

## Chapter 2

### **Awakening: Women's Journey Beyond the Boxes of Packaged Images**

#### **Foreword**

What does one do with the seething desire which obstinately refuses to go away? It is the desire of a mother in Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084*, to understand the reason of her son's sudden death. It is also the desire of autonomy of mobility of an orphan girl, Muskaan in Nabina Das's *Footprint in the Bajra* who is brought up by the leader of a Naxalite group. This heaving desire creates spaces. These spaces, in turn, leave Sujata, Muskaan and the readers with time to explore the blank spaces between the inner and the outer world, between the peripheries and the centre by individually intervening in the establishments of the patriarchal society.

#### **Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084***

Mahasweta Devi in a firm structure of exposition, development, reversal and denouncement writes Sujata confronting the ultimate realities of time, death and isolation in *Mother of 1084*. *Mother of 1084* is a work which is not devoid of historical and social context yet it begins by showing women as cosmic orphans, "Dibyanath never came with her, never accompanied her when it was time" (3). There are images of entropy in which Sujata is slowly but inexorably running down.

The novel begins in a dream, taking the reader into a journey along with Sujata. We together pass through a dark tunnel to a bright, "... morning of twenty two years ago" (1). Often Sujata lurks into this morning. This is a different land, but of reality where there is a strong existence of time and private history running parallel. Sujata, pregnant with her child Brati, is packing her bag and then suddenly we are informed that she is fifty-three at

present. The past comes into the present private consciousness, there is a constant shift from time to timelessness and again time. The shift makes visible the impossibility to accumulate those twenty-two years into the ill-fitting compartments of time. This sudden realisation of the passage of the twenty-two years of lived life through the masculine measurements of time also highlights a space where the reconstruction of her inner experiences has begun happening out of the mechanical time. In the same dream we see Sujata writhing in pain and she, "...clamped her teeth on her lips to check the cry, the Sujata of the dreams waiting for Brati to be born" (1). This shows Sujata travelling beyond the limits of her mind to a place where there are no borders. A place that gives her opportunity to observe and understand the truth by connecting and recovering all those moments which she has carried in her mind for years as reality.

Placed in the coalescing of mechanical time and societal mechanism, Sujata is witnessed a cog rather than an individual. Like most of the Indian girls, Sujata was born and brought up in the patriarchal set-up in which a father is the head of the family, the bread-earner who lays down the rules and the code of conduct in the family; the mother and the children are dependent financially and emotionally on the father. Sujata was made to do her graduation but only as a part of her marriage preparation. The woman of the house always at the end has to be subordinated as she is understood to be the inferior sex and Sujata had a no different destiny. She was born to be humble and submissive as she had to serve her husband whether by confining herself to the kitchen or taking up a job to substitute the loss of her husband's two important accounts. Even when she was working, she had to follow decorum and behave like a woman in society. She had to learn to listen and accept whatever her mother-in-law said, satisfying her ego. She initially goes on waiting for what will never come but, "When she saw her husband in the bed beside her, her long brows twitched into a frown. Why should her husband be in the bed next to hers? She shook her head" (4),

declining into old age and serenity which has made her helpless and dependent. She has been living in a reality constructed by others.

The class location of her family in the hierarchical social structure ascends to higher reaches, where there is a tension of conflicting values between the conventional firm structure and changing requirements for social stability. Sujata becomes the victim of this relentless warfare and routine oppression also. This violent social order initially does not let Sujata work but when Dibyanath starts too loose out on his business, Sujata is asked to work. Intriguingly, in doing so she is reduced to an actor who could not completely identify herself with the new role. For her, the hierarchical fetters of socio-economic positions could never constitute personal identity. There is an instability, a lack of fixed identity in Sujata's life that stands out in opposition to a defined way represented through a sense of institutional conformity and discipline practiced by her husband and three children, Jyoti, Neepa and Tuli. Ironically, this opposition surfaces the absence of unity that we have always understood existing behind the constructed concealment of a woman. It also shows the cultural arbitrariness of such prejudiced constructions. Jyoti, Sujata's elder son removes that telephone from Sujata's room which broke the most devastating news of Brati, Sujata's beloved younger son's death. Sujata did not stop Jyoti but found it funny which humorously comments on the emptiness of the house, "Sujata knew very well that nothing like that would ever happen in the house again. And that was why she found funny that Jyoti should have the telephone removed to his home" (8). She knew very well that there will never be such calls again, no one will be Brati again in the house, a paradoxical symbol of change and stability and she also knew that no one will be ever able to wipe Brati from her body and mind as "... Dibyanath had wiped away" (8). This event in its multiplicity serves as an indicator of indirectly saying and functioning as the representation of the essential textuality of the collective consciousness which is morally male oriented.

This upsurge of domination starts torturing Sujata when her family tries to put her back into the normative life after the traumatic death of her son Brati. Amidst all the torture, what was fascinating for Sujata was one of the most beautiful things to happen in life, that is, the creation of the bond of unconditional love between her and her youngest son Brati. He was the only one who used to miss Sujata when she was out for work, “Ma, don’t go to office today, just this one day, why can’t you stay with me” (10)? Triggering had already happened before the death of Brati but a new consciousness begins to emerge when Sujata starts reading Brati’s consciousness after seeing her son’s name in the long list of people who were declared dead.

Brati’s death becomes a centre which leads Sujata towards self-knowledge, “... may be indirectly, she had been responsible for the killing of Brati” (15). “The questions remained: Was Brati’s death futile” (20)? Being the most emotionally connected to Brati, his death leaves space and time for Sujata to explore the bare spaces between him and the world and thus to intrude in the structures of his meanings. His death marks a voyage for Sujata into many consciousnesses and helps her unearth their various facets comfortably seated in them. They are different people, of various professions, gender, age and class. A closer analysis reveals that whereas women at Dibyanath’s house are supposed to be the carriers of cultural norms, Sujata’s indescribable pause after Brati’s killing subverts and inverts the laid social order. Her brief suspense lays bare the power politics in the patriarchal family structure, rejects all forms of authority and the stereotypical notion of women practiced at Dibyanath’s place. It offers an alternate vision of perception. Devi through Sujata questions and re-examines the modes of perception proffered to the reader which are governed by patriarchal dominance. She does so by imposing the shape of a story onto the recording of a family. The minds of the main characters of this story are

accessible to the readers through Sujata. But the minds are neither read by Sujata as a complete outsider nor an insider, she dissects them and her knife lies outside.

Soon after the novel opens, the fifty-three years old Sujata is seen remembering re-evaluating her life and relationship with Dibyanath. It is almost two decades back that Sujata wanted to break free from her troubled marriage and the life after it. She definitely did not have the courage to announce divorce but after the birth of her third child Tuli, she tried to protest against her bent towards acceptance and passivity. She was sure she will not yield to her husband's part of the definition of a wife: to produce children. But the internalization of the patriarchal values was strong enough to make her grow to be her own jail and she conceived Brati six years after Tuli's birth. Sujata struggled against Dibyanath's imposed intrapersonal alienation during the nine months of her pregnancy. She could not feel herself anything more than a walking womb. It was only at the night of Sixteenth January, Nineteen forty-eight, Brati's painful delivery that Sujata could bond with her baby and there emerged a space of care. Her youngest child Brati was born with the first ray of sun on Seventeenth January, Nineteen forty-eight. This date becomes a moment of permanence in Sujata's life. It acts the locus where past, present and future become inseparable for Sujata and from here what becomes important is not the measuring of the clock time but a journey of self.

Sujata's memories of the day when Brati was born were interrupted by a flashback of the ringing telephone. The telephone also rang on Seventeenth January, eighteen years after Brati's birth. It is again Seventeenth January today, twenty years have passed, making us question that these memories and dreams are not just chance but a probing insight into the nature of Brati's death.

Two years before the day on which the novel is set, the telephone broke the news of Brati's death to Sujata. She recalls those years before Brati's death to be the "...

safest years ... (5) of her life. The restricted gender role has problematised her self-understanding by now. She doesn't have a meaningful identity and is content with the gender role of a good wife imposed by the patriarchal society. She was settled with her space restricted to the home where performing the household tasks, taking care of the children and being obedient to her husband became her only duty. She was pleased seeing her children playing the conventional roles and practicing the morals and ethics laid down by the society. The conformist order of men ruling, wooing and women obeying has been perfectly reinstated in her first three children. Her elder daughter took up the conventional role of a wife and the second has also already made her choice. The eldest son was adept in all the manly skills. Sujata wrestled hard for freedom but Dibyanath confined her again. Nevertheless, there is someone who infuriates Dibyanath. He is Brati. Dibyanath always wanted to send Brati abroad for studies but "Brati was dead" (20). "Everything seemed so well organised, orderly, neat and beautiful. And it was right then that the telephone rang" (20) and broke the news of Brati Chatterjee's death to her mother Sujata. It was a call of the complete breakdown of Sujata. Chaos overtakes her world, "... with a violence that did not fit in any pattern" (6). Sujata was called to Kantapukur. She had to identify the dead body. Dibyanath did not accompany her to identify the body as he was busy wrapping up the news of his son dying "... such a scandalous death" (7). In the fear of the discovery of Brati's disgraceful death, Dibyanath did not even allow Sujata to travel Kantapukur by his car. Sujata could not verbally confront her husband but her inarticulacy exposed the denotative and symbolic functions of language as unstable modes of communication. Her presence was asserted by her very verbal absence, "That day, with Brati's death, Brati's father had also died for Sujata. The way he had behaved that day, that moment, had shattered numberless illusions for her" (7).

Mahasweta Devi loudly reads, "... Dibyanath had wiped Brati away" (8). Brati could never die for Sujata, what made his death unreal for her was his nature of consciousness. She gradually understands that Brati's sense of self, separated him from this world. Brati was definitely a part of the corporeal world and yet, somehow, was liberated from its casual obviousness and materiality. As is explained in *Vedanta for the Western World*, in this material world of class, caste and religion one starts to recognise itself inextricably linked to all those things that he is not born with (Datta *JSTOR*). Brati was himself, he could detach his self from the other, thus not letting the other exert control over his self. Therefore, he was the only child of Sujata who could understand her becoming a victim.

Brati as a child was haunted by many fears. He is addressed to be an "imaginative child", his dreams and nightmares used to take him to the world which though offers a flight from the human world but at the same time helps to grab what goes on around him in his familiar world, "... the street performer masquerading as a bandit ..." (13). Here a child can be easily compared to a woman who is cut out from the outer world. Both live in the present and have very blurred and incomplete views of their future. They attempt to grasp the meanings of life but their conscious familiarity is too limited to make them completely comprehend what life is all about. When they read a story, a more profound significance of life is suggested to it, as these tales convey noteworthy messages to its unconscious mind. The same was happening with Sujata. Interestingly, this has been symbolically stated by Devi. During Brati's birth, Sujata was throughout experiencing severe pain, "... from consciousness to unconsciousness and back again ..." (4) and today when she is still struggling to bring the dead Brati back, it involves a movement from conscious world to the unconscious. This movement is also filled with the same pain, in fact, Devi so subtly integrates these two different phases laying at a stretch of twenty long

years that they can only be understood as pieces of total reality. In the first paragraph she is describing the labour pain experienced by Sujata on the night of Sixteenth January, nineteen forty-eight and the moment this paragraph slips into the second, there is a sudden realisation that the pain discussed is the one Sujata is experiencing because of Brati's death in her dreams. On the same page, just a couple of paragraphs after there is another kind of pain that has been described being experienced by Sujata on the same date, two years before the day of the dream. This is the pain of the, "... violence that did not fit into any pattern" (6). She was informed about Brati's death. This call knocked Sujata to question and reconceptualise Brati's self. Sujata has begun to read Brati's story, ironically this twitches her conscience and raises her self-consciousness. It is a story which was located in different time and space rather was not tied up by time or space.

Brati was soon grown up enough to perceive and comprehend the world in which he lived. He was no more afraid now as he was in his childhood. Quite early in the story, there is an awareness of difference between Brati and others in his family. He is introduced through the emotions of love that he feels towards his mother. He used to love reading books with Sujata, going to the zoo with her, spending hours with his friends. His imagination and sensitivity made him see things with a layer of unfamiliarity. He was not a blind follower but reasoned things. Sujata remembers him dissimilar to all the others in her house.

Dibyanath, Jyoti, Neepa, Tuli, Bini and Tuli's fiancé, Tony Kapadia meet us as plodding bodies placed heavily in the materiality of socio-economic space. They are represented as identities in terms of hierarchy and social relationships.

Dibyanath is a chartered accountant, he owns his own firm which has a British name. If one sees it in the framework of Indian national identity and class structure, Devi attacks the so-called new consciousness of the economically independent middle-class.



There was hunger of power hidden. Dibyanath's daily engagements for all time dealt with the issue of placing his children up in the social hierarchy. For him, patriarchal customs were more important than human emotions of love and care. Dibyanath's attitude towards Sujata had also been always unreasonable. He exploited her commitment and submissive attitude for his own mean gains. He could not even successfully rationalise his problem with Brati to constructively counsel him rather silently laid the blame on Sujata. However, if this situation is unravelled, one can see Sujata emerging stronger than Dibyanath because she makes his existence possible. Her apparent servility and inadequacy provide the crutch on which Dibyanath constantly leans in order to proclaim his sense of authority. Ironically it was Dibyanath who consciously bound their relation in an essential power relationship, nevertheless, himself falling prey to his entrap, "Dibyanath never knew that his behaviour on that day had taken him far away from Sujata, that he was dead for Sujata from that day onwards" (8).

Jyoti, representing the new generation of Dibyanath's ideals easily accepts the legacy. He is dependent on his father and works in his firm. He is also a beneficiary of his father-in-law living in Britain. His wife, Bini is pictured as attractive and willing to take on responsibilities. After the demise of Brati, she takes on the responsibility to run the house. In spite of this, she was not aspiring and never even realised the trap of gender stereotype of herself. Tuli being the daughter of the house acknowledges it as her natural liability to look after her family and eventually conforms herself to the image of a meek woman who effortlessly accepts boy's advances and slams out her sense of self-respect. She is strongly lured towards normative companionship disclosing the power of normative system on women. She behaves like her grandmother in the house, in effect she is Dibyanath's favourite. She knows her father visits women and even indirectly tells her. Like her grandmother in the fear of losing the support of the male-protector, she becomes a partner

in the victimisation of her own mother to an extent that she honestly takes all the messages of these women for her father in his absence. Bini and Tuli never tried to delineate their individuality, they are the submissive recipients of the paradigm that patriarchy has envisioned for them. They could never see their bondage through the delusion of love, blissful domesticity and social security.

Neepa in contrast to them desire for a kind of agency, she does not accept duties or responsibilities. She has an extra-marital affair with Balai. He is a womanizer who did not even spare his own aunt from making her a pray of his lust. Neepa and Balai's relation is known to everyone and never revolted by anyone. In this relationship, Balai presents the image of a middle-class man steeped in backward patriarchal values. The girl, Neepa on the other hand projects two different positions. Neepa openly flirts with Balai without being concerned about her husband or family. She doesn't share the bedroom with her husband rather has her room on the different floor beside Balai's. The husband and the son sleep in his bedroom. This reads that Neepa uses her charm to meet her physical needs thereby challenging patriarchal codes. She at least complicates and destabilises the understanding of woman as a victim through her wilful participation in this relationship. On the other hand, she can also be seen as the woman who crosses certain gender restrictions yet remains firmly rooted in gender nexus of hunter and prey.

The two son-in-laws of the house are also placed well in the hierarchical structures of human relationships. Amit, Neepa's husband is a custom officer who powerfully believes in maintaining social dignity at any cost. He accepts Neepa and Balai's relationship and never confronts them. Nevertheless, his inaction towards Neepa also hints at his self-centeredness and lack of sensitivity towards a wife. Tony, Tuli's fiancé is a mother's boy, well-educated and cultured exporter. He has high contacts and rich parents. He is the one who through his high contacts helps Dibyanath to hush up the news of Brati's

disgraceful death. Together, Dibyanath's family apart from Brati makes an ideal image of a perfect family.

Nevertheless, Brati could notice that this family was fraught with various problems. He could read the stereotypes working in his family. He could see the family fragmented on the lines of class and gender. He was the only one who could see Sujata's prison, comprehend her exploitation and see a sense of faith developing into faithlessness. Brati loved only his mother, she was his favourite person, and his mother was loved only by him, "Even in his childhood Brati had become aware of Sujata's intense loneliness and would console her- Ma, I'm going to put you inside a glass house once I grow up. A house built of magic glass, Ma, where you can see everyone and no one can see you" (98). As a child, he understood his father's rudeness, abuse and injustice towards his mother. He could realise his father could get away with such insults only because his Sujata did not protest. At that time he even did not have the courage to protest against his father yet he was anguished and started questioning this eternal question of exploitation and oppressive existence. This anguish and questioning led him to encompass other discriminated groups also. These people were different from his family and the differences were not only of money and power but also of unity and love. They celebrated a sense of unity and together were fighting against the corrupt forces of society to survive. They were solving their problems themselves. The more Brati drew towards them, the more he got drifted away from his mother. Sujata could feel the distance, she could notice Brati becoming a stranger to her but she never grasped the depth of that distance and therefore she could not understand his death. Sujata's understanding of Brati's death becomes a voyage which reveals the deepest truth about Brati, her life and the society she has accepted to be a part of her identity.

Devi divides this journey from darkness to truth into four parts. These four parts are the four *pahar* of a day: morning, afternoon, late afternoon and evening. The same day on which Brati had died two years ago, the day on which he was born.

**Morning:**

Dibyanath fails to acknowledge the existence of other. He silences them and make them invisible. He represents the powerful section of the society that has caste based biases and pre-conceived misconceptions about both women and low-class people. This section is constructed within the forms of lands that can not be technically understood as homes. They perceive them as uncultured, feckless and ugly. Dibyanath could never even understand them as humans, forget about respecting them. He treated his wife Sujata as a body with which he could cohabit to satisfy his carnal lust and produce children to add on to the number of the black sheep breathing in his powerful section of the society. As Sujata was a mere body to him, it was never difficult for him to have open illicit relationships on being refused by her. The women working with him became easy targets of his mechanisations. He used his economic power to exploit women outside marriage. Brati's acknowledgment of the same marginalisation and more so practiced by his own father made it difficult for Dibyanath to ignore him. Brati refuses to accept and live by this truth, unlike his other siblings. This silent un-acceptance led to alienation between Brati and Dibyanath and Brati's unconventional death gave crooked, cunning mind of Dibyanath the opportunity to murder his dark reality that Brati had spoken aloud of. His murder gave Dibyanath the occasion to cripple the truth once again and to put on the mask of the civilised section to remain away from the deepest truths of inhumanity. He not only like many others of his dominant class used his social and economic power to transparently subvert the procedure of jurisprudence to assure his supremacy over the marginal but also tried to efface Brati's self from his house, he was, "... still trying to wipe Brati out, even after his death" (9). He

shifted his picture, shoes to the second floor and no one in the house including Bini objected to it. Bini was the one who supposedly had a bond with Brati stronger than his own sisters. Sujata was too shocked to discover Bini's submissiveness to Dibyanath's order and she leaves the house for the bank remembering Brati and then his dead body.

Sujata was asked to identify his body, the body of the person who was the only one to miss her in her absence and cry for her. He was the only one for whom Sujata was a part of his existence, probably his only existence. He assured her of her being, "Ma don't go to office today, just this one day, why can't you stay with me" (10). Sujata was not allowed to see Brati's face, it was deformed badly. It was hammered by a sharp weapon. She was asked to identify his body through identification marks but she wanted to see Brati as that was the last time she could have seen him. The horrible mutilation of Brati's body results in a kind of self-awakening. She walks out of the morgue of the police station, broken in body but with a tough spirit of questioning. It was as if the blunt edge of the sharp heavy weapon had not only pierced Brati's face but also the ornamental garb of civility that Sujata has learnt to paste on her.

On reaching her office, the first person who comes to share her grief is Bhikan, the peon. He had also lost his son some years ago and Sujata had clasped Bhikan the day the news of the death of his son was broken to him. He could share her loss but not the pain. On seeing the sympathy in the eyes of Bhikan, Sujata recognizes Brati's death to be different. His death had so many questions clinging to it. She has to find the answers. She recalls Brati's love for poems about death. She starts reading his identification with death. Brati comes in her dreams reading these poems to her and then, "... the other part of the mind went on insisting that it was not a dream, it was real" (14). Devi uses this technique of blurring the distinction to juxtapose the death written in the poems that Brati read and the death Brati is reading out to her, the death that exists in her life. Brati is reading the poems

of death and, "... Sujata sat on Brati's bed, listening" (14). It takes Sujata to lands located in different time and space. It's a voyage inside her mind, and the read poems become her own experiences so that she can understand the images written in the poems as situations she is facing in her life. It helps Sujata to again acknowledge the various aspects of Brati's individuality, to gain knowledge for her own self, "Where did she fail" (15)?

She starts from calling to mind Brati's and Dibyanath's relation. They could not bear each other's presence and Dibyanath had always blamed Sujata for it. Brati had told her once that it is not Dibyanath but his value system that he hated. He did not like Dibyanath's restricted male and class point of views. He hated the culture of using the influence to rise in the socio-economic map. He did not like Dibyanath exploiting people and being a pawn to the governing ideologies. She couldn't understand Brati's explanation at that time but today can realise that her resistance accepting the truth Brati was voicing became the reason for his aloofness from her. After much deliberation, she dismisses all the reasons possible behind Brati's death. He was neither sick, nor the horoscope read it, nor was it an accident and he was definitely not involved in any criminal offense. She was sure that Brati had lost belief in the social system but then she immediately questions the same social system, she can see the fissures present in the same community. Selfish businessmen, money making capitalists, corrupt leaders, killers who adulterated food, goons who murdered openly in the name of safeguarding the state constituted Dibyanath's social system. Even on being the real criminals they were never held to be culprits by Dibyanath. His insensitive social system victimised the marginalised positions in the society, their efficiency was put to action only when a victim is poor. People who try to place their self outside the boundaries of the dominant social society can be killed by anyone, anywhere, anytime. Their killers will be honoured as martyrs for safeguarding the interest of Dibyanath's social system. However, do these killings, "... stand for a massive No" (20)?

Sujata was not convinced, she was sure that Brati's conviction, courage and adamant passion were not a 'No'. She began spending time in Brati's room, fondling his belongings. She could see Brati present there and then they would talk. At this point Sujata connects her feelings towards her dead son to the feelings of all the mothers who have lost their sons, in the same manner, engraving a bond of motherhood with them. In this identification, the difference between her and the mother of the other four boys killed with Brati strikes her. She understands that at least that day, the telephone rang in her house, unlike others. She reads the difference of privilege that some of them enjoy in this selfish society constructed by people like Dibyanath. Sujata's inquiry of dominant ways begins. Sujata answers, "No. It doesn't pain any more" (25) when Tuli checks if her appendix is still paining. Devi here draws a parallel between Sujata's appendix and wound of Brati's death. Sujata knows that one can decide to get appendix operated. But strangely a day before yesterday, the same day when two years after Sujata starts contemplating Brati's death, the doctor informs her appendix to be gangrenous which has to operate at the right time to stop it from bursting. However, being anemic, the operation was also not an easy solution for Sujata. It was not easy to accept Brati's death like any other natural death and live. Everything can not be cosmetically treated and removed. Tuli asks her about the operation. Sujata answers that she will get it operated after her marriage. There are certain things which this ornamental society can not provide remedy for.

Tuli is irritated, she has set the breakfast table, and no one has yet come down. She frustratingly questions if it is only her responsibility to first prepare the lunch and then make sure that everybody is on the table in time. Sujata remembers that this rule of eating together even when the members of this family were obligatory connected to each other was made by her mother-in-law. Tuli is equally determined to follow this law of her grandmother. They never gave people their own space and time. But Brati was the only one

who revolted against it. He revolted against the forced compliance to a rule which was dragging the ideologies which had fallen apart in this house, “Strange house! Strange discipline” (26)! One such facade was practiced by Bini also. Bini daily used to mechanically put some flowers in *thakughar*, their prayer room. This act did not stem from her reverence but was a part of the interior decoration of that room. Tuli calls it a sham, and makes Sujata interrogates her own belief in her in-law’s guru living in England. Tuli and her in-laws, Kapadia family, hold Swamiji in great reverence. Sujata speaks about belief and stresses the fact that one can not dismiss other’s faith by declaring absolute righteousness in own beliefs. In this process, she starts looking through Brati’s faith. His faith which had challenged Dibyanath’s faith but was not selfish like the latter’s. The faith which does not permits a father to even consider his son being dead for once, “A father gets the message on the telephone and doesn’t feel for a moment the urge to rush to see his dead son” (29)! His concern is only his social reputation. He did not mourn the death of his son for even a fraction of a second. He just wanted to wrap up the news of the indecent death of his son at any cost as soon as possible. She pursues that Brati was long dead for Dibyanath and what happened on sixteenth January was just a physical death of a man who screwed up Dibyanath’s social workings, “Sujata could sense how they had put Brati into other camp from the time Brati had begun changing” (30).

Tuli and Dibyanath’s dehumanisation works like a catalyst in Sujata’s self-awakening towards the spirit of resistance and protest. The women who had learnt to accept life the way it came to her and never ever realised that she as a wife, mother and a woman had rights to question, starts looking for answers. She begins to locate the reason for the detached behaviour of the family towards Brati or towards that something which made Brati love only Sujata, a thread which kept them one against all the others in the house.



**Afternoon:**

Sujata leaves the house to meet Somu's mother. Somu is Brati's friend who died with Brati in the encounter. Rather Brati died saving Somu and his other friends. They all were present at Somu's home that dark night. This place is first of the colonies in West Calcutta. First the colonisers then the landlords and now the government have been ruling it. The rulers changed but the place remained always barren, the language describing this colony presents the colonial images that are both literal and sexist, "The colony spread and spread till it had swallowed up the fields ..." (33). The thirst to capture the unexplored land is vibrating in the lines. The opposition gets many votes from this area and in the anger to take revenge from the opposition and also punish the people, the elected government do not put in any effort for the betterment of the place and its people questioning the victim in this power play of the opposition and the government in the rule.

Unlike that night of killing, today everything is calm, there is no unrest, "There is no sign anywhere of the two-and-a-half years' disorder ..." (34). The shops are working smoothly, people are buying their daily groceries, there is no police, people are going to movies, there is the noise of various routine things. In spite of all the violence and terror of that night, these streets do not bear or remember the names of Somu, Brati and their other friends. Brati believed that social change can happen if one strives to work for it in his individual and collective competence. He began carving up feelings with have-nots of Somu's streets due to his own familiarity of deprivation. On that night, Brati had come to warn Somu and his friends about the violence waiting for them. This is the street where mutilation, rape murder and burning had become a routine thing, yet, Sujata realises, people refuse to leave this place. This was also now the only place where Sujata found some relief if possible for her. There was no superficiality here, even meeting for the first time as

strangers; Somu's sister had broken into tears seeing Sujata. People expressed what they felt.

Somu's sister is presented as a responsible dark skinned girl. Somu's murder and their father's consequent demise put the load of running the family and looking after her mother and siblings on her delicate but able shoulders. It is informed that in the desire to send his only son to the college, their father doesn't send her to the college, whether middle or low class the male is powerfully placed in a patriarchal family. But yet she toils like an engine to fulfil her liabilities. She undermines various myths regarding Dalit woman's incompetence. But patriarchy irrespective of talent and skills characterizes women solely on the basis of their gender and biology. Somu's mother is scared that the goons who had murdered Somu will not spare his sister.

Somu's mother cries inconsolably in front of Sujata repenting that night of the death of her son. She is an uneducated poor woman who is already a victim of exclusion based on poverty. Placed in a patriarchal setup, she has lost her only shoulder, Somu. She summons that night to Sujata, "It was your son, Didi, who came to warn them. He died for them. That night, Didi, in this little room of ours, Somu, Partha and Brati slept close to one another" (37). She further narrates how the three of them were talking and laughing lying on a torn mattress. It leaves Sujata in utter surprise. A boy, who remained so distanced in his house, was most lively at Somu's place. He would talk, laugh and have tea here. Sujata in a second looking at the ragged mattress, broken cups and torn calendar and identifies what was missing in her house. She could sense what made Brati a stranger for her. Brati "... was coming back to Sujata again" (38).

Brati had the space to be his true self here and this recognition is the beginning of the construction of Sujata's alternate self. Sujata's mind shifts to her house that day. Brati was sitting in his room and it was only later that she came to know that Brati was writing

slogans. This takes her memories to the days when Brati was excited about his achievements and parades on the Independence Day. Sujata can now see his child to be any other child who loves freedom, who wants to carve his own room. Brati also desired so and Dibyanath made every effort to crush the individuality and creativity of Brati. Brati could not accept this. He is used to smiling at Somu's mother query:; "...why do you waste your life like this, my child? You have every-thing. A well-known father, a mother so learned" (38). The poor and feminine self of Somu's Ma was so reliant on the pity of the upper-class to free themselves from their harsh conditions that it has stop desiring freedom. This sketches an analogous between Somu's mother and Sujata. Nevertheless, Somu and Brati also shared a similarity. They were the selves which were secular, free-thinking, humanist with an evaluative faculty that does not rely on imperceptive mimic.

Brati was at his house that day waiting for a call. Sujata did not know the reason of Brati being at home. He was waiting for a call from the messenger to confirm that Somu and the other friends have been informed to not return to Somu's home. The murderers were waiting for them. The messenger cheated them and instead of protecting Somu and friends, he informed their return to the people who were waiting to finish them. The narratorial voice comments, "The passion of a belief had blinded them to a reality" (40). She talks about a particular reality, the fact that faith is a very small lamp in a big dense forest, it can not reveal all the hidden mysteries of the forest. They died because they trusted many people. Sujata has also trusted all in her family.

Brati and Sujata had tea together that day. It was after a long time that Brati was present in the house in the evening. He was teasing Bini, both were happy. In that moment of happiness, Sujata gathers the courage to question Brati if he needs his mother anymore. She questions her importance and relevance in Brati's life. After all, Brati was the only one who was different to Sujata, they survived because of each other in Dibyanath's stifling

walls. Brati evades her questions leaving the readers wondering if Sujata deliberately did not want to read the answer written big on Brati. Probably, today sitting in Somu's home she can read the answer.

Brati had not given any specific answer to her question that day but he wanted to sit with Sujata, he again wanted to live his childhood with her. He wanted to play *ludo* with Sujata. But Sujata had some work with Tuli and she did not want to upset her. On this, after years Brati made her question her desire, "Why go when you don't want to" (43)? They played *ludo* that day trying to live the same bond which had united them. Sujata enquires about Nandini, the girl whom Brati loves. He was sure as Nandini is not the traditional beautiful girl, the boss as Brati called his father at his back will not like her. His mention, makes Brati question Sujata awareness about him having an affair with his secretary, "Ma, do you know where Boss goes everyday after five" (44)? This time Sujata effaces the question and Brati calls her passive. This suggests that both Sujata and Brati knew that Sujata is not happy, she recognizes her unquestioned acceptance and is willingly not doing anything to overthrow this pressure. However, the problem is to know whether she is doing it willingly or is it her upbringing? But can upbringing alone be questioned? It was not only Brati who knew his father's infidelities, the other children were also aware but they all thought it to be a, "... part of his virility" (46). No, upbringing alone can not be questioned. There is also something known as strength of revolution one is born with. Sujata had defied Dibyanath, not once but twice. She refused to have children after Brati and was stubborn not leaving her job. Both the retaliations had angered Dibyanath. It seems closer Brati is, whether in physical presence or memories, intact is Sujata's sense of free self and the years of their distance had made Sujata a passive recipient. Thus Brati can be discerned as Sujata's self, or a double that has been placed outside by the author just to make things explicit, "... she knew Brati knew everything. He watched his mother all the

time” (47). Brati knew Sujata in and out as if he is the mirror image of her. The mirror with whom she never communicated yet he knew her completely. In reality, he spoke the deepest truths about her, “Let’s stop the game. Why don’t we chat for a while” (47)?

Sujata did not have the time, she was running away, “Just a minute. Let me run down to the kitchen and tell them what to cook” (47). She did not have the courage to confess the crime of killing her identity. She thwarted all his efforts and went down. The phone rang and Brati left the house. It was not Brati who had distanced himself, it was Sujata who had the fear to let Brati close to her. She was embarrassed to face the mirror which will translate all her sins to her aloud. Ironically it is today, after two years later that Sujata has the strength to look into the mirror to know what was happening in Calcutta, what was happening to her.

Margaret Atwood in “This is a Photograph of Me” talks about a picture taken ‘some time ago’. This picture is blurred and the drowned persona though placed in the centre of the picture is most obscured. She compares the smudged photo with her identity which is also smeared. It is blended with others. She is someone’s daughter, wife and mother. She does not have an independent identity. In spite of the fact that she is at the centre of the creation, she is not given any importance and attention (258). Every irrelevant object in the picture is discussed but she is not mentioned until the end, “The radical citizens of Calcutta found nothing unnatural in the spectacle” (50). She is in the centre of the lake which symbolises society and drowning highlights her oppression. The photo is symbolic of her oppression. She herself is not able to locate herself in the picture, she does not know her identity and position in the society. But the moment she peeps into her own self, “...but if you look enough, eventually you will be able to see me” (258), she shows the confidence of finding her identity and place in the society. Sujata’s understanding of the

oppressed Calcutta helped her understand her own oppression, it encourages her to work hard to locate Brati's role and in turn her role in his life: "Who is Sujata" (51).

While leaving for Somu's place, Brati stared at her for the last time. It was a grave look as if pressing Sujata to locate herself, in those eyes, mirror and lake. Her identity was so stained by the insignificant things that she could not locate herself instantly. But today Brati has also become the catalyst for this discovery. Devi delineates a stunning spectrum of myriad relations between Sujata and Brati. At times they run parallel, at times they are one, at times they nag each other's conscience and at times they are friends who can lie and "Brati lied to her" (52). He told her that he will be spending the night with his school friend Ronu but it was only later that Sujata comes to know that he had lied. But then who has lied Brati or Sujata. Sujata had deceived him, yes she was in his camp and without informing him she changed her sides. The night of Brati's death was a usual night for Sujata, her household chores had run the same way, "All the normal, daily chores (53). This further stresses the fact that Brati and Sujata were entwined. For all the other mothers, Somu, Bijit and Partha's; their sons had died that night but for Sujata, Brati had died long ago. Their bond had long been snapped by Sujata, the physical murder of Brati was just a stimulus to her awakening to this truth. They all were left helpless by the death of their sons. Nevertheless, Sujata's awakening, "Now she realised that Brati had belonged with them not only in death, but also in life" (57) helps her use her critical faculty to question their protest, living. She sees an other unlike Somu, Bijit and Partha's mother. For them, what died are their sons, their bodies, they never lamented the loss of optimistic, vigorous and judicious people who had leadership qualities to stir sleeping conscience. Somu's mother shares with Sujata that she could not understand Somu's activities and always called them evil. It was only Sujata who could see them live. She sees another Brati being raised in the Brati laughing and living with Somu, Bijit and Partha. This Brati loved his mother and

Sujata also loved this Brati but, "... never really knew him" (57). Probably, this Brati was always there. He was the Brati who had never accepted things as offered to him like his siblings, who reasoned everything. Sujata lost the vision to see that Brati and therefore he lived with his friends and was separated from Sujata in his life itself, "That was how they were inseparable in both life and death" (57). But today Sujata can also feel herself, "... bound inseparably to all those who carried in their hearts the burden of their loss" (57). Even after a sea of the difference between the learning of Sujata and Somu's mother, the former could understand each word of grief expressed by Somu's mother. Sujata recognized that Brati has not left alone rather connected her to, "... others like her, given her a new family" (58). Sujata had lost Brati years ago and today at the same place where Brati died fighting for the spirit of liberty, Sujata has started finding him again. But how can Sujata seek her liberty here among these people who themselves have been alienated by the upper class? How can she even find solace among the upper class people who are indifferent to any critical interrogation of their hollow society, "The nation, the state, refused to acknowledge their existence, their passion, their indomitable faith in the teeth of death, all that they stood for" (60)? These people were completely unaffected by such murders, it was totally normal for them and this surprised Sujata. She has been living in a society which is, "... rootless, lifeless, where the naked body caused no embarrassment, but natural emotions did ... (68). Somu's father did every effort to save not only his son but other's also. He offered his life to safeguard the life of his son and his friends. He pleaded in front of the police to save his son. He in his limited capacities tried for justice and died in the grief of the dead son. But Brati's father tried every bit and succeeded to efface Brati from his family.

The visit to Somu's place made Sujata juxtapose two kinds of reality and stance of the doom. Where on one hand, her family was excited about Tuli's engagement today on

the other, the grief of Somu's mother and anger of his sister could never be pacified and Sujata could relate to them. This identification narrowed the gap of class distinction. But in all this, today Somu's sister expressed a new facet of desire and potential. The class that has the reputation of bearing human atrocities retaliates with ferocity, she doesn't want Sujata to come to her place and probe into her family, her attitude pointed Sujata that she was not wanted in their home.

Sujata came to know her dead son Brati in this house. She does not know what will she do next seventeenth January? How will she meet Brati next year as every corner of Somu's home has his resonances? But at the moment of final parting, she puts her hand on Somu's mother and tells her that she will, "... always remain grateful to" (69) her. This moment in one go unites her with the universal suffering and also places her outside the social codes that chained herself. She felt something drawing out of her private prison of grief. Somu's home offered a window through which she could see Brati and today she has unchained her prison, "She felt the desire to draw something out of the prison that she had carved within herself, out of her own grief, and offer it to Somu's mother" (70).

#### **Late Afternoon:**

Breaking the prison, Sujata walks into a, "... house quite close to her. Sujata had often glanced at it while passing, but she had never entered it ..." (71). This house resembles the city Sujata lives in, from being polished to rugged, this house has become the recluse of both wealth and poverty as its ground floor accommodates varied rented establishments. The depiction of the house instantly summons Sujata. At one point of time, hinting Sujata's journey starting from an ornamental existence to some unknown destiny and at the other point, it becomes Sujata herself from being a woman who at least had the spark to revolt to a complete passive housewife.



Untill afternoon, the two physical places that the reader encounters Sujata at, have been symbolic of her realisations and experiences: Dibyanath's house where Brati had died, Somu's home where Brati was located and now Sujata enters this third place. On entering this house she first sees a custard apple tree standing but it is now desolate as if mirroring Sujata's loss and then the image of the tree is replaced by Nandini sitting in front of Sujata. She is the girl whom Brati had loved. After Sujata, if Brati had loved someone it was Nandini. She sat on a cane stool facing Sujata. Whether Brati's dead body, Somu's mother or Nandini, Sujata sat facing all of them as if reading her own self in them.

Nandini's first mention is of betrayal, "Anindya betrayed us" (72). Brati died because of a betrayal. A promise, a faith had been broken. Sujata has no awareness of this betrayal. Nandini knows about Sujata's unawareness but she is angered by this ignorance of Sujata. These people have been cast away by Sujata's society and though met daily, the upper class has become hardened to their state. Anindya had betrayed them, "They had developed faith in faithlessness of everything that spelt Establishment, and yet had never thought that there could ... betray them" (75). These establishments killed harbingers of change like Brati and his friends and those who could not be encountered were beaten, burnt, tortured and thrashed in the dark interrogation room, "The burn on the skin healed soon. But in the young heart within, every single burn ached forever. Then back to the solitary cell. Alone with oneself" (73).

Devi talks about the plight of the modern world where institutions based on old age and community rules are placed over and above living beings. Everybody is in the struggle to subdue everybody else. If some like Somu's sister are searching for their self, there are some like Dibyanath for whom existence has become a custom sinking them into sterile inflexibility of the same conformity. Brati and their friends were trying to break this conformity that has separated the life from being. They were unlike Jyoti, Bini, Tuli and

Neepa who did not know their own selves, they were different from Somu's mother who is compelled to abandon her identity and they were also different from Somu's sister who is tormented in their effort to find their identity in the established social society. Yes, betrayal became the reason of their physical death but in turn raising the question about the actual victim of that betrayal. Even on being exposed to the problem of oppression by Nitu, the best like Brati, Anindya could not break away from his clichéd life, "A person recruited by Nitu was above suspicion" (72). Anindya could not destroy his conformity thus becoming a victim of his own betrayal. Devi elaborately describes the act of betrayal commenced by the established system on Brati and Nandini. The description of jail evokes the images of hell, the physical hell that the society makes people like Brati go through, the hell of seclusion and isolation that they experience. This jail is a solitary cell with strong iron doors, soundproof walls and a small hole. The bondage has no connection with the outer world yet he is forced to remember each and every little fact of his experience in the outer world. These solitary rooms have doors which open in even more ferocious interrogation rooms. A thousand-watt bulb is made to frown in the eyes of the bondage till he goes blind, burning cigarettes are pressed on his skin, "The burn on the skin healed soon" (73). Yet every word for the readers turns on itself to reveal the hell that this established system itself is in. It calls for investigation all the accepted official codes. Sujata's arrival in Nandini's house discloses the murky shades of her city.

Nandini also opines that the social structure based on class and wealth is destroying the strength of unity that stands against the oppressive routine. She converts the living room of the house into a space of voice for her pent up frustration, highlighting both her and Sujata's loneliness and alienation in the corrupt social world. Sujata could see that people like her son and Nandini were closest to the reality during the process of breaking away, something she had never tried to know before.

For Brati and Nandini, their group, their purpose was an extension of home, family and nation. They were forging unconventional relationships and families based on love and identification. Their eyes had the gift to see what lies underneath the historian's architectural tombstone, Bengal, the present, the everyday in all its malice and magnificence. Nandini recollects their tremendous confidence in their struggle to bring a new age, "Brati and I would walk all the way just talking ..." (77) about it. These were the walks which bore a resistance to authority that try to enforce itself from the above, they broke the stereotypes to experience the astonishment of happiness, "... everything spelt ecstasy; we couldn't hold in the joy, we felt explosive" (77). But today these have turned into terminated, pointless search, "It will never come back. Total loss" (77). The different architectures of power have undone them. But they felt betrayed and annoyed more at the people like Sujata who shut the door on fracturing inferences of scepticism. It makes Sujata go through a limitless void and inconsolable grief. She senses in Nandini an annoyance felt towards an intruder for herself. "No one would again throw open the doors of her solitary cell ..." (79), she has been exposed to her reality. Brati had told Nandini that Sujata was being used like a doormat by his father and Sujata did nothing about it. Brati was frustrated that Sujata chose not to do anything yet she wanted the best for her and assured her integrity always. Nandini let Sujata know that Brati had confronted Dibyanath about his relationship with his secretary. He had threatened Dibyanath and thus it is today that Sujata gets to know the reason of why Dibyanath had started avoiding Brati from some time before his death itself. Brati's death assured the burial of the confrontation between the father and the son, the confrontation which acted like a fissure in the belief system of Dibyanath. It made Dibyanath confront his ugliness. Brati's death effaced those ugly marks from Dibyanath's face. Through this revelation, Nandini explains Sujata that protest does not have to only stem from personal grudges only; it can also stem from the desire for the betterment of a

system. These people were not working to formulate new ideologies, but just to make the world a better place. Had they been in the process of forming new establishments, Brati would have been probably alive today. No one will now ever fiercely debate her reality, “From now on she would be alone, totally alone” (79).

Nandini informs Sujata that Brati and she had to leave Calcutta on fifteenth January but as Brati knew that his birthday was the most important occasion for Sujata, he had postponed the departure to nineteenth January, “...he loved you. That is why he hadn't left home” (82). Not only for his birthday, Brati was living in Dibyanath's house only for Sujata. Brati wanted Sujata to accept and fight against the wrong. Sujata questions if she was responsible for Brati's death on sixteenth January? Nandini pacifies her saying that Sujata does not have to blame herself, he might have got murdered at the base he was going to. Nonetheless, it leaves Sujata and the readers wondering if she was responsible for the death of Brati that had happened years ago in Dibyanath' house. If she had revolted to the stifling ways of her husband, probably Brati would have been alive. Sujata has got the reason for Brati's death, she knows how and why Brati died and may be this is the end for her. Nandini enquires if Sujata could understand the reason for Nandini's hurt after she came out of the jail. Sujata did not have the answer. Nandini answers that it was the veil of normalcy and the false assurance that everything is quietened. Sujata was shocked, “But haven't things quietened down” (85)? Nandini screamed in denial. Nandini questions Sujata's numbness. Why is she accepting Brati's death as the end? Nandini tells her that she might be arrested again making the readers acknowledge Sujata's arrest. Neither of them has anyone to talk to. Sujata comes to know that this is not Nandini's home, her parents do not reside in Calcutta. At this moment, this home becomes the symbolic home for Sujata where from the journey of need and remembrance switches to one of desire. Sujata bids farewell to Nandini, they both know that they will not meet each other ever, “Nandini did

not say a word. She turned back, supported herself against the grimy and dirty wall. She slowly started walking back. Each step she took carried her farther away from Sujata. Sujata came out onto the Calcutta streets again” (89).

Walking away from Nandini, out onto the streets of Calcutta symbolically functions both as walking away from a screen into the world where the unconscious and the reality coalesce and also figuring generation of spirit that comes into being for Brati and his values after their loss.

### **Evening:**

Sujata has reached her home. As it is winter, it has already got dark. Devi again uses nature to explain the feelings and thoughts of Sujata. She beautifully juxtaposes the exterior landscape to Sujata’s experiences.

Dibyanath has been waiting for Sujata. He is angry on Sujata for being late. After all, it is Tuli’s engagement today. Since Brati’s death, he had maintained calm with Sujata. He was not shrieking at her but today he could not control his anger and burst out: “Wonderful” (90)! Sujata does not reply but Dibyanath’s scream summoned what Nandini had told her, Brati’s confrontation with Dibyanath about his affair with his typist. She tried imagining what could have happened. Brati did not only try to protect his friends that day, he was also everyday safeguarding Sujata from Dibyanath’s atrocities. Now it is her turn, to protect Brati who was her spirit, whom she lost years back.

Every step and corner of the lighted house of Dibyanath are today standing in contrast to the world of Brati and Nandini speaking the difference. The reminiscences of Brati have faded away in Dibyanath’s house. People like Brati can never live in the palaces of Dibyanath or people like Dibyanath can never accept the change, “There was no trace of Brati in this, in any of this” (91-2).

Sujata is feeling like a stranger. Strangely, the house she has been living in has become distant to her than the last two homes she has visited. Everything in this house is echoing betrayal.

Sujata is not shocked to see that drenched in evil, the house is still functioning normally. There are sweets on the dining table, diner had been ordered, elaborative decorations. Bini, Neepa and Tuli have gone to the parlour to get ready. These embellishments stand against the raw grim reality for Sujata. This juxtaposition works as a symbol for the reader to see the heart-wrenching truth the lighted outer world is constructed on. For the first time, Sujata could see the ugliness in the varnish of cream on Dibyanath's face. This glazy cosmetic has not been able to hide the carnal Dibyanath. Devi uses each adjective aptly to bring out the various forms of evil existing in the world. Every adjective and activity happening at Dibyanath's place puncture the world of the haves established on ideological inclinations and political gains. She is angry, offended and thus reacts to Dibyanath's strict inquiry of her whereabouts, "If...you...don't leave...this room...at once, I'll...leave...this house...and never come back again" (93). The space stresses that Sujata's conclusion springs from retrospection, reading, debating and questioning and in this moment the entire book changes into Sujata's journey that started with reading a book topic and has now attained a living dimension. She refuses to obey the image of good, polite, homely women that Dibyanath had carved for her. She shouts Dibyanath's extra-marital affairs on his face living him crippled. Dibyanath walks out of the room, "... tamely, wiping the nape of his neck" (93). Dibyanath could exploit her till the time she works as a self-sacrificing woman but when because of her family's betrayal, she revolutionizes into a strong person, Dibyanath is left whiplashed and tamed. He could not accept this image. Her open declaration of Dibyanath's corrupt relations and acts works as a denial of their relationship and the institution that subdued her individuality. She tears apart the patriarchal

expression of love and signifies its understanding of man-woman relationship only in terms of sex, where women reside in the secondary place and men have power over their body as well as their mind, represented by the ex-typist and Sujata respectively in context to Dibyanath. The usage of the crude language which by the same patriarchy is categorised as male-language places her outside the body.

Sujata was now sure that she will not stay in this house, this body and this sleaze, “She will no longer stay in a house where Brati was no more” (94). Brati who was the symbol of humanity in all its aspects: love, empathy, understanding, helping and self-respect. She repents being weak when Brati was alive, she laments not showing the courage to leave Dibyanath’s house when Brati was alive. Brati dies saving humanity and Sujata can not even now challenge her bondage.

Sujata wanted to take a bath, “Get me some hot water Hem. I’ll have a bath” (94) as if trying to rinse away her un-protesting self, an awakening to the complexity of her own solitude. But the solitude still has to be understood and answered, Can I choose what I want to read? Who settles for me then? Can one person select for everyone? Does that mean what is real for one person is true for every person? Who characterizes what is improper, “One could kill and go unpunished, for the killers were extremely cunning, Can any society be in an even terrifying situation? Why is there no one to identify those who initiated the killers into killing the youth? How could they go unscathed? Why does it all still remain so baffling” (98)?

All this has to be answered. Sujata enquires about everyone from Hem, the caretaker and probably the only person who after Sujata lamented Brati’s loss.

Sujata is suddenly hit by her appendix pain taking her back to the labour pains she had experienced on the day before Brati has been born, “Why did she remember Brati’s birth alone? Was it because Brati would remain forever close to her heart” (96)? Or was it

that today Brati is being born to her in the true sense. Devi subtly knots the two flashes of reality, life and death, physical and transcendental.

Sujata wanted Tuli's engagement to go well though she never wanted her engagement to be fixed for this day. However, as usual, no one was bothered about her opinion. Tony is Dibyanath's choice, like Dibyanath he is also a mother worshipper. Toni has also got Dibyanath, 'Shaw and Benson account'. Tony's family religiously believes in their guru, Swamiji who lives in America. Dibyanath had every reason to love Tony and also more so when Tuli was his favourite. It is today that Sujata finds the reason for Brati not liking Tuli. Brati did not eat at the same table with Tuli. Tuli even knowing Dibyanath's affair never spoke about it. This all brings out the immense hypocrisy existing in the world of Dibyanath. People have become comfortable in the skins of followers of the superficial norms.

Brati had been always upset about Sujata not protesting against it. Sujata wants to tell the reason of her not protesting to Brati. "Brati would never know now that Sujata had suffered all the indignities only for his sake ..." (98). She wanted his studies to get over smoothly and then she would have left with him for always. Devi shows time constantly moving to and fro, constantly shuttling between past and present, between lived and desired, between existing and should have been. With every memory is attached a repentance of not being able to act honestly. Sujata is projected as a tourist, a visitor in her own world, a world that she thought was created by her without realising she was a mere space in that world which had to be filled with different requirements at varied times. She was not moving rather different images were visiting her. Sujata was fixed and it was Brati who was walking. Devi highlights the futility of seeking for landmarks as Sujata was fixed and stagnate at one place. Sujata wanted to caress Brati's mutilated face with her fingers but she realises that, "It was an inevitable part of the pattern of killing to prolong the process of



killing and watch with demonic glee the death throes of the man dying” (98). Sujata reads her life in this distorted face. Devi makes Sujata see her life through the distorting cuts of Brati’s face. Every cut of his face scratched reality which stood contrasted to what Sujata thought natural or normal.

Sujata sees Tuli, Neepa and Bini dressed in *benarasi saris* gifted by Dibyanath. They were of nine hundred rupees, something that could ease the suffering of Somu’s mother to a great extent. She strips the layers of this unessential expenditure from which is raised violence. It is the violence of class. The same violence that has killed Brati and his friends. The same violence that has paralysed Dibyanath to death of his own son. The concealments of saris and ornaments uncover the violence that exists at Dibyanath’s house. Even on being daintily dressed, Tuli seems to be distressed. She is worried if Sujata has got her the ornaments, “Sujata undid the clasp of her bag and poured the jewellery out on the bed” (100). Tuli is not content with her part of jewellery, she also wants the jewellery that Sujata had kept for Brati’s bride. On not getting it, Tuli creates a big fuss but Sujata reacts stubbornly to it, “You didn’t heed my sentiments when you fixed the day. You chose the day because Tony’s mother wished it. That I’m back home should be enough for you” (101). She also silences Neepa counting all her illegitimate affairs. In spite of such vehement criticism from her family members, Sujata gets ready for the party. She remembers Brati asking her, “...how can you go on doing your duty” (103). Sujata wants to reply, she was trained like that.

Sujata wore a black bordered white sari, she was looking different from all the other decked up, “...they all wanted to be like each other. They never wanted to be themselves” (104). The difference is not isolating her rather seems like an enlivening sense of life at these cracks. Brati also always wanted her to experience the freedom of herself. She remembers on one of Neepa’s birthday, Brati resisted her going there as visiting the eye

doctor was important. Sujata refused listening Brati thinking that Neepa will be disappointed. But today she craves to tell Brati that she doesn't want to go down for the party. She wants to 'act as her heart dictated'.

Sujata drags herself to the party, "A hubbub of talk and laughter. Did the earth belong only to the dead? The dead that ate, quarrelled and lived in a frenzy of lust and greed" (107)? But then she realises these people are actually dead, these are those dead people whom Brati could never accept and love. Finally, there is a triumphant celebration of Brati, the self that Brati championed, that rips apart the mean artificial identity. Sujata sees Brati has not died, rather is beyond the garb of fake identity and relations. Sujata met each one of these dead to see through the varied superfluous identities.

The entire family of Tony, Kapadias are unquestioned followers of Swamiji who has a halo behind his head. Devi contrasts the fake divinity of Swamiji as announced by Mrs. Kapadia to the halo that is used to make people like Brati and Nandini blind in the interrogation cells, "But Mrs. Kapadia's vision had not been damaged in the light of a thousand suns" (108) radiated by Swamiji. It is a comment on the endless night against the freedom Brati was striving for.

Some were drinking in the party, others gossiping. Molly and Jishu Mitter were praising themselves for the upbringing they have given to their son, Ronu unlike Brati. Ronu had gone to the club on the night of Brati's death. Devi critiques urban violence of commercialisation through Jishu Mitter's comment about Sujata, "Sujata looks lovely! In white. Grief. Wonderful" (113). Everything is glamorised, ready to be sold or purchased. Being the survivor in this capitalist world, the journalist, Tony's friend wants to buy Sujata's experience as a bereaved mother to sell his newspaper. It will sell easily. People want to realise the bliss in their life only by finding it absent from others'. Amit and Neepa start fighting openly over Neepa's extramarital affair. However, the irony is, no one is

interested in these different events of madness, pointing that this madness has become the normative code. These people are deciding and defining society for everybody. Mr. Kapadia asserts, “What is the country’s problem? We can not accomplish integration ... Food is no problem” (120). He does not feel that farmers have any issues with the government rather according to him they are earning rich and can buy all that they wish for. He only knows the discussed problems of caste, gender and religion. Kapadia is completely oblivious to the realities of his society. The statement assesses critically the concept of nation and nationalism. Poverty has killed Somu, it is still murdering his entire family. His siblings are still not allowed to lead a normal life. They are still struggling for integrity but people like Dibyanath and Kapadia don’t allow that to be established.

Sujata observed everything but she did not speak. Her silence at their conversations speaks rejection of her past self and the symbols that enclose the self. There is a construction of a new self which deconstructs the element of hatred and sympathy attached to the socially understood misguided. The understanding of Dibyanath’s society gets destabilised by their failure to notice the class and gender fissures and faults in their society. They come out to be short-sighted and self-centred people who believe in exploitation.

Sujata’s pain was growing and Tuli calls her to meet a friend of Tony who was in a hurry and was leaving from outside itself. Sujata comes to greet him outside. It is Saroj Pal, Deputy Commissioner, Detective Department who had proved Brati to be a criminal. He becomes the symbol of Dibyanath’s society which works hard to fix the theories of the secondary-self or the ‘other’ created by the dominant versions. Saroj Pal is the reminder to Sujata that self, unity and fellow feelings between the people who want to deconstruct the fixed stifling notions will always be opposed by Dibyanath’s society. As William Butler Yeats in “The Second Coming” says, “Turning and turning in the widening gyre”, the

opposites will always exist (99), however it does not mean that people like Sujata will always be victimised. Sujata questions, “Did Brati die so that these corpses with their putrefied lives could enjoy all the images could enjoy ...” (126)? ‘Never’ is the answer, “Sujata’s long-drawn-out, heartrending, poignant cry burst, exploded like a massive question ... It was a cry that smelt of blood, protest .... Ironically, blood and protest are also the two pangs that a mother experiences at the birth of her child. It makes me remember my favourite “Spelling” by Margaret Atwood in which she elaborates the birth of a child like the course of self-discovery and articulation. The first stage of the process is where a woman without questioning accepts the routines and patriarchal prejudices followed by the second step of protest. It emerges from the comprehension of artificial existence and finally as a baby is born, the woman discovers herself, she finds her power and identity (265-66). Sujata’s appendix burst and the novel ends on this note. The burst of Sujata’s appendix is the expression of her denial of the hollow existence. She refuses to be dominated by the hypocritical society. The novel begins with the pain of birthing and ends on the note of pain. The former was also the birth of a mother and the latter marks her transience. She becomes one with the brutal and estranged truth of the death of one thousand and eighty-three revolutionaries struggling in double-faced bourgeois society.

### **Nabina Das’s *Footprints in the Bajra***

*Footprints in the Bajra* is a story of Muskaan, a young girl, running in the setting of Bihar Maoist activities. Muskaan declines to be a victim of the circumstances she is living in. The novel begins in the dense fields of Bajra in Durjanpur, “...a world of darkness and shadows that jostle in the slightest light” (15). Durjanpur has no electricity, it is the bad man’s place where thieves and robbers can rob or enter your house at any time. Muskaan is an orphan who lives with her *mausaji*, Suryakant Sahay. She has passed the

twelfth class and goes to a college twice a month. Nora, who is a New Delhi based student cum activist not only narrates Muskaan's journey of escape and freedom from these dangerous fields but also acts as a catalyst for Muskaan to gain the required consciousness of her long suppression. Nevertheless, Muskaan's jail is the male-utilization of a woman's body and psyche. Nabina Das delineates Muskaan's poignant journey of realisation of her marginalisation as secondary even when she thought herself to be one of the strongest parts of her organisation that was supposedly working for liberation from the state oppression. The journey is divided into nine parts and unlike *Mother of 1084*, it is a linear process.

### **Sheherwali: Visit to Durjanpur**

The novel's words are charged with denotative to connotative meanings, "If you misrepresent them, they'll abduct and kill you" (15). It is the first line of the novel. Muskaan is briefing Nora or Sheherwali as Muskaan addresses her, about Durjanpur. Nora has come to research Durjanpur and its hidden ventures. All this time of the briefing, Muskaan has been scrutinising Nora, as if trying read her reactions hidden under a mask. The beginning itself introduces Muskaan being trapped amidst the traditional jails setup for women and the global changes happening in relation to human-self. On being questioned by Nora about her awareness of their values and aims, Muskaan stays numb. She evades the subject.

Nora has come to Durjanpur not only research about the area but also to perform their plays. She has come with her theatre group named Campus Theatre. There is a constant juxtaposition of the thick, impenetrable forests and concrete, constructed metropolitan architecture. Nora questions, "How can one convince students who are used to ranting in cafes, bookshops and campus plazas [...]" (16) to come and perform in the discomfoting sounds of Durjanpur?

Their first show is performed in Mandap. This place in Durjanpur is the one where different kinds of socio-political and religious ceremonies take place. Muslims are not allowed to enter this place, however for the first time to see Nora's theatre, the Muslims step here. The local headmaster, Suryakant Sahay, Muskan's guardian and a community leader is happy to see Muslims at the Mandap stating as if he desired change and peace based on equality. Das, here again, contrasts Durjanpur with the big cities, but only to point the various discriminations existing in the cities also. This makes the reader question the difference between varied places when it comes to exclusion of people on the basis of social, economical, political and religious factors. The novel thus uses this common place, Mandap to summon those different structures that practice discrimination on the different levels of existence at the same platform. Das like Omvedt and others hints that women survival cannot now be worked out in seclusion. It should be seen in relation to sweeping changes and must surpass social, economical, political and religious distinctions. Nevertheless, private and public existences all the time connect with each other to form life. Muskaan gives a long scarf to Nora before she goes to perform, informing her about the possible sexual exploitation of the woman sported in jeans without a *dupatta*. Nora wants to retaliate; she does not want to drape the scarf. She knows that this is one of the rules that men ordain to subjugate women and she is not scared of these rules but at the same time she is afraid of the violent activities that take place in Durjanpur. Muskaan updates her that it is a common thing finding a dead body here or a gun. On hearing this Nora gets scared to sleep alone but Muskaan is not. One can understand the important role of place in framing the experience. Muskaan also tells Nora that in Durjanpur people do not run over each other but they do not believe in educating their daughters. Headmaster Sahay runs a school where there are fifty students but the maximum of them are boys. Muskaan is educated enough to understand these statistics, she does not enjoy the fact that girls at Durjanpur are only taught

to cook, “My dear Sheherwali, women here are under double yokes. They are worse off than farm animals! Only I have my freedom of choice” (22).

### **Muskaan: In Bed with Che**

Muskaan reveals that the enormous work of cooking, washing, booming, mopping she does at Sahay’s home is just a cover for something. It is some mission and this assignment that has been given to Muskaan by Sahay. Muskaan is confident and proud of the fact the Sahay depends on her completely to carry out his aim and uphold his philosophy as a son would have done. She again stresses the gender binaries existing in her society. Equating herself with a son marks the desire to rise up. Soon after the mention of the mission, Muskaan tells that she loves reading her mausaji’s gift, *Life of Che Guevara*. She also loves to read books which have the legends of revolutionary heroes and their uprisings. These books have formed Muskaan’s fairy tales. Apart from the books, Muskaan loves comrade-in-arms Palash Paswan. They are very good friends. Slowly the readers are getting to understand Sahay’s mission and Muskaan real task. Comrade Avadhut is their supervisor. Muskaan knows every skill required in this mission, she can strike, cut, swim, run and drive too. She is comrade Madhu. However, her skills are yet to be put to action. Her place in this mission was a recipient, away from the meaning of a functional being. Madhu is trained but is still treated like a child. Das uses language to make us see Muskaan’s place in this world of Maoists. The description never even hints at this world being that of Muskaan. Muskaan comes out to be a child enamoured and lured by some stardom. Palash, Avadhut and her training seem an escape from the conventional burdening work meant for a woman. It in no way gave the control of her life to her, she wanted to learn firearms but was denied till the time Avadhut wants her to learn that. Muskaan here emerges out to be a pet who is prepared to fight but can be hunted by the powerful male at anytime.

Avadhut asks Palash to train Muskaan in the firearms. During their training, Muskaan is completely overpowered by Palash's physicality. It makes us question Muskaan's true desires. Comradeship could have been seen as a true liberating tool only if it would have destabilized her co-dependent behaviour and built up own desires and directions. Muskaan can do anything for the pleasure and security promised by Palash, "It's fun teaching you. May be when we are not practicing, we can go watch turtles in the river" (30). Palash also tells Muskaan that the turtles were dying in Durjanpur as the government did not take care of them, ironically turning Muskaan into a turtle who will not only be brutally treated by the government but is also a prey of Palash's lust in the garb of love. Muskaan soon falls in love with Palash but they decide not to disclose it to anyone. One of the many reasons they hide their love from Suryakant is his prejudices against class, caste and religion. Palash Paswan is placed at a lower level in social ladder than him and thus he will not allow Muskaan to enter into any kind of relation with him. Sahay's biases in not only limited to Palash, the other comrade Arif being a Muslim also falls in the same line. This attitude of Sahay forces the reader to interrogate the ideas and their boundaries propounded by a particular group. Sahay's doings and actions expose the double-mindedness of the person fighting for his state's independence.

The same doubts are also faced by Muskaan, however, unlike Sahay, she questions and answers her own inhibitions. Muskaan can clearly see the difference between her and Nora. She remembers that on first meeting Nora, she had her own reserves. Muskaan wanted to know if Nora is a Muslim name. On knowing that Nora gets her name from her Christian grandmother, Muskaan is impressed. She reads the difference between New Delhi and Durjanpur. Durjanpur will murder anyone who would even try to cross the socio-religious boundaries. Muskaan is seen reading the democracy that Sahay's wants to achieve through his struggle. Nevertheless, she also questions the purpose of the



terminological plays of Nora and her friends, “But I also know perhaps these students aren’t aware that this play they have brought from New Delhi can do nothing to alleviate the problem they want to address” (36). Muskaan has begun reflecting on Durjanpur’s condition. She draws a parallel between Nora’s plays and Durjanpur. Sahay has told her that Nora is soon flying to America for a student exchange programme. It has been funded by ‘Pepsi- sponsored cocktail’ that promises to work for downtrodden. He wants Muskaan to help her enjoy the excitement hidden in the, “... stab-wound bloodied underbelly of rural India ...” (37). Sahay’s words fuse the different places and people into each other where Durjanpur is merged with entire India and at the same time, there is a stress on the difference. This comment also brings the reader face to face with the versions to which the ruling revolutionaries have subjected the struggle to.

Muskaan is appointed to protect Nora. She shows the discrimination laid by the Indian *Varna* system Durjanpur is deeply immersed in, “... lotus- crammed village tank neatly slices into two halves this settlement of five hundred people” (40). Women are not safe in Durjanpur. Muskaan compares them to juicy treats for armed men. She then takes Nora to people’s courts. On enquiring about these courts, Muskaan explains that these courts are arranged by people who do not trust authorities. There is a case of a young girl going on. She is crying on being victimized by her own aunt and uncle. The trial resembles any other trials that are carried out in the societal normative courts. The Uncle and aunt are calling, “... the girl a prostitute and other names” (44). The judge is sitting in the same manner with a table in front of him. There are witnesses. These courts are more or less the same as normative courts but they offer a new political insight. These courts are formed in dejection to the working of government; however, what is also exposed is how the so-called revolutionary spirit is also victimising women. This is the politics that is there on the agenda of revolution. They are using these helpless victims to achieve their own end. The

liberator of people has become an impediment to the autonomy needed today by women. Muskaan gets furious when Nora claims that the young girl must have got justice, “An illiterate village girl gets justice ... Ask any women in this village or around and come back to tell me how many of them ever got justice when such issues came up. They won’t even know the meaning of justice” (46).

Ironically, the truth is that Muskaan knows that this girl, Gauri gets justice, she gets her piece of property. This is a change in terms of a woman getting her rights but what Muskaan says reveals the counterpoising of patriarchal violence against the liberal violence of the comrades. The laws of ‘kangaroo courts’ against the wounded sense of women’s integrity, “With Comrade Bhattarai’s visit nearing, our courts will build up a crescendo, influence the media, confuse the authorities and gain grassroots support” (47).

#### **Nora: With the Headless Goddess**

“... decent women in the village do not go about anywhere with a bunch of men ...” (49). Das explicitly brings out the construct of gender. Nora is quite blunt about using fair creams to keep her feminine self safe. Muskaan notifies that Maoists do not kill women. This difference is not only present in Durjanpur but exists in the big metropolitan cities also. Nora boyfriend was apprehensive about her visit to Durjanpur with ten men. He could not adjust to the idea of Nora sleeping with them in a same room. He wanted to fly off to New York with Nora to lead a comfortable life. Das again questions the difference between Durjanpur and New Delhi. Amidst it, she places the central theme of Nora’s play that is enacted at Durjanpur: *The Ghost at the Altar*. It is about an orphan boy who works in a carpet factory. On being suppressed he sets himself free along with his co-workers. They form a group to counter the system that refuses to change itself. Her play is met with criticism. They were accused of spreading revolutionary ideologies by the Durjanpur men, “As it is the Maoists have made our life hell” (55). Nonetheless, Das uses this episode to

cut out the reaction of women. They were more interested in Nora herself. They were first seeing a woman performing out on the street outside the reel life. Given this background and two different reactions of men and women, Das does not only show the binary opposition operating between the two genders but highlights the polarisation between the progressive Maoists and suppressed women, "... these women approach and run their course fingers on Nora's arm and made sure she is not made of fragile porcelain" (55). It is only Muskaan who understands this. She shouts at these women telling them to learn from Nora's plays.

Muskaan takes Nora to her evening college in Banka. There she meets Avadhut who scans her face. On being told by Muskaan that Nora wishes to go to America for a creative writing course, Avadhut expresses his displeasure but requests Nora to perform her play in a place near Durjanpur. Das gives a romantic turn of events to Nora and Avadhut relation.

Nora on his request agrees to perform the same play at Chinnamasta, the abode of the headless goddess. Coincidentally, Nora is also playing the role of an angry goddess in the play. But the performance is hindered by sudden violence. Many people, unseen enemies started chasing them. Nora, playing the goddess is left frightened. There is a clever use of imagery of the goddess by Das to bring out the reality of construction working in the concept. Avadhut holds the hand of Nora and takes her into the dense and dark fields of Bajra. Nora gets scared evading all the artificial strength that the Sheherwali has been projected till now: "...a gunshot goes off nearby deafening me momentarily" (69). It is Muskaan who saves her instantly setting a distinction between her and Nora. Their positions are swapped. "Sheherwali, Muskaan whispers. Now that you have found me out, stay with me" (70).

Nora comes to know that it was all planned by Avadhut and his army. Their Maoists identity is revealed to Nora. She further understands that their play was just a trap to lure an important landowner's son. They wanted to kill him to avenge the feuds these rich people have with the 'so-called social renegades'. Suryakant Sahay was the master mind of this execution and the landowner's son is found dead the next day, his throat was slashed.

At the time of the killing, Muskaan unaware is helping Nora to escape, "We could have got you an early bus to the train station. Now you have stained yourself with blood all over" (71). Nora had fallen down and thus she could not leave Durjanpur.

### **Avadhut: Am I Mr. Butterfly or Lazarus?**

This part begins with examining Muskaan role in the army. Avadhut reveals the use of language as tooled by Sahay to convince his village brothers about their actions. He uses big metaphors. Avadhut is happy killing the landowner's son because it will get them in the news. He also confesses that in order to safeguard his cover, he has put the life of Nora and Muskaan in danger. He could have helped them and the entire theatre group to escape but just in order to safeguard his identify, he abandons them in the middle of the chaos created by him. This attitude forces the readers to equate workings of establishment and Sahay's anti-establishment. The murders and killings of the opposition people have been an age old mantra to maintain the sole authority. Avadhut is more bothered protecting their organisation than saving the lives of Nora and Muskaan. He neither wants them to return nor get hold by the police.

Das through Avadhut tries to lift the consciousness of the exploited people to rescue them from self-destruction. Avadhut describes the clever process of establishments to enslave the people, though he himself practices the same. He describes how the society prostitutes itself to retain power and the way government works in extolling power structures among the masses to ensure resistance against any attempt towards radical

uprooting of these structures, “The glitter and shine baffles us, as does its tantalising promise of a syrup lick ... curbing all our attempts to dissent” (75). It is as Langston Hugh’s tells in “Harlem”, dreams deferred dry up (126).

The question is isn’t Avadhut prostituting himself to be powerful. There is a strong hint of a desire to be recognised by the people in Avadhut also, “I emerged as ‘Comrade’ Avadhut, the ‘saintly comrade’. To be honest, I took immense pleasure in my transition, or should I say, my new Lazarus status” (86). Married at a young age, Avadhut has been a hot-headed man. He soon lost his wife Meena in a car crash. He was driving the car. Pestered by the blames of Meena’s parents he wanted a change and so he met Sahay. Sahay did not take much time to brief Avadhut about the problems of Durjanpur and the aim of their organisation to uplift the place. Avadhut’s easy acceptance of the role offered by Sahay in his organisation points at his thirst for recognition and a consumerist image and therefore, his self-comparison with the classical figure of Lazarus works as a parody of the traditional figure of power. Lazarus had risen again because of his faith in the Christ and Avadhut rises because the society always needs a hero to base their faith on. His idea of subversion is not executed in terms of any liberating ideology rather he emerges an image to battle against the already rooted.

Sahay also makes Muskaan the victim of same freedom mimicry: “Yes Mausaji. She almost did a military salute ...” (86) on being introduced to Avadhut by Sahay. Her desire to be different from the traditional docile girl is schematised and packaged well by Sahay. He gives her all those images and symbols which have been traditionally associated with patriarchal control and power. These equipments give her the semblance of power. This bias is a common practice against such women. Manimala in “The Bodhgaya Struggle”, talks about how in 1978, women’s struggle was left unheard by the Sangharsh

Vahini which was together started by men and women against the autocratic exploitation of the ruling party, Congress.

Sahay is trying to emerge out to be the new power centre of Durjanpur or a new place where the 'proletariat population' will not be exploited, "We are providing justice to the people" (93). This also clearly reveals a close nexus between Sahay, the government and landlords. They both are recognised by the people by the power that gets defined through the opposite. Sahay shouts at the landlord, Madho Singh, "To us, you are a class enemy and the only way we can overcome class enemies is by awarding them death" (93). On this, Palash shoots Madho Singh "...in the head twice in powerful but quick blunt thuds" (94).

There is a want to be differently recognised by the people, "The idea was not to hide the fact that Madho Singh was killed by just anyone. The idea was to let the whole world know this is how Maoists punished ..." (95). Ironically, Ernest Olmos who had helped Avadhut meet Sahay, around the same time is captured and killed brutally by the police on the doubts of terrorist's activity. Das successfully shows the horrible reality of power play existing as fissures in both the systems. Avadhut is sure that Nora is a threat to their existence. He doubly victimizes Nora. On one side she is seen as a danger to their life and on the other Avadhut turns her into the devil that incites his lustful passion.

### **Nora: A Marlboro Maoist and His Gang**

Nora could not believe the reality she has to live in Durjanpur. Even being a strong confident woman she is not able to accept what happens to her and Muskaan a night before. Though she has read a lot about such happenings in Durjanpur yet the incident leaves her terrified. She curses her decision to be at Durjanpur. Nora's experience helps to realise the difference between the read facts and the true comprehension of their existence. It interrogates the claims of awareness. On the contrary Muskaan even on knowing the

purpose of Nora's visit can understand the former's fear, "No use lamenting, I can understand how you feel" (102).

They return to the hiding camp. In the room where Nora lays are hung the posters of Mao, Che, Lenin and some other revolutionaries like them. She describes the place as dark and menacing, immediately juxtaposing the literal description with the last night's happenings in the mind of the reader. She hears voices she has not heard before. They are discussing some plan and then amidst these strange voices, she could identify one of them. It was Suryakant Sahay. Nora is not able to believe her ears, "...the sage like elderly man is nothing but a cunning commander of a group of dangerous people ..." (106).

Muskaan apologises to Sahay for being identified by Nora. The loving *mausaji* is very upset with Muskaan, he rebukes her for not being in her uniform. Muskaan did not act the way she has been taught. Their conversation works as a yardstick for their relation. The love is just a polite garb to train Muskaan the way Sahay wanted her to act. This lays bare the traditional trap a woman has been trapped since ages. On the other hand, Sahay and his other comrades take the issue of their identity being exposed to Nora. Nora pretending to sleep overhears their conversation and fears if she is "...a central character in the Maoist Kangaroo court? A culpable class enemy ..." (106) who is now waiting for her verdict?

The Kangaroo Court which is a mark of protest asserts defeat also as it becomes a symbol of a new power which is shown in the process of being immortalised in the memory of people. We see that these rebels are unable to separate themselves from the structural constructs of the traditionalists. It also questions their goal. All of a sudden the issues that were explained by Muskaan vanish and what seems to remain is just an image. One can always say that the Maoists, who are traditionally explained to be situated at periphery placed at the centre of power but what can not be escaped is the fact of both the traditionalists and Maoists are caught up in the same power game. They both employ the

female labour for their purpose. Das conveys the existence of patriarchal boundaries in each domain of human life.

There is a pervading sense of violence in the way the comrades communicate. Das focuses on their process also apart from their aim. Avadhut asks the captive Nora to relax but then suddenly addresses, “Listen comrade Palash, don’t forget to collect your new assault rifle from Raxaul” (107). They also want to kill Nora now as she knows about them and their workings. Interestingly, Muskaan also favours it, “She can’t cook, can’t dig, can’t toil, can’t shoot. What a liability” (109)? Her phrases assert her need for an identity. The comradeship allows her to move away from the subjugated identity of a woman but limits her association to the outside world. Ironically it fixes the identity of this woman into a new role. Muskaan is thus not a transformed woman but is transformed into a hollow symbol of transformation by an organisation which still reflects the State.

It is only Avadhut who finally decides to save Nora. This puzzles Muskaan, “...when did you become so compassionate about the enemy” (111). In doing so Das compares her to “...a snake whose tail has been stomped upon” (111) confirming Muskaan’s position in the organisation to be just another role given to a woman to be performed.

The linear time is passing away and we meet Nora at the John F. Kennedy Airport. She is released by the Maoists on the condition of not revealing their identities and workings to the police. It was a bargain, revealing their truth would have been an end of Nora’s future. Avadhut had given her their address before she left them. She wants to write a letter to Muskaan. In spite of what all had happened in Durjanpur, Nora felt an attachment towards Muskaan. She could see a desire for change and set things right in Muskaan. This is something that Nora wanted to always do in her life. Her visit to Durjanpur was backed by the same motive, “I share with her similar impulses, rather, convictions” (114). She feels



the difference between them is only of the different approach. She yearns to tell Muskaan that they are one in their desire.

Nora recollects the reason of delaying her departure from Durjanpur. She wanted to be with Muskaan but the latter always saw her as her enemy. Nora is the only one who is able to understand the warmth of Palash and Muskaan's relationship. Even on being criticised and tagged jealous by Muskaan, Nora realises that Muskaan is, "...so young, so human, this Muskaan. She is so like us" (119). However, soon the reader is offered a different picture of Muskaan. A night before Nora's departure, frightened Muskaan comes to her room and wakes her up, "Get up fast and move to the backyard" (120). An outrageous mob from *chabutara* has come to avenge the murder. In all the violent chaos, Muskaan is the one who takes the courageous lead to face them. Avadhut is seen merely hurling slangs at them. Das uses him to offer an edging subversive critique of the progressive urban world and the state oppression but at the same time his words also places him in the position of an interrogator who assures that not everybody can take part in the commanding social roles as this will disrupt Maoists' position in the new struggled hierarchy, "Shut up, it's not the same, he said curtly. We risk our lives and you sit in your plush living rooms and seminar halls" (123). This statement is when placed at the backdrop of Muskaan fighting the crowd alone, reveals the urban progressive state ideologies and the male Maoist thinking to be the sides of the same coin. Some who exist by subjugating people and the others who validate the former by fighting against them, like the concept of 'self' and the 'other'. Nora's silence on this remark places her on a different plane from Avadhut and even Muskaan, "I did not want another kangaroo court to decide whether I should be thrown off the jeep or not" (123). One can easily see that Nora understands the institutions as clutches. One has to be free from ideological tools and roles. This understanding clearly demarcates the armed fight of Avadhut and the ideological battle of

Nora. There is always a sense of threat to their identity, “I have told you, we are on a revolutionary path. This is not a Bollywood movie” (127). Woefully, writing a letter from New York City to Muskaan, Nora knows that Muskaan is still captive to this “... Durjanpur, the poor little Maoist” (128).

### **Headmaster Sahay: Narrative of a Crazy Old Man**

Sahay describes himself as having something special. He has a red patch on his thigh. He describes life as eternal waiting, not missing to quote *Waiting for Godot*.

His red patch as he says has a history. History is necessary for a revolution to begin. His patch becomes the image of history. Das blurs the distinction between the two:, “It pains and swells up time and again, not really a chronic trouble, but more as something that doesn’t want to fade away from the memory or be separated from my body. It has a history” (132).

Sahay’s tale takes us through little village houses and backyard gardens of vegetations, small towns to carefree good people teeming with life even whilst enduring the clashes of men and machine. He narrates his memory to a young person eager to know about him. Winding his way through the beautiful past, Sahay along with his friends found the way to the jail and soldiers, “... with guns aimed at them” (135). They were all happily prepared to face their end. They were singing and patting each other’s back. They were to be punished for going against the government. Das invokes hell describing the shots. Sahay was not killed and found himself with the red patch in a hospital room carrying it like a ghost. This ghost wants his revenge. A motive, a purpose had to be accomplished. It is still seeking fulfilment. Ironically, the credit card salesman who was interested to know about Sahay is also never able to seek fulfilment, he tells Sahay, “Nothing has changed, you changed nothing for me” (139). Their condition highlights the binary equation required for the existence of an oppressive society. This equation consists of one who exists by subduing

fellow human beings and other who authenticate their existence by taking pride in his marginalised position. Sahay could not subvert the existing system and his decision to fight as a marginalised clutched him in the web of existing social hierarchies. He is, “Resurrected, refreshed and reddened with a new anger” (140). This anger will keep the identity of the government intact. It is on this ideology Sahay creates a battalion of armed rebels.

Sahay now lacks the same courage he had shown that day with his friends. He could not tell his comrades that he did not kill all the landlords that night just because of the fear of paying a heavy price for it. He confesses that he is losing his strength of mind and this strength is something that he applauds Muskaan for, “It’s from her fortitude that we old fogies learn to progress on the path of revolution” (143). Das repeatedly draws parallels making readers question the similarities between Sahay and the conventional setup of Indian society. However, Muskaan clearly comes out to be courageous among the two. She is the one who bravely faces the mob from *chabutara* whereas Sahay was left shaken. The spontaneous divergence from her defined role announces a complete breakdown of all power relations.

Nevertheless, the survival of such brave people is not easy in our society and Muskaan is abducted by the mob. Avadhut could have saved Muskaan but seeing the mob, he assured his safety over Muskaan’s and hid inside the broken water tank. This questions the power of Maoists to safeguard the interest of society. After Muskaan’s release, the greatest fear of Sahay was the possibility of Muskaan having revealed all their secrets. The Maoists could not even retain their cohesive identity. Sahay further places himself in the image of a protector for Muskaan. He explains how Muskaan is lucky as he had taken her after her parents’ death in a train mishap. Sahay wants to frame Comrade Madhu in his own image. He is disappointed knowing the possible relationship between her and Palash. He

gets furious knowing that more than him, she misses Palash, “Nonsense! This is not what I have trained her for ... she is my protégée. Romance and emotions are not allowed for her” (151). Maoists are fighting for humanity and Sahay dictates rules that stand in opposition to the basic human emotions and values. He exemplifies Avadhut recounting the detachment he practices after the demise of his wife. Sahay makes it further clear that he strictly wants Muskaan to choose a partner of an equal social status. All these expectations project Sahay’s venture to be artificial, uncovering the conventional one-dimensional front of authority. Sahay’s strict concepts of Maoism and class consciousness suggest the upstart of neo-patriarchy and Muskaan has to be on watch against it. Nora’s letters for Muskaan angers Sahay. The readers can see the different ways Sahay and Muskaan perform their duty. Muskaan tries her best to aid the people’s struggle in her limited resources and Sahay injured by his circumstances turns into an avenger.

Through the class discussion of Avadhut and Sahay, Das further highlights the existence of some stereotypical fissures present in the Sahay’s anti-establishment organisation. Avadhut doesn’t agree with Sahay’s ideas and this stresses the differences existing within their organisation. Das craftily gives the viewers these insights in between the discussion about their movements. It makes the reader question the effectiveness of these new strategies to free the society from exploitation.

### **Nora: Reaching Out to the Rebel**

After a long wait, Muskaan finally replies to Nora’s letters. Muskaan holds her responsible for what had happened at *chabutara* that day. She, in fact, labels Nora guilty for all the bad that she thinks has happened to their militant organisation after that incident, “It happened all because of you” (156). There is a clear exposure of misgivings of an oppressive regime. The regime has subtly assured the sieving of its ideologies into its

agents, “Did I ever think that I, Muskaan ... would receive letters that came from the very evil empire that I despised” (157)?

Nora’s reply is a kind of ideological confrontation. She writes to Muskaan about her least interest in the *chabutara* incident. Nora is more interested in discussing the human. Nora tries to uncover the inhuman values that codified the Maoist males. She mentions about Palash in her letter who left Muskaan after her abduction on the obvious grounds of Muskaan’s body being defiled. Not only Sahay but Palash is also an agent of the patriarchal constructs of the society. Muskaan till Nora’s letter never questions this abandonment. Nora questions Muskaan’s future plans about education, job and life. These questions show Muskaan standing individual to the group she thought has helped her liberate from the conventional subjugating roles of a woman. However, the truth is put into words by Nora. Muskaan is truly alone without any knowledge of how to begin afresh. Avadhut though rescue her but leaves her aimless.

Avadhut goes to America. Muskaan is shocked to know that Avadhut has detailed information on her life at New York City. Avadhut inquires about the letters from Nora. He feels Muskaan is changing and her, “... growing aspirations. Muskaan’s realisation of reality beyond stark life-and-death cycle of Durjanpur” (162) can be seen. A new Sahay is in formation whose ideologies smell the same but the ideas are different. He defends Palash abandonment of Muskaan on the grounds of the purity test that Sita had to go in the *Ramayana*.

Muskaan has started understanding that Avadhut and Sahay are not her true protectors. On Nora’s suggestion, she has started working with Shaktishalini, a non-profit agency in Patna. Avadhut and Nora have a heated argument over it. Avadhut defends himself through the garb of being a protector, “Muskaan has never marched alone. She believes in collective action” (164). But he could not convince Nora, nonetheless, Nora

feels difficult to resist his charm. When Avadhut bids bye, she questions if he will return, “Will you come again...to ask about Muskaan? I was afraid to say ‘me’” (165). A quaint parallel between Nora and Muskaan is witnessed here. Muskaan had always considered Avadhut to be her idol. She was enamoured by his dedication towards their cause. If fathomed, Muskaan was in awe of the comrade image of Avadhut given to her by Sahay and his organisation. On the contrary, Nora through her experience can read a different face of Avadhut yet she can not resist being tempted by his charm. Does Das imply that roots of women subjugation rest in the sludge of multifarious images? Nora reads Avadhut to be an egoist yet she confesses that feelings are feelings.

Amidst the memories of Avadhut, Nora gets to hear from her long-lost acquaintance Rehana. Rehana has always been a strong political woman and works as a social worker with the same organisation Shaktishalini, where Muskaan is also working now. Rehana keeps informing about Muskaan to Nora. Muskaan is having varied experiences at Shaktishalini. She is dismissive on one hand but on the other, she is also surprised people discussing things openly. But she definitely is not the one who will follow anyone. Rehana also informs Nora about an unknown gentleman who is keen to help Shaktishalini. “But before he committed to his act of charity, he asked about the agency’s programmes, the causes they fight for, the geographical areas they concentrate upon and about their dedicated workforce” (172). To Nora shock, this man turns out to be no other but Nirav Saxena, the real name of Avadhut.

Muskaan finally calls Nora in New York. Muskaan tells her about her fight for the poppy growers at Patalgarh. In this process, she meets Palash there. Muskaan informs Nora that she fought with Palash too. She has understood that Palash does not love her anymore. But Muskaan still believes that it is Avadhut who really cares for her. Probably, he is her only support left. He has asked Muskaan to apply for one of the projects of

Shaktishalini which will have its work in New York also. Muskaan has understood her solitary position but she still does not realise the breach between the inner and outer reality. She still does not realise her separation from Avadhut's aims and still tries hard to be one with it.

### **Muskaan: Life, Love, and a New Path**

In this section, we meet Muskaan in New York City. She has come to the City for some Shaktishalini's project with a global women's group. She is eagerly excited to meet her Sheherwali Nora.

Muskaan has found a new spirit working with Shaktishalini, "At twenty-one, I'm empowered ... I'm a bird! I'm a leaping frog! May be ready to swim" (181)! Muskaan does not want to think about her past anymore. Surprisingly she now sees her past as violent instead of the completeness that it used to provide her. Through Muskaan we get to understand women's general tendency to follow any new trend or the features of any ideology which gives even the slightest hint of being different. Muskaan's separation from her camp ruptures the harmony established between her inner and outer reality and reveals the void of nothingness. Her meeting with Sahay after a long time at Shaktishalini summons the memories of the same violent past. She was happy to see Sahay but her new self was divorced from those chaotic memories. She asserts her free thought and individuality. She bravely discloses her trip to States to her Mausaji, Sahay who, "... would be dead against anything in favour of America" (183). Hearing this, Sahay again starts intimating Muskaan about the Maoists activities in India and Nepal. He tells her how America is responsible for a breach between their Nepal Maoists' solidarity but Muskaan has woken up to the dangers of this solidarity.

In her orientation sessions, Muskaan meets women of different ethnicities, black, white, Afro-American and women from Nepal. These orientation sessions are strictly

charted out. Their every reaction and second are under scrutiny. If there are some women who are surprised knowing that Indian women are still learning, the others have "... seen a bit more of the reality" (185). The reality is the suffering caused by the double marginalisation of poverty and discrimination. This was a new facet that Muskaan was becoming aware of. She could understand a difference between Maoists who emphasized on 'product management' as opposed to the required 'process management'. Sahay and his comrades have been subjugated by a pattern and habit. Their actions are fixed, unlike these women who have decided to help their sisters through the tools and ways best suited to the latter. Some plan to use puppets, some Buddhist *mandalas* and some street plays for the girl's child at their respective places. The street plays make Muskaan remember Nora's visit to Durjanpur. It is today she can value that trip over what Avadhut had commented about their aloofness from reality. Nora's visit had a sense of purpose as against an always existing sense of anguish of Avadhut's aim.

Muskaan can understand this anguish now but she is still at an ease. Nevertheless, meeting Avadhut in New York City marks the move towards immediacy and truth that was not there before. Muskaan is seeing Avadhut dressed casually for the first time, he was differently dressed in Durjanpur. Muskaan also feels a difference between Avadhut and Palash, "Avadhut exudes a sense of calm control that was so lacking in Palash" (190). For the first time, we watch reality moving closer to Muskaan. She is angry at Palash, "But why am I thinking of that bastard? He had refused to hear me out and rejected because ... violated me ... Because I was a woman, after all" (190). There is a sense of clarity and an acknowledgment of her life. In opposition to her earlier indifference and silence, Muskaan shows a need to take things seriously. There is the wisdom of agency, she wants to kill Palash, "I know how to kill" (190). Seeing her perturbed, Avadhut consoles her, this time grabbing her shoulders. Avadhut never wants to return to his old life.



He discloses his love for Muskaan and the truth of Palash and Arif's death at the hands of the Hunting Brigade. This conversation between Muskaan and Avadhut lays bare the ironical fact that works in the lives of women. They have to choose between seclusion and oppression, "Yes, I am with him. There is no one else I can cling to ..." (198).

Muskaan is seen gripped by uncertainties. She does not know if it is right to share her relationship with Nora right now. She calls Nirav's house a den. She lies to Nora about her and Nirav. Yet she has gradually overcome some of the uncertainties. She is sure that on her return she wants to enroll for Bachelors. One can not deny her will and purposefulness marked against the world of suppression, "I'm even hoping to settle down one day, have a family" (201). Das stresses the fact that two spaces need not be binaries.

Muskaan is right now living between Nirav and rescued inmates like her. She plans to marry Nirav but sees her reflection in the pain of her inmates. Nirav behaves as if nothing had happened to them in the past. He comes as a completely different man and sometimes it frustrates Muskaan, "I am so dizzy with all this love making" (204).

Avadhut has started commanding Muskaan. He wants her to act according to him. When Muskaan tells him about her plans to do Bachelors, Avadhut tries to dismiss them saying that his business will not allow him to stay at one place in the world. He almost threatens Muskaan saying that if she decides to study, she will have to stay alone in Shaktishalini. He also orders Muskaan to not to listen to Nora in everything. All of a sudden the relationship which had a strong bond of togetherness standing at its threshold transforms into a mere comforting relation, Avadhut proclaims, "Why do you worry? You are young. There is so much to do. Besides, I am there for you always...don't you believe me Muskaan" (208)? Muskaan questions herself if she has anyone else to believe in. The history seems to surface again in a new garb, but this time Muskaan knows to sustain

herself. The section ends with Muskaan last words, “I do. There’s no one else I can believe more. But then...” (208).

### **Footprints in the Sun**

This last section opens with the meeting of Nora and Muskaan. However, instead of the engulfing bajra fields of Durjanpur, they are now meeting in a cafe called Ozone. The physical setting is completely different from the descriptions of the Bajra fields. Das has intelligently used it to show the vast distance travelled by Muskaan, “... she is used to this chameleon life where clothes, language, food and habits undergo changes while she meets up newer people around her every day” (209). The physical place becomes the reflection of the inward change. Till now the bajra fields have emerged as symbols of dark engulfing conventionality or the abode of rebels who were equally conventional and orthodox. They curbed the freedom of Muskaan the same way, the traditional society does with every woman. Set against it is this modern cafe which marks a kind of subjectivity.

This was the life Muskaan was completely against in the opening of the novel. Yet, Das does not take the conventional stance of urban winning over rural. If Durjanpur was, so is the city seen as a dedifferentiated land of unknown and unnamed people, a homogenous intact where an individual can not be spotted. But the visible reality is not the only truth, individuals are laden with distances hiding their own reality. Muskaan is still filled with some of the particular pieces of the past that are reserved as memories. She is dressed up in jeans-shirt but the dim lights of the cafe-bar quickly summons the ugly memories, carrying an underlying baggage with it which the readers otherwise may not see, that is, a stagnancy. Muskaan has been ordered by Nirav. She has been asked to not to disclose their relationship to Nora. It is been one year now and Muskaan is not being able to live with this secret anymore. It marks the desire to break away from stagnancy. There is a craving for freedom, for inner space synchronized with the desire for belonging. Das shows

how any place can be gendered. What is more vital is the inner journey taken by the corporal act of a voyage, “It doesn’t really hurt Muskaan the Sheherwali calls Nirav a bastard” (217). The self is changing which is a subversive act.

Nora’s critical opinion about Nirav along with the suspicious facts about him shifts Muskaan’s perspective. But even after Nora’s rant, Muskaan likes Nirav. She enjoys his company. She openly confronts Nirav for not telling her about his becoming a trustee of Shaktishalini. Nirav is taken aback, “Rehana shouldn’t have told you about this right away” (219). Muskaan says that Rehana has not told her the secret, Nirav guesses Nora to be the informer: “Women, I tell you” (219). We see a continuous process of exposing covers of marginalisation a subaltern woman has to experience. Nirav chose Muskaan as in this love relationship he would have never required to reveal and unfold himself in front of one Muskaan unlike with Nora, “You are still friends with Nora” (219). Muskaan’s love would have been a woman’s longing for her lover and her loneliness, “Nirav is complex, he himself knows. Nothing constitutes a permanent position of reference in his life, be it women ...” (220). He uses Muskaan for his plans. Muskaan is an active part of Shaktishalini which will, in turn, assist Nirav fulfilling his big plans. He could not tell his plan to Muskaan because in reality Durjanpur never got over for Nirav. It shows how each human is in a different dilemma and has a different perspective. The inner space alters our insight of the outer reality. Nirav could be liberated in domination whereas Muskaan has started understanding that liberation lies in the constant state of becoming. Muskaan discloses the murder she had committed. She had murdered a man that night at Chinnamasta to save Nora. She also narrates the horror of her rape to Nora.irate, full of anger and sarcasm, Muskaan riles against the society of Durjanpur, its mentors, its systems and its upholders. She satirises and accuses those upholders who do not let women free. She speaks about the Naxalite women crossing the fields in the dark and being pursued. Muskaan’s retaliation

gives Nora the courage to confess, "I slept with Nirav" (227). This clears the evil intentions of Nirav. Muskaan doesn't hold Nora to be the culprit, "... Nirav's the one" (227).

Investigators come to inspect Shaktishalini. They suspect Shaktishalini to be collaborating "... with forces that work against the country" (229). They could be Maoists as specified by one of them. On the other hand, Nirav's appointment and Nepal-based projects also had some connection. Gradually with each detail, the trap of Durjanpur is uncovered or if one wants to put it as freedom was being uncovered to be a trap, "They would have called it an encounter death. How ironic! That Muskaan would have ceased to exist without as much a whimper" (231). The final blow comes when she gets to know from Sahay on her last visit to Durjanpur that Nirav has allied with Nepal's rebels and Sahay agrees to this move. Sahay, the man who was Muskaan's ideal has also failed to see the true liberation, "... the bajras grow dark outside and absorb all timid sunrays one by one" (242). Muskaan today clearly knows that Nirav has used her to get a place at Shaktishalini, "She doesn't know this landscape, this part-wet-part-dryness of the soil ..." (242). A corporal environment becomes a place only when pragmatic virtues of home, belonging, and collective encounters get joined to it.

Muskaan had to collect some Shaktishalini parcel from Banka, Banka from Patna was just a few hours travel. On reaching Shaktishalini's headquarters at Banka, she gets to know that Nirav is also staying there. Nirav is surprised seeing Muskaan there. Muskaan confronts him with a gun, "You tell me" (247). Nirav tells her everything, yes he had planned everything, he has used her and above all, Sahay was always an active agent in all this planning, "You are lying, not Mausaji" (252). Muskaan is ostensibly made to be an angel and whore according to the requirement of the situation by her own guardians and relegated to the borders of the society, "Dusk has settled over the wintry sky of Delhi like a musty roof. The city has another name tonight. Refugee" (252).

Muskaan has started staying in Sarojini Nagar but she is still with Nirav. Nora visits Muskaan as she gets to know that Muskaan has been appointed as the main person of Shaktishalini's project in Nepal. Nirav has not returned since days. Nora can clearly understand Nirav's plan to use Muskaan till required and then be done with her. She forcefully grabs Muskaan and takes her to talk to the media. Muskaan could not deny because she somewhere agrees with Nora's thinking. She leaves with Nora with many doubts and especially if the police get to know that she took a gun to kill Nirav. Muskaan, on one hand, is feeling lonely and missing Nirav, there is also a hint of ensuing guilt because of the gun episode. On the other hand, she seems to be assertive about her opinion about Nirav, she calls him a traitor. Her situation is thus multifaceted and complex, as it is full of contradictory emotions. It delineates these feelings within the self, tussling with one another. However, Nora is sure about her actions and in a great haste makes sure that Rehana helps her to make Muskaan meet the media.

We finally see Muskaan emerging out from the frustrations, demands and tensions and her own personal angst. She throws away her dependency and the stigma associated with Durjanpur, the place that lies closest to her heart. The Bajras which have been Muskaan's best friend. It is real lived practice that reads a place. She now wages a politically committed war, "Former Maoist territory hums with community work: bajra belt washes away blood" (263).

Muskaan not only reports about Nirav and Sahay, she also opens a school in Durjanpur which has five hundred students from nearby villages also. She is studying the shift of feudal system to cooperative culture as her Masters thesis. It is she and not any male Naxalite leader who voices the narratives of conflict existing in Durjanpur. It is a woman rewriting and appropriating the space dominated by male hooligans.

Muskaan works hard for the betterment of the women of Durjanpur. She has arranged for women to learn and grasp different facets of computer and accounting. She has helped them collaborate with many NGOs which buy their handcraft work. The older rules and customs of Durjanpur do not exist anymore. She recognises the pain of the women of Durjanpur. They are split between the requirements and pressures of the violent system they are a part of. She can relate to the desire of coming out from the mental as well as physical exploitation they face living in a gendered space. She helps them come out of the fences of domestic roles imposed on them. Her efforts are consciously devoted, political, and feminist. She boldly encounters these dark areas of their and her own existence. The struggle for survival has not ended for Muskaan just the dynamics have altered. There is a strong assurance towards marginalized classes and women making them more democratic so that they can chalk out their own space. The bajras now, "... rustle with an incoming evening breeze" (263).

## Works Cited

- Atwood, Margaret. "Spelling." *Neruda, Walcott and Atwood: Poets of the Americas*. Ed. Ajanta Dutt. Delhi: Worldview, 2002. Print.
- . "This is a Photograph of Me." *Neruda, Walcott and Atwood: Poets of the Americas*. Ed. Ajanta Dutt. Delhi: Worldview, 2002. Print.
- Das, Nabina. *Footprints in the Bajra*. New Delhi: Cedar Books, 2010. Print.
- Datta, Mohan Dharendra. "The Contribution of Modern Indian Philosophy to World Philosophy." *The Philosophical Review*. 57.6 (1948): 550-72. JSTOR. Web. 28 Apr. 2017.
- Devi, Mahasweta. *Mother of 1084*. Trans. Samik Bandyopadhyay. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1997. Print.
- Hughes, Langston. "Harlem." *The Individual & Society: Essays, Stories and Poems*. Ed. Vinay Sood, Indira Prasad, and Harriet Raghunathan. New Delhi: Longman, 2010. Print.
- Manimala. "The Bodhgaya Struggle." *Women's Studies in India*. Ed. Mary E. John. London: Penguin Books, 2008. Print.
- W.B. Yeats Selected Poetry*. Delhi: BookLand Publishers. Print.