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Research Article

MOTHERHOOD AND RESISTANCE: A CRITICAL STUDY OF AND POLITICAL REALITY IN *MOTHER OF 1084*

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Abstract

Mother of 1084, written by Mahasweta Devi in 1974, is set in Bengal during the late 1960s and early 1970s, a period marked by the Naxalite Movement and social unrest. The novel centers on Sujata, a middle-class mother whose son Brati becomes a revolutionary and is killed by the police, recorded only as number 1084, symbolizing state brutality. At the start, Sujata is unaware of her son's political life and lives in domestic comfort, but Brat's death triggers her journey of grief and reflection. She gradually develops political consciousness, understanding social inequality, oppression, and the harsh realities of revolutionary struggle. Themes of state violence, class conflict, alienation, and dehumanization are explored through Sujata's emotional and intellectual journey. Sujata's awakening challenges patriarchal expectations, showing women as active participants in social and political change. Through realism and emotional depth, Mahasweta Devi links private grief with public struggle. The reduction of Brat to a number emphasizes the erasure of individuality in oppressive systems. Sujata's transformation shows how personal loss can lead to political understanding. The novel portrays maternal identity as a site of resistance and moral courage. *Mother of 1084* (1974) remains a powerful work on the human cost of political violence and the awakening of social awareness.

Keywords: Political Consciousness, Maternal awakening, Naxalite Movement, Social Inequality, Oppression .

Introduction

Mahasweta Devi was one of the most influential writers and social activists in modern Indian literature. She was born in 1926 in Dhaka, which is now in Bangladesh, into a family that strongly valued literature and culture. Her father was a poet and her mother was a writer and social worker. Growing up in such an environment encouraged Mahasweta Devi to develop a deep interest in literature as well as social issues.

Throughout her life she remained committed to the welfare of marginalized communities, especially tribal people who were often neglected by mainstream society.

Her work as a social activist greatly influenced her literary writings. Mahasweta Devi believed that literature should not only entertain readers but also expose injustice and create awareness about social problems.

Mahasweta Devi wrote more than one hundred novels and short stories, many of which focus on the struggles of oppressed and marginalized communities. Some of her most famous works include *Mother of 1084*, *Rudali*, and *Aranyer Adhikar*. Her writings are known for their realistic portrayal of social conditions and their strong political awareness. She often used literary techniques such as realism, symbolism, and psychological narration to present the emotional experiences of her characters. Through these techniques she was able to depict complex social realities in a powerful and meaningful way.

Because of her remarkable contribution to literature and social activism, Mahasweta Devi received many prestigious awards. Some of the most important awards she received include the Jnanpith Award, the Ramon Magsaysay Award, and the Padma Vibhushan. Her works continue to be widely studied in universities because they address important issues such as social injustice, gender inequality, and political resistance.

Patriarchy and the Silence of Women

One of the central themes of *Mother of 1084* is the portrayal of patriarchy and the silence imposed on women in middle-class families. Sujata, the protagonist of the novel, lives in a household where male authority dominates every aspect of family life. Her husband and other

family members rarely consider her opinions important, and she is expected to quietly accept the decisions made by the men. This situation reflects the patriarchal structure that often limits women's freedom and suppresses their voices. Although Sujata is an educated and sensitive woman, she is treated mainly as a housewife whose primary duty is to maintain the household and support her family. Her emotional needs and personal thoughts are ignored by the other members of the family.

Through Sujata's character, Mahasweta Devi highlights the invisible suffering experienced by many women who live in patriarchal societies. Her silence represents the broader social condition in which women are expected to remain obedient and passive. However, the tragic death of her son eventually pushes her toquestion these expectations and to develop a new understanding of her own identity.

Political Oppression and the Naxalite Movement

The political background of the novel is closely connected with the Naxalite movement that took place in West Bengal during the late 1960s and early 1970s. This movement was led mainly by young people who were frustrated with social inequality, poverty, and corruption. They believed that revolutionary action was necessary to challenge the existing system and create a more just society. Brati, Sujata's son, represents the idealistic young generation that choose to fight against injustice. Although he comes from a middle-class family, he becomes aware of the suffering experienced by poor and marginalized communities. This awareness motivates him to join the revolutionary movement. However, the state treats these young revolutionaries as criminals and suppresses them through violence and police action. The fact that Brati's body is identified only by the number 1084 shows how the system reduces individuals to mere numbers. Through this powerful symbol, Mahasweta Devi criticizes the dehumanizing effects of political violence and exposes the tragic consequences of social conflict.

Another important aspect of the political atmosphere represented in the novel is the sense of fear that spread throughout society during the period of the Naxalite movement. Many young people who were suspected of supporting revolutionary ideas were constantly under surveillance by the authorities. Police raids, arrests, and interrogations became common occurrences, creating a climate in which people were afraid to express their political views openly. This environment of fear affected not only the revolutionaries themselves but also their families and friends. Through this portrayal, the novel illustrates how political conflict can disrupt the ordinary lives of individuals and create deep emotional tension within society.

The novel also highlights the strong contrast between the revolutionary ideals of the youth and the conservative mindset of the middle-class community. While young activists like Brati are willing to risk their lives to fight against injustice, many members of the middle class prefer to maintain their comfortable lifestyle and avoid political involvement. They often view revolutionary movements as dangerous disturbances rather than attempts to achieve social change. This difference in perspective creates a generational and ideological gap between the youth who demand transformation and the older generation that prioritizes stability and social reputation.

Another significant element of political oppression depicted in the narrative is the use of institutional power to silence dissent. Government authorities treat political resistance as a threat to law and order, and therefore respond with strict control and punishment. The system does not attempt to understand the social conditions that motivate young people to rebel; instead, it focuses on eliminating the movement through force. This response reveals the limitations of a political structure that prioritizes authority and control over dialogue and reform.

The novel further demonstrates how revolutionary movements often emerge from deep frustration with social inequality. Many young people become involved in such

movements because they witness the harsh realities faced by the poor and marginalized communities. These experiences challenge their belief in the fairness of the existing social system. In this context, the revolutionary struggle represents an attempt to demand justice and equality, even though it leads to tragic consequences.

Mahasweta Devi also emphasizes the emotional cost of political conflict. The deaths of young revolutionaries not only represent the loss of individual lives but also reflect the loss of potential social

change. Families are left to cope with grief and unanswered questions, while society continues to struggle with the underlying issues that caused the conflict. By focusing on these emotional consequences, the novel moves beyond a simple political narrative and explores the human suffering that accompanies ideological battles.

Through this detailed portrayal of political oppression and revolutionary activism, the novel encourages readers to reflect on the complex relationship between power, resistance, and justice. The narrative suggests that political violence cannot be understood simply as a conflict between law and rebellion; instead, it must be examined in relation to the social inequalities and moral dilemmas that shape human actions. In this way, the narrative presents a powerful critique of systems that ignore the voices of those who challenge injustice.

Motherhood and Emotional Awakening

Motherhood is one of the most important emotional themes in *Mother of 1084*. Sujata's journey from ignorance to awareness forms the central narrative of the story. At the beginning of the novel she appears to be a quiet and obedient housewife who does not question the decisions of her family. She is not fully aware of the political ideas and struggles that influenced her son's life.

However, after Brati's death, Sujata begins to reflect deeply on his beliefs and actions. As she learns more about the conditions that motivated him to join the revolutionary movement, she gradually begins to understand his ideals. This realization changes her perspective on society and on her own life. Instead of forgetting her son, she chooses to remember him and to understand the meaning of his struggle

Through Sujata's emotional transformation, Mahasweta Devi shows how personal grief can lead to social awareness. Motherhood becomes not only a source of love and pain but also a catalyst for intellectual and moral awakening. In this way the novel presents motherhood as a powerful force that can challenge injustice and inspire change.

Another important dimension of motherhood in the novel is the emotional isolation that Sujata experiences within her own family. Even though she is surrounded by relatives, she feels completely alone in her attempt to understand her son's life and death. The other members of the family prefer to erase Brati from their memory because they believe his revolutionary activities have brought shame to their social status. This reaction highlights the difference between Sujata's emotional attachment to her son and the cold practicality of the rest of the family. Her refusal to forget Brati shows that motherhood is not limited to biological care but also involves emotional loyalty and moral responsibility.

Sujata's journey also reveals the conflict between private grief and public silence. In many traditional families, mothers are expected to suppress their emotions and accept tragic events without questioning them. However, Sujata gradually refuses to follow this expectation. Instead of remaining silent, she begins to search for the truth about her son's life. This search becomes an important step in her emotional development because it allows her to confront the uncomfortable realities that her family wants to ignore. Through this process, the novel shows that motherhood can become a form of resistance against social pressure and collective denial.

Another aspect of Sujata's awakening is her growing empathy toward the people who were part of Brati's life. As she learns about his friends and the circumstances that influenced his political choices, she begins to understand the struggles faced by the poor and marginalized communities. This understanding expands her emotional world beyond the limited boundaries of her middle-class household. Motherhood, therefore, becomes a bridge that connects her personal loss with a larger awareness of social suffering.

The novel also presents memory as an important element of maternal consciousness. Sujata repeatedly recalls moments from Brati's childhood and youth, trying to reconstruct the person he truly was. These memories help her realize that her son was not simply a rebellious youth but someone who was deeply concerned about injustice in society. By remembering these details, Sujata restores his individuality and dignity, which had been taken away when the authorities reduced him to the number "1084." In this way, memory

becomes a powerful act through which a mother protects the identity of her child.

Furthermore, the portrayal of Sujata challenges the traditional image of motherhood as passive and submissive. Although she does not openly participate in political activism, her determination to understand her son's ideals represents a quiet yet meaningful form of resistance. Her transformation shows that awareness and empathy can emerge even in the most ordinary individuals. Mahasweta Devi suggests that the emotional strength of mothers can play an important role in questioning injustice and exposing the moral failures of society.

Sujata's emotional awakening reflects a broader message about human responsibility. By recognizing the reasons behind her son's revolutionary actions, she becomes aware of the inequalities and suffering that exist in society. This awareness forces her to reconsider the values of the comfortable middle-class life that once seemed normal to her. Through Sujata's journey, the novel demonstrates that motherhood can inspire individuals to move beyond personal sorrow and develop a deeper understanding of social realities.

Conclusion

The research paper concludes, Mother of 1084 is a deeply moving and politically significant novel that examines the relationship between personal tragedy and social awareness. Through the character of Sujata, Mahasweta Devi explores the emotional struggles of women living within patriarchal family structures. The novel also provides a powerful critique of political oppression and the social inequalities that led to the Naxalite Movement.

By presenting the story from the perspective of a grieving mother, Mahasweta Devi humanizes the political violence of the time and encourages readers to reflect on the moral responsibilities of society. The transformation of Sujata from a silent housewife into a questioning and socially aware individual symbolizes the possibility of resistance and change. Even today the novel remains relevant because it challenges readers to recognize injustice and to understand the human experiences behind political conflicts.

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