prepared well for the battle in the Kunch. Again Tatia Topi fled the battle without informing anyone. The soldiers started to scatter but the Queen was determined and gathered the men. The English were stunned at her military skills. She organised the scattered men and

organised an extremely long line of retreat by way of Urai. Another woman who lost her life in the battle fighting against Captain McMahon was Ganga, the Queen's flank and the woman warrior.

Devi mentions about some of the women who had sacrificed their life for the sake of their country because the mindset of the people was that women were fit enough to do only household chores and to take care of her family. Through her works she proved that women are also equal to men and would definitely take up their responsibilities. The English were shocked to see women disguising themselves as men in order to fight against them and they were not able to realise the fact. For example, Mandar, Queen's companion dressed herself as a male and participated in all the battles with the Queen. Mandar's chest was pierced by the bullet and she died:

The English still had not realised that the Queen and her companion Mandar were actually women in male garb.

At this time of extreme danger, the Queen tried her utmost to cross the Sonerekha. At that very moment Mandar's chest was pierced by a bullet. Sadly, she said 'I'm leaving you, Bai Saheba – I guess we won't be escaping together!' The Queen turned her horse around in a split second and killed Mandar's killer. (282)

The resistance by the Indians was very powerful but due to the disunity among the Indian rulers, it was not very successful. After the defeat at Kalpi, the Queen did not give up; instead she began to drill her soldiers even more effectively. The Queen's inspiration and mode helped the soldiers to fight fiercely. Rao Saheb took the leadership and made the Queen as the head for only 250 horsemen to guard the northern part of Kalpi. Again it was a failure. Then the Queen gave her plan of attacking Gwalior where many Maharashtrians were also protesting against the

English. The Queen had lost her belief that she could protect Jhansi because of Tatia Topi's escape and Rao Saheb's sudden change in the plan. The Indian Brahmins were bribed and they opened the doors for the English.

In the battle of Gwalior the Queen and others gave their best to save Jhansi. Tatia Topi and others felt guilty for their betrayal. Still Queen did not feel sad; she moved on with her preparations for the battle of Gwalior. She informed her men: "We must take over Gwalior, the supreme Maharashtrian city of central India" (255). A large number of Indian sepoys were filled of enthusiasm to fight under the leadership of the Queen. There were many deaths in the battle of Gwalior and this was the last battle for the Queen. After the death of Mandar, the Queen did not return to her camp. Then Gul Muhammad found her body lying on the horse. Devi describes her death:

At the same moment, the garment covering her neck shifted and her pearl choker became visible. Suddenly she felt a sword strike her forehead, slashing the right side of her head up to the right eye. She tried to stop the bleeding with torn folds of her turban. Despite the blood gushing out in a jet, she struck her horse's belly to make it go onward. Finally, when the horse crossed the Sonerekha, a sudden bullet pierced the left side of her chest. She immediately fell over on the horse. (282)

When the Queen was taken back to the camp, Ramchandra Rao Deshmukh, a brahmin, poured Ganga water on her lips; she became conscious and remembered the jokes she shared with him: "Then softly but clearly the Queen expressed her final wish: 'Be loyal to Ananda as you have been to me. Pay my troops their salary out of my remaining jewellery and money. Make sure the foreigners don't get hold of my

body after my death.’ These were her last words. Immediately after, she breathed her last” (283).

Devi detailed that after the death of the Queen, there were numerous uprisings in central India but they were crushed by the British brutally. She mentioned about the violence and plunders which served as a tool to express their feeling of resistance against their persecutors. The resistance movements aimed at getting rid of the British rule and retain their culture, traditional values and social structure. Later in her works, she focused on the tribal’s delineation of the struggles against their oppression and discrimination by the dominant, Beniwal and Vandana in their article “Subaltern Historiography and Literary Aesthetics: A Reading of Mahasweta Devi’s Fiction” comments on Devi’s participation in the fiction as:

Her fiction participates in the subaltern debate by subverting the monologic authority of the mainstream history through a host of diverse deconstructive strategies. She interrogates the grand narrative of national history and its attendant politics of ‘sterilizing’ the master narrative of the nation’s past off the dalit/subaltern presence. She affects historical ‘correction’ through her creative works which function as counter-literary and counter-cultural consciousness formation instruments whereby the non-heroes emerge as heroes and certain mythico-historical narratives get liberated from their conventional epistemological binds. (26)

Devi’s other novel; *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* deals with resistance of the tribal people against the mainstream society – how her characters raise their voice against dominant native Indians. She wants to present the real condition which prevails in India still now. She gives her view on colonialism done by the native

Indians to the tribals and their resistance along with the aspect of historical and cultural transactions. In her article “Subversion and Resistance: The Uses of Myth in Mahasweta Devi’s “The Hunt” and *The Book of the Hunter*” Bindu Nair comments on Devi’s style: “Mahasweta Devi again portrays the tribal’s burden of memory engaging with his/her contemporary reality, with ironic and deeply tragic effects” (118).

In her *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, she shows how the tribals resist against the corrupted politicians of India. Even after the Britishers went out of our country, India was still ruled by selfish politicians, wicked police and corrupt officers etc., During British rule every Indian suffered a lot except the ones who supported them. Similarly, tribals fought against their own native kings, landlords, police, politicians and other officers. This novel can be said as the continuation of other revolts done against the British by Indians as a whole and later by the tribals for their freedom. Still they face many more problems. They are not getting the benefits sanctioned by government. It happened “from the Ulgulan, to the Emergency, and post-Emergency” (*Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, ix). During the later part of the eighteenth century there was disintegration of the tribal agrarian order in India under a steady influx of non-tribal people – land hungry peasants and unscrupulous traders – accelerated by the local administration acting in collusion with the British administration. In the article “Subaltern Historiography and Literary Aesthetics: A Reading of Mahasweta Devi’s Fiction” Beniwal and Vandana enumerates Mahasweta Devi’s fiction on the side of native people who resist against the dominators:

She thus writes this fictional history from below to lay bare the hegemonic dynamics of history from above. In his defiance against the immoral feudal practices and the inhuman indifference of the

administration towards the deprived and the dispossessed, Bashai revolts again and again, dies a phoenix-death to resurrect each time whenever the circumstances appear to repeat the history of exploitation. (27)

The resistance of adivasis are often failure but still they are fighting for their traditional land, culture, occupation, etc., In the words of Bindu Nair, in her article “Subversion and Resistance: The Uses of Myth in Mahasweta Devi’s “The Hunt” and *The Book of Hunter*”:

She portrays the losing battle that the adivasis have fought and are still fighting with the more dominant groups in the Indian nation over their traditional land resources, occupations and cultural traditions. In the process, there has been much exchange and assimilation among the tribal and non-tribal populations in India at all times. These interactions have often been damaging to the tribal groups more often than not and have resulted in the erosion and loss of their cultural inheritance. Mahasweta Devi’s fiction reveals a deep understanding of the tribals’ need to hold on to their cultural identity amidst the loss of much of the material base of their lives. (112)

Devi created mythical characters along with the issue of contemporary world which has been quoted in the lines of Beniwal and Vandana in their article “Subaltern Historiography and Literary Aesthetics: A Reading of Mahasweta Devi’s Fiction”:

She seeks to resurrect older periods in history in their immediate physicality, as if they are nothing less than contemporary. In the process, she rewrites the old grand mythical, historical narratives in contemporary permutations and combinations. In her fiction, such as

Titu Mir, Operation -? Bashai Tudu, Chotti Munda and His Arrow she re-excavates the margins to revise the mainstream history by foregrounding the 'un-historical'. (27)

The tribals reacted to these developments in the form of a series of uprisings in an attempt to throw out the intruders from their homeland. The major leaders who contributed and sacrificed their lives such as, Dulchand Turu, Birsa Munda, Baba Tirka Majhi Alluri Sitarama Raju. The resistance movements and revolts of these people are not widely known to the people but remained in the lores of tribals and now brought out by the writers. The process of armed resistance and revitalization movements aimed at reconstructing tribal society continued sporadically, finally bleeding and culminating in the last uprising of the Mundas, the Ulgulan or 'The Great Tumult', led by Birsa Munda (1874-1901), the legendary tribal leader, from December 1899 to January 1900 in Ranchi and northern Singhbhum districts of Bihar. However, the uprising was suppressed, ending in the surrender of the insurgents, followed by the capture and death in captivity of Birsa Munda.

Devi wanted to portray about Birsa's struggle so she has made use of the flashback technique to describe the struggle. The hero of the novel, Chotti learned arrow shooting from the great archer Dhani Munda. Through him he came to know about the resistance offered by Birsa. Birsa died before twenty years in the Ranchi jail. Dhani describes this to Chotti:

It's a long story. I want to tell t' tale, but there's no one to listen. And t' Munda folk here are broken-backed, livin' on t' kindness of t' Diku-Hindus. They won' let me stay in Chaibasha. There's [10] still people to hear me there. They won' let me stop. . . That is a tale. Ye are a

Munda. A man came to this world for all o' ye. Father Earth. Lord
Birsa. (9-10)

In these modern times also the history of Mundas revolves around the heroic figure Birsa Munda, Dhani Munda, Sidhu and Kanhu. The revolt of the Birsa Munda is an inspiration to the tribals. Yamuna in her article "Unveiling the Mundari World: A Reading of Mahasweta Devi's Novel *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*" quotes Spivak's words regarding this "Birsa Munda "spearheaded a revitalization and armed resistance movement of the tribals, culminating in the Ulgulan or armed uprising, 1899-1900" (104).

Devi mentioned about the scope and freedom to articulate the tribal history. The resistance of the tribals against their masters were dramatising in her works. She also uses Buildungs Roman technique where the novel's character goes in all the periods of life cycle from Childhood- old age. The situations around makes changes in his life. As in the words of Beniwal and Vandana in their article "Subaltern Historiography and Literary Aesthetics: A Reading of Mahasweta Devi's Fiction" says,

Chotti Munda and His Arrow takes this continuing battle of the tribal against the oppressive powers belonging to mainstream India further. Criminalization of politics, inhuman torture and oppression of the marginal continue unabated and hence make resistance inevitable. *Chotti Munda's* revolt dramatizes the collective revolt of the subaltern of Munda, Oraon and other Hindu outcastes. The wipe sweep of the novel provides Mahasweta the scope and freedom to articulate the tribal history along with colonial and post-colonial history. (29)

They also compared *Chotti Munda* with *Titu Mir* and *Bashai Tudu* as:

Whereas on the one hand in this novel, she, like *Titu Mir* traces the life and career of Chotti, right from his childhood, on the other, like *Bashai Tudu*, she weaves it in the form of a legend of Chotti Munda:

In my travels I saw this old man with whom I was not so well acquainted. I knew other tribals well, and all of them revered him, oh he's a legendary chap, and all these (archers) you see here and there, he is the person who has taught them all. So that legendary Chotti Munda provides me with a legend at the book's centre. (29-30)

The colonisers not only ruled the city and towns but they also exploited the natives in the forest. There was no peace in the Munda regions and it was the days of Ranchi's revolt led by Birsa Munda. Yamuna in her article "Unveiling the Mundari World: A Reading of Mahasweta Devi's Novel *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*" remarks:

The unrest among the Mundas from the days of the Ranchi revolt of Birsa Munda to the post-independence period has resulted from the erroneous policy of the British towards tribal lands during the colonial period. The Colonizers wanted access to even the remote tribal regions of India to be able to rule the country effectively. They sent their officials to these areas, and introduced a money-based economy in the tribal regions. (104)

Beniwal and Vandana quoted this in their article "Subaltern Historiography and Literary Aesthetics: A Reading of Mahasweta Devi's Fiction" as:

By incorporating in her texts the multiple voices from the past she overcomes the inherent inadequacy and biases of the 'official' narratives in articulating the history of the nation and also produces

continuous medley of resonant as well as discordant notes as her narrative insertions ricochet off the historical givens. Consequently the official reflections on the nationalist history, when filtered through the prism of subaltern perception, get transfigured into multi-dimensional refractions. (32)

In the novel, Devi has covered the period of independence, where the Mundas did not know about Gandhiji. They were enclosed in the forest without knowing the outside world which benefitted the landlords. It was during 1930's when people in a nearby railway station spoke about Gandhi that Mundas came to know that in the towns also there was resistance. The group of revolutionists who spoke against the British were sent to prison. The nationalist movement for independence had been recorded from the subaltern's view in *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*:

In 1930, a new scene could be seen. Police in some of the compartments. The passengers wear white caps. They shout something incomprehensible.

Sana Munda gets the news and says. These Dikus are the followers of king Gandhi.

King Gandhi, Chotti says, who is that?

Do I Know? All say a great king.

These're followers?

Yes mate. Raising revalutions ta chase off t' white man. So they're taken to je-hell everywhere.

So! So many Diku! No end to them?. (62)

After the colonisers left India, the other set of groups started to rule the country especially the tribal lands. The other groups were not from the foreign land

but they belonged to the native India such as the local landlord, money lenders, police, Daroga, dikus, etc. The words of Hasnain are quoted by Yamuna in her article “Unveiling the Mundari World: A Reading of Mahasweta Devi’s Novel *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*” says in this regard, “The new situation enabled the local landlords and money lenders to have access to the tribals most. The small amounts borrowed by the tribals from the money lenders at usurious rates of interests made them indebted for generation” (104).

These Mundas were tied on the thread of bonded labour where they worked under landlords’ generation after generation. They were given very low wages and treated inhumanly. Many leaders rose against the system of bonded labour. Devi creates a fictional character to emphasise her views on dominant role played by the landlords, dikus and other government officers on the innocent tribals. P. K. Rajan’s observations quoted by Bindu Nair in her article “Subversion and Resistance: The Uses of Myth in Mahasweta Devi’s “The Hunt” and *The Book of the Hunter*” regarding nativism in critical and creative practice is worth notice:

without an understanding of history at all levels – local, inter-regional, national – (it) can degenerate into dogma.” She also says, “It is this understanding of the multiple layers of the historical and cultural situation and their effective narrativization that prevent Mahasweta Devi’s fiction from becoming mere museum pieces on tribal culture. Through the aesthetics of subversion, she creates figures of tribal resistance, sometimes justly triumphant, sometimes defeated. (119)

The Mundas who were bonded labourers generation after generation were given ten seers of rice by landlords to be made as bonded labourers; moreover, their thumb print got on the papers would bind them for ten generations. Thus, they were

exploited by them. The Mundas worked hard and made the barren land fertile. When the landlords came to know that the land has become fertile, they would grab the land from the Mundas. They remained subsidiary and exploited. The landlords treated the Mundas and the other tribal people very badly and gave them a lot of troubles.

The landlord's manager would take cut from the Mundas and Kurmi people. They also never let them live an independent life. So many Mundas and tribals from other villages started to move from their village to other villages. They began to convert them to Christianity as they provided the Mundas food, shelter and money. The Mundas of Kurmi village also decided to join the Christian missionary in Tomaru. It was a sort of escapism from the tortures of landlords and their managers. It is also considered as resistance done by the tribals against their landlords along with their so-called system "bonded labour". The tribal's struggles for freedom are "an event in the outside world" (68).

The tribals faced not only the sufferings given by their landlords but nature also created problems in their life because they were affected by drought and famine; at such times they would go to the landlords for getting paddy and rice. When Chotti came to know about the facts about the wages provided for the workers and the act regarding the abolishment of bonded labour, he educated his people and other tribals about them. He came to know about the nominal wages paid to the workers, he made his villagers and the other tribal people to demand for more wages. Thus the resistance by the Mundas against their landlords started. The tribal people informed their landlords that they would not work in the farm unless their wages were increased. The Munda boys began to protest against their landlords by using violent means. Harmu, Chotti's son shot an officer, Dukhia killed the Nakata King's manager and other tribal boys killed their landlords.

The political system of India is so corrupt that people suffer under politicians. This is best described by Yamuna in her article “Unveiling the Mundari World: A Reading of Mahasweta Devi’s Novel *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*”:

Further, they suffered greatly during the period of Emergency when tyrannical activities were unleashed upon them by Youth congress, here termed Youth League. The members of the Youth League created problems by taking cuts from the daily wages of the Munda labourers. The Youth League persuaded the hesitating brick factory owner to take cuts from the daily wages of Mundas. The imprudence of the Youth League resulted in the burning down of the huts of Mundas, killing four of them. Even the Bonded Labour Act of 1976, the law enacted to abolish bonded labour, proved to be of little use to them, due to the lack of political and official will to implement it. Their tragic plight compelled the Mundas to get ready for another fight under the leadership of Chotti Munda who took up his bow and arrow to resist the atrocities meted out to them by the mainstream society. (106)

The Mundas began to resist by not going to work and started complaining against their landlords; but they were betrayed by the officers who were corrupted by the landlords and politicians. The results of their resistance were killing of innocent people by the non-tribal people. The police and Daroga knew about the people who had caused the disturbance and violence in the forest but they were not able to take action against them.

The police warned Munda people to surrender the murderer of Youth Party members. Even though the Mundas knew who had done the murder, but they were not ready to betray and hand over the criminal to the police. Devi in the last scene of the

novel shows the resistance of tribals against corrupted police, S.D.O officers, etc., The tribals were restricted to use bow and arrow. It was during 1978, it was a fair conducted during the last day of the Goddess Feast – Bijoya Dashami. Every tribal people brought his bow and arrow. In order to find the murderers, the police, warned them to surrender or to help find the murderers. S.D.O, Daroga, Tirathnath, Harbans and the armed police were surrounded by the Mundas. First Chotti raised his voice and put the blame on himself and all the tribal people accused themselves for committing murder.

Every officer suspected Chotti to be the murderer. The S.D.O. officer ordered him to shoot the arrow in order to check him. He shot the arrow at the target by saying “Dhani Munda! I’m raisin’ yer name an’ shootin’ yer arrer today. To stay true, meself to meself” (363). All the struggle of the past rises together in the present as the united struggle by the en number of adivasi’s stood behind one old man who had raised his bow and arrow. The officers were all flabbergasted. Devi describes this in detail:

Then he waits, unarmed. As he waits he mingles with all time and becomes river, folklore, eternal. What only the human can be. Bring all adivasi into the present, today into the united struggle of the adivasi and the outcaste.

Time still passes. Chotti throws the bow to Harmu Harmu catches it.

Says, Why go on? Catch me? I had but that one arrer:

S.D.O. seems to break some spell and stands up, goes forward. But

instantly a thousand adivasis raise their bows in space and cry, No!

The non-adivasis raise restraining hands.

Chotti on one side, S.D.O. on the other, and in-between a thousand bows upraised in space. And a warning announced in many upraised hands. (363- 364)

From this it is evident, that, Devi speaks for the tribals and wants the Government to develop the tribal areas. With her two novels she brings out the resistance of the Indians before and after independence. She also portrays how loyal the Indians had been and how the innocent tribals were tested by the oppressors who at last found ways of resistance. Beniwal and Vandana in their article “Subaltern Historiography and Literary Aesthetics: A Reading of Mahasweta Devi’s Fiction” quotes:

Mahasweta Devi visualizes the past to be a contested terrain that offers a creative-activist scope and space for protest, resistance and contestation against dominant hegemonic historical constructions. Her texts produce a deconstructive, historiographic discourse that aims at centering the hitherto historical margins by. . . Deconstructing the cultural history of the nation by rewriting the dominant myths and replacing them with the local tribal myths. Resisting the dominant historiography and countering it with an alternative folk historiography drawing from oral histories, folk songs, folklore and legends. (40, 42)

Chapter 5

Summation

The literary traditions in India have always drawn on the various folk and tribal oral traditions that were kept alive all over the country. Since Mahasweta Devi has decided that the recognition and rehabilitation of the tribal populations in India is her life's mission, she gives prime importance to the recovery of their oral traditions. Captivated by the image of the warrior Queen and fascinated by the personality of Lakshmibai of Jhansi, Mahasweta Devi took off on a journey that visited the central and geographical landscapes of those stirring times. Family reminiscences, oral literature, people's histories and the more traditional sources of British and Indian historians provided her with the materials she needed. From these, she was able to weave an unusual woman, widowed at an early age, who grew from a free-spirited child into an independent young leader.

Mahasweta Devi's *The Queen of Jhansi* and *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, present two different types of nativism, colonialism and resistance; both deal with the theme of loyalty, honesty, oppression and betrayal. She beautifully brought out the innocence of the natives by sketching out the different types of geographical features, traditions, rituals, food, attires and every nuance associated with their culture. She provides more information to the readers about India, its tradition and culture before and after independence. Still there are changes in India which can be seen as an evidence of transformation. Though change is welcome, the change which Devi portrays is different. In the article "Subversion and Resistance: The Uses of Myth in Mahasweta Devi's "The Hunt" and *The Book of the Hunter*" Bindu Nair comments: "Change is as inevitable as life itself, but change at what price seems to be one of the question that is raised" (118). Women do play a major role whether it is family or a

nation. Devi wanted to show how women are important through the depiction of Jhansi Rani who bravely fought for the country and through the tribal women who take up significant works in their community.

The native Indians followed many different customs and traditions. After the colonisation of the British, many changes occurred in the Indian tradition and culture. Devi's two novels – *The Queen of Jhansi* and *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* are concerned with the aspect of retaining their cultural identity. Colonialism of the British over the Indians had its effect on the Indians. When the British left the country, the impact they had on the Indians made them colonise their own people – the dominance of the mainstream Indians over the tribal people. The impact of colonialism on the Indian mind made them forget about the insults of the British. Devi wrote about the Indian's loyalty which had been insulted by the British and hence, resulted in the outbreak of the great revolt. She observed that in the beginning the Indians felt safe and comfortable under the British rule but later when they became aware of their status they suffered. The minds of Indian rulers were also poisoned by the arrival of English- their thoughts, way of behaving, manners, etc.,

The influences of the Britishers were felt in all the fields of Indian system. They started to reform the Indian rules and regulations. Sometimes the British arrival in India proved to be a benefit, but many times it is horrid due to the interference of them on Indian issues. The Indian rulers paved the way for the English to rule the country. The disunity among the Indian rulers was the main cause for the English to rule over the Indians.

Indian women were not treated as equal to the men. Devi wanted to depict that the women can also do anything for their country. In her novel, *The Queen of Jhansi*, she brought out how the Indians were enjoying the favours offered by the

Britishers and how they were suppressed later and how after many years they began to resist against the British. She also brought out many truths behind the great battle. Many things were unnoticed and unrecorded by the English. There were many reasons for the Indian rulers to resist the rule of English. The king of Jhansi and his clan were so loyal and ruled their kingdom according to the orders given by the British. Later when the British started to oppress them for simple issues, the Indian rulers started to raise their voice. Even Jhansi began to raise her voice regarding her adoption case. The Indians were personally snubbed and humiliated, and criticised for their faith in religion, superstitions, manners and behaviours. The importance of oneness and unity was felt among the Indians. In spite of their differences but they had only aim - to make the English leave their country.

The British were good at times but they were jagged in their minds. Devi makes it clear that Indians faced failures because of their lack of leadership in the battle. Another major issue was that Indian rulers felt bad to be under women's control. That is the reason for another failure for Indians when Rao Saheb hesitated to wage war against the English under the leadership of the Queen of Jhansi.

Devi also brought out the good qualities of Indian rulers, commoners along with the Britishers. Major Ellis was considered good because he tried to help the Queen in her adoption case and he was the one who supported the Queen regarding eligibility and her skill to rule Jhansi. As a result, he was transferred from Jhansi by his officers for supporting and describing the good qualities of the Indian rulers. The historians such as Kaye and Malleson's words are evidence for the events that happened during 1857-1858. The English wrote that the main cause for the Great Revolt was Indians. The reports of Kaye and Malleson prove that the English was eager to annex all the regions of India.

Devi's other works regarding tribals and their issues present her thoughts through the fictional characters. Her works depict corrupted Indian politicians and other officers, hurdles for the development of tribals and the tribals resisting for their freedom from the oppressor. In *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, she mentions how the uncivilised tribals abide by the rules when the civilised people are fully corrupted. She creates awareness about the historical and mythical past of the Indian tribals. Her fictions reflect the changes happening in everyone's life especially one who tries to hold the cultural identity but lost amidst the cosmopolitan culture. Her works mostly reflect the subaltern perception which often encroaches the past and present events of oral history. She writes about history with a story to express her opinions.

Devi's two works demarcate the struggle in two different outlooks: one, Indian's struggle against the English who ruled the country for more than 300 years; the other the continuation of oppression of the tribals by their own non-tribal Indians. She wanted to unveil the impacts of the colonialism by the English that has been laid as track for the Indians to dominate the native people. Beniwal and Vandana in their article "Subaltern Historiography and Literary Aesthetics: A Reading of Mahasweta Devi's Fiction" remark about Devi: "She affects historical 'correction' through her creative works which function as counter-literary and counter-cultural consciousness formation instruments whereby the non-heroes emerge as heroes and certain mythico-historical narratives get liberated from their conventional epistemological binds" (26).

Devi is always fascinated by the socio-economic history of human life. Her fiction highlights the various cultural facets of the tribal life which are connected with the socio-economic and political causes of India. *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* starts and repeats the different stories throughout the novel around Chotti and make him the legendary figure. Devi not only rewrites the record of events in history but also

establishes a parallel between history and story. She describes the failure of adivasis' struggle that has been still continuing against their tormenter groups. The struggle of the adivasis is regarding their cultural traditions, exploitation of natural resources, land and occupation.

Devi's works are so complex and varied from other authors. She completely concentrates on the tribals issue, their resistance which are partially successful. In *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, the revolts by the Birsa Munda, then Dhani Munda, Chotti, etc., are used by Devi as myths as she describes a magic arrow which was handed over to Chotti by Dhani. The true fact was that there was no magic in the arrow but the magic arrow which she represented had a deep meaning. The arrow symbolises a person who is next to take up the responsibility of leading the clan. At the end of the novel Chotti gives his arrow to his son Harmu. Indirectly, she mentions that the tribals will resist against their dominators until they get full freedom. In many epics, the use of arrow has been used for bravery, focus of goal and as native's weapon; but Devi uses it for leadership. She also attempts to create a new perspective from existing myth and history by re-creating the subaltern myth. She criticises the present world along with the usage of subaltern thoughts and views.

In both of her novels she has presented the quality of honesty and loyalty of the Indians which were finally tested by the worthless people. The King and Queen have been loyal and honest. Even Mundas were so honest but the landlords and police called them liars in spite of knowing their true nature. Both tried to be honest and loyal until they were tested. Later they started to prepare for resistance against their masters secretly. They were so humble that they underwent lot of sufferings and pain. They thought that the protest against their masters would be the only reward for them when they succeed in their resistance.

Both the novels hold the aspect of the nationalist fight between the outsider and the native, the colonial or the imperial against the indigenous patriot. The tribal's views about the nationalists were different from the people who fought for the independence of India. Devi presented dikus or outsiders in *Chotti Munda and His arrow* and as the British in *The Queen of Jhansi* as the colonisers. The place of the English was taken by the so-called dikus or outsiders of the tribal community. They tormented the innocent natives for their personal benefit.

Devi brings out the lives of the natives in all their beauty as they are filled with virtuous qualities and have a very rich tradition. During the British rule the Indians were exploited as they proved themselves of immense value, intelligence and worth. The songs of the tribals are not simply records of their mythical and historical past but reflect every change that touches their lives. Devi fights against the erasure of such rich cultural heritage the tribals have.

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