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## Examining Resistance and Rebellion: Unveiling Sujata's Journey in *Mother of 1084*

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### **Abstract:**

Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084* delves beyond its surface depiction of Kolkata's response to the 1970s Naxalite movement. Through Sujata, the protagonist, Devi crafts a powerful narrative of female resistance and rebellion. Sujata embodies the struggles of marginalized women, challenging societal norms and her oppressive marriage. Her transformation parallels her son's revolutionary path, reflecting the interconnectedness of personal and political liberation. Through Sujata's journey towards self-discovery and empowerment, Devi offers a nuanced exploration of gender dynamics and the ongoing struggle against patriarchal oppression in India. This study sheds light on the transformative power of individual resistance, offering hope for those fighting against societal constraints.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Patriarchal society Resistance, Rebellion, Self-discovery.

### **Introduction:**

In the intricate mosaic of Indian literature, Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084* is a powerful narrative that explores the nuances of resistance and rebellion against societal norms. At its core lies the compelling journey of Sujata, a character whose story serves as a poignant reflection of the struggles faced by women in a patriarchal society. Through the lens of this iconic work, this paper embarks on a journey to delve deeper into Sujata's narrative, unravelling the layers of her

resistance and rebellion against the oppressive structures that seek to confine her. As the exploration navigates through Sujata's experiences of seclusion, betrayal, and societal expectations, a transformative journey of self-discovery and empowerment unfolds. Through this exploration, the aim is to shed light on the resilience and agency of women like Sujata, whose voices echo across time and space, inspire discourse and reflect on societal gender dynamics.

### **Literature Review:**

A concise review of existing literature has been conducted to establish a strong foundation for this study. This review aims to achieve two key objectives: first, to refine the research question and ensure its focus, and second, to identify established methodologies relevant to the chosen topic. In this way, the research article "Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084*: Saga of Predicament of Middle-Class Women in Indian Society" offers a comprehensive framework for understanding Devi's *Mother of 1084*. It not only connects the work in Devi's social activism but also accurately identifies the main storyline of the protagonist, Sujata. The review highlights the novel's exploration of crucial themes such as gender roles, the struggle for identity, and the weight of societal expectations. Furthermore, it explores Devi's criticism of the educational system's constraints on women and the oppressive dynamics within traditional marriage structures. Similarly, Prof. Joshi and Dr. Neha Arun Hariyani, in their research paper titled "The Predicament of Women for Deliverance in Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084*," analyze the novel through the lens of evolving feminist thought, particularly "womanism," which emphasizes the struggles of marginalized women. By connecting Sujata's transformation to the concept of the subaltern woman, the analysis explores how her interactions with other women catalyze her fight against societal and familial oppression. In the same manner, the other research article by Brijesh Kumar titled, "Portrayal of Motherhood in Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084*", provides a robust understanding of the historical context of the Naxalite movement and its impact on Bengal. This context is essential for interpreting the characters' motivations and the violence that unfolds. The analysis effectively connects Sujata's transformation, marked by grief and awakening, and the broader themes of social oppression and the pursuit of justice. This connection underscores the potential for individual experiences to catalyze social change. Finally, the contrasting portrayals of mothers from different socioeconomic backgrounds, Sujata and Somu's mother, highlight the significant societal inequalities that fueled the Naxalite movement. Hence, these studies provide

valuable insights into various aspects of Devi's "Mother of 1084"; however, there remains a significant gap in exploring the novel's portrayal of individual transformation. The present study that delves deeper into Sujata's journey, the transformative potential of grief, and the cyclical nature of change can offer a comprehensive understanding of the novel's emotional resonance.

This research paper endeavours to explore the odyssey of Sujata, the protagonist of Mahasweta Devi's 1973 novel *Hazar Chaurasir Ma (Mother of 1084)*. It aims to illuminate the narrative as a saga or discourse intricately woven from a feminine standpoint, chronicling her voyage towards self-realization and emancipation amidst an environment fraught with peril and subjugation. Sujata epitomizes the collective struggle of numerous women who seek to maintain their identities within the pervasive dominance of patriarchal hegemony. Her narrative holds the potential to serve as a powerful symbol in discussions about empowering women and achieving their freedom. In a patriarchal society, women encounter challenges in establishing an autonomous identity and exercising agency due to prevailing gender norms that restrict them to predetermined, traditional roles. This phenomenon is rooted in the perpetuation of stereotypical and archetypal representations of women, constraining their ability to assert individuality and make self-directed choices. In the narrative, Sujata serves as both the narrator and protagonist, facing challenges that stem from her marginalized and subjugated societal position. Her narrative journey revolves around overcoming these obstacles to assert herself as a rebel, ultimately reclaiming her entitlement to psychological emancipation, autonomy, and the freedom for independent thoughts. Before proceeding with those procedural steps, she needs to acknowledge the systematic denial of her fundamental human rights in both public and private domains. While contemporary women generally experience acknowledgement of specific established human rights, such as suffrage and access to education, it is deeply disconcerting that broader rights, including the rights to equality and freedom from exploitation, remain largely inaccessible due to the prevailing patriarchal social framework. In various sectors of human communities, women lack opportunities and a favorable environment to cultivate their distinct abilities due to patriarchal structure or male dominance. Adrienne Rich defines the concept of patriarchy in her book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976) as "the power of the fathers: a familial, social, ideological, political system in which men- by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour- determine what part women shall or shall not play, and which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male" (57). This

template for dominance, constructed within political frameworks, is meticulously designed to ensure the perpetual subordination of women to male authority. It engenders a pervasive absence of women or their meaningful participation within discursive realms, including canonical texts across various media platforms such as print, electronic, and graphic formats. Herein, women are often depicted dichotomously as either wickedly seductive or naively submissive, perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing patriarchal norms. This analysis contends that the emergence of this counter-discourse not only elevates the female perspective to a position of greater prominence but also actively redefines femininity by imbuing it with characteristics of strength and vitality. The novel strives to admonish the pernicious sexist ideologies prevalent in contemporary society while simultaneously equipping its readers with the cognitive resilience necessary to unambiguously repudiate the normalization of women's exploitation across various contexts, whether overtly depicted or subtly implied. Sujata's narrative of resilience within a patriarchal framework, followed by her defiance of gender norms to carve out her own identity, transforms into a collective narrative of resistance and emancipation, which holds the potential to mirror the trajectories of numerous women in their quest to forge individual identities amidst challenging environments characterized by gender-based constraints.

Mahasweta Devi, a distinguished Bengali author and social activist, was born in 1926 in Decca, British India, but her family relocated to West Bengal in 1930. Devi's legacy is notably emblematic of her staunch advocacy for the rights and empowerment of marginalized communities, often identified within academic discourse as 'subaltern'. Subalterns are those individuals or groups positioned outside the prevailing social, political, and geographic power structure. In 1982, Ranjeet Guha elaborated on Antonio Gramsci's notion of the subaltern within the historiography of colonial India. Building on Guha's work, the concept of the subaltern became popular in creating literature and historical narratives focusing on the oppressed. Subaltern Studies emerged as a critique of traditional Indian historiography, highlighting the limitations imposed by narratives dominated by elite and nationalist perspectives. This school of thought emphasizes the importance of decentering these dominant narratives and giving voice to the experiences and perspectives of marginalized groups. By foregrounding subaltern agency and resistance, Subaltern Studies seek to create a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of Indian history. Devi's advocacy, amplifying the voices of marginalized groups, positions her as a postcolonial advocate combating the exploitation of women and indigenous communities. Her philosophy of life takes

shape from a dichotomy between “needful and needless”, and she has “no interest in the latter one” (Talking Writing: Four Conversations with Mahasweta Devi). Devi, who acknowledges herself as a communist, refrains from explicitly aligning with feminism. However, her concern for women’s matters stems from the belief that they reside on the fringes of society, relegated to the status of marginalized or subaltern. This characterization suggests that women endure suppression not only from the dominant elite but also from the construct of patriarchy. In one of her interviews with Anjum Katyal, Devi states, “ So if from my writings feminism oozes out, I can’t do — I have nothing to do with it...I write about the entire society. About women, of course women, men, children, all of them but about women, about such women about whom no one writes” (Devi 22). As an intellectually engaged author and a female, she senses a responsibility to portray Sujata, Dopdi, Jashoda, and numerous other unorthodox female characters as embodiments of resistance. Her primary focus revolves around documenting the experiences of women oppressed by both the bourgeoisie and patriarchy.

An analysis of *Mother of 1084* may lead readers to interpret it as a politico-historical narrative, given its detailed exploration of the evolving socio-political landscape of West Bengal. The text elucidates the perpetuation of class distinctions that serve the interests of capitalists, thereby relegating the impoverishment of the proletariat. However, a more thorough examination of the text unveils a deeper layer transcending conventional political discourse. It exposes the prevalent phallogentric and misogynistic tendencies entrenched within society, which exploit women across both domestic and public spheres. Through its narrative, the novel illuminates the myriad struggles women face as they strive to assert their voices, rights, and autonomy within a system that heftily marginalizes them.

The historical background of the novel embodies the Naxalbari movement, highlighting a period of socio-political upheaval. It is characterized by the defiant uprising of marginalized communities, which is spearheaded by a quest for equitable wages for agricultural labourers. However, this backdrop does not play a focal role in the novel. Instead, the primary thematic concern revolves around the profound transformation of Sujata. She meticulously reconstructs her narrative, chronicling her unwavering resistance against ubiquitous oppression and relentless pursuit of empowerment amidst the barriers created by societal structures. Within the Naxalite insurgency’s sociopolitical framework, the novel explores the psychological phenomenon of

bereavement (exemplified by maternal loss) as a potential catalyst for the development of a distinct ideological identity. This divergent exploration contributes a profoundly personal and emotionally resonant layer to the discourse, predominantly articulated through the introspective reflections of a female protagonist. Sujata was born into a refined, well-educated Bengali family with traditional values. She had been groomed to embody grace, etiquette, and a polished English accent, and she proudly earned her degree from Loreto College, Kolkata. Nevertheless, she discerned that these privileges were bestowed with the underlying expectation of securing a suitable marriage, as societal norms dictated. Born into a society that valued sons like gold and daughters like lead, Sujata's spirit, nonetheless, burned brightly. Despite the ever-present weight of societal disapproval, she navigated her childhood with quiet strength, her resilience a testament to the unyielding human spirit. Ultimately, Sujata married Dibyanath, who exhibited megalomaniacal traits and held convictions regarding elitism, monetary stability, and authoritative control. Devi articulates the state of married Sujata, "Sujata had a shadowy existence. She was subservient, silent, faithful and without an existence of her own" (Devi 9). After marriage, women often navigate a maze of societal expectations that limit their freedom and expression. When families absolve themselves of responsibility by arranging marriages for their daughters, individuals like Sujata must endure with patience and tolerance. They cannot question or challenge their husband's authority, as the marital relationship is hierarchical rather than egalitarian, favouring authoritarianism over equality.

On the evening of her son's second death anniversary, Sujata's emotions reach a climax as she recalls memories from twenty-two years ago. It is a poignant moment as she grapples with the duality of her daughter's engagement coinciding with the remembrance of her youngest son, who died as a member of a leftist militant group. These memories transport her back to when she was thirty-one, pregnant with her fourth child. She feels today will be her last in this house, unsure of her future but determined to leave her oppressive partner. Transforming from a traditional Bengali wife to an independent individual, she rejects domination and prepares to attend an evening party while reflecting on past events. Sujata's recollection of her past and the vivid images she conjures offer readers a glimpse into her memories. She recalls, "The whole of the night of the other sixteenth of January she had had the pain tearing through her, from consciousness to unconsciousness and back again, ...then the dawn of seventeenth January and Brati was born" (Devi 4-5). The enigmatic, mystical night marked the start of something inexplicable to her; the

infant's ordeal nearly cost her life but forged a magical bond between them. Reflecting on recent discoveries, she envisions a future where her imperfectly perfect life remains imperfect forever.

Sujata adhered to societal norms throughout her life, from her youth to motherhood, until her youngest child, Brati, became just a number on a corpse— 1084. She reflects on her life and society's flaws, realizing the impact on those who challenge traditions. Investigating her son's death prompts her to reevaluate her existence, realizing her marginalization and lack of protest. She recalls only saying "no" twice in her entire life. The text mentions, "Refusing to leave her job was Sujata's second act of rebellion. Her first act of rebellion was when Brati was two. She had refused to be a mother for the fifth time (Devi 46). Across the globe, motherhood is often determined not by women's choices but by external factors. Second-wave feminism studies indicate that women are often pressured into motherhood due to biological, social, and cultural forces, even if they are not physically or psychologically prepared. This pressure stems from societal norms that equate the "ideal woman" with maternity. In South Asia, the challenge is compounded by the need for women to undergo multiple pregnancies. Mahasweta Devi expressed great concern about this issue. During an interview, she admits that while researching for her story "Breast Giver", she finds it shocking that "women are developing breast cancer because they overfeed too many children" (Devi Conversation). Despite experiencing irreversible physical and psychological changes with each pregnancy, Sujata exhibited reluctance towards further childbearing after each trimester. However, this reluctance did not translate into a permanent decision to stop childbearing, resulting in four pregnancies culminating in the birth of Brati. Realizing her physical, psychological, and emotional incapacity for further pregnancies, she rejected her husband's desire for a fifth child. This decision led to criticism from her in-laws and extreme behaviour from her husband. It is exemplified, "Dibyananth had gone on sleeping with other woman. After Sujata's refusal, his sex life outside the house became more active" (47). Sujata, other family members, and Dibyanath's mother are aware of the situation. However, only Sujata and Brati were troubled by this openly known fact, while the others were unaffected. She opted to stay silent, adhering to the societal norm of an "ideal wife", refraining from opposing her husband's actions.

Marital norms in patriarchal societies often reveal a troubling intersection between male privilege and fidelity. Men are expected to be more unfaithful, while women are held to stricter



standards of fidelity. This imbalanced dynamic reinforces gender inequality within marriage. Despite her education, professional occupation, and high social standing, Sujata experiences exploitation and violence within her marriage. She exhibits unwavering loyalty by complying entirely with her husband's desires, including sex and enduring repeated pregnancies at his behest. Sujata refrains from questioning her husband's extramarital affairs and abstains from asserting her autonomy in the decision-making in the family. This paradox underscores the persistent power differentials within intimate relationships despite women's advancements in education and employment. According to Devi, "Suffering peculiarly...starts from home...Their society is also very, very cruel against women" (Devi 19-20). Sujata's portrayal in the narrative as a heroic figure emerges through her courageous navigation of turbulent marriage and fearless confrontation of deeply ingrained gender inequalities in society. She is a symbolic archetype, embodying the struggles and resilience of women facing similar adversities. Gender discussions invariably involve discrimination, domination, subjugation, and power imbalances. The power dynamics in gender politics predominantly align with Foucauldian theories, operating subtly and pervasively at conscious and subconscious levels. This power struggle stems from inherent biological distinctions between genders, driving one group to seek dominance by subjugating the other wherever differences arise.

Sujata exemplifies the global phenomenon of women who navigate constrained societal roles. She embodies the concept of economic agency through job retention despite the burden of childcare, highlighting the gender disparity in career trajectories. In domestic life, women's return from work extends into household responsibilities. Sujata's unwavering determination propelled her through the challenges of her banking career, even amidst the turmoil of marital discord. She found solace in her youngest son, Brati, who provided a sanctuary from the storm. She cultivates his character with traits like compassion, sensitivity, and imagination despite societal perceptions of these qualities as emasculating. Sujata was cautious with Brati due to his resemblance to her older children, who inherited conventional, chauvinistic, and corrupt traits from their morally questionable father and grandmother. Though apolitical, She instilled a strong sense of social justice in Brati. When Brati's activism exposed corruption, even their family, Sujata grappled with her inaction. Guilt and a sense of lost purpose gnawed at her, leaving her feeling adrift and disconnected from her former self. Witnessing Brati's unwavering commitment to fighting

oppression reignited a spark within Sujata. Inspired, she joins her son's struggle, marking a personal awakening. By embracing Brati's revolutionary path, she finds new meaning and purpose.

Over the past two years, following the loss of her son Brati, Sujata has undergone a transformation and become more self-aware. Her world crumbles with the news of her son's death as Naxalite number 1084. Grief morphs into a desperate search for answers. Brati, ostracized for his revolutionary beliefs, is reduced to a mere number by the authorities. This callous indifference fuels Sujata's rage. Initially, she battles crippling depression and fights to preserve Brati's memory within the stifling confines of her family. However, a seed has been sown. Sujata ventures beyond her sheltered existence, seeking Brati's comrades and fellow grieving mothers. This descent into the Naxalite world becomes a crucible, forcing her to confront the stark realities that shaped her son's path. Through Brati's girlfriend Nandini, who was also captured and tortured by the police, Sujata realizes the strength and independence she instilled in Brati. Reflecting on her life at fifty-three, Sujata recognizes her past as a caged and silenced woman. As Devi affirms, "Dibyanath and his mother constituted the centre of attraction in the home. Sujata had a shadowy existence. She was subservient, silent, faithful and without an existence of her own" (Devi 9). Given the fact, "She had been taught by life to take things as they came. She had never thought of asking questions. She never knew that she had the right to ask questions." (Devi 31). Afterwards, Sujata stands tall, driven by defiance, advocating not only for her son but also for herself. She articulates boldly, confronts authority, and seizes command of her fate. She dismantles the societal construct of womanhood, rejecting the notion that others should dictate her path. While some perceive her evolution as irrational or dreamlike, to her, it signifies emancipation. She discovers her voice, escapes the confines, and welcomes her newfound freedom.

Consequently, Sujata experiences a transformative journey, moving from the sidelines to the forefront, challenging patriarchal dominance within her family dynamics, and ultimately attaining personal autonomy. This narrative delves into themes of individuality, gender bias, and freedom from psychological and emotional oppression, concluding with a dramatic and uncertain resolution. In the interview, Devi exuberantly proclaims her approach to writing, "I write in order to make people think, feel. I want to rob them off their sleep. I don't write to put them to sleep. I can't write with happy endings" (Devi In Conversation). Therefore, Devi strives to liberate women from ideological constraints and envisions a society free from stereotypes, where women have not

been reduced to mere physical beings driven solely by instinct. Through the portrayal of Sujata's journey towards liberation, she resonates deeply with women who are actively seeking emancipation. This elevates the literary work as a powerful testament that embodies the collective struggles and aspirations of women.

*Mother of 1084*, a historical realist work, is a feminist narrative highlighting women's struggles within conservative gender norms and their resistance against male hegemony. While discussions often focus on quantifiable metrics in the public sphere, women's enduring trauma within familial dynamics persists due to entrenched patriarchal mindsets and gender extremism perpetuated by deep-rooted biases. Dismantling these biases across ideology, politics, and media poses a complex challenge in combating gender disparity and violence. In a nutshell, Devi's heartfelt depiction of Sujata's journey not only stimulates reflection but also serves as a source of inspiration. Her story serves as a beacon for countless individuals striving to reclaim their lives and dignity. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that while Sujata's experiences offer insight into a broader societal issue, they do not represent the entirety of women's experiences. Women are diverse individuals with unique stories and choices, united in their collective struggle for empowerment and liberation.

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