

**BLOCK: III**

**Unit 1 : Mohan Rakesh: *Adhe Adhure* (Introduction and Stage History)**

**Unit 2 : Mohan Rakesh: *Adhe Adhure* (Reading the Play)**

**Unit 3 : Mohan Rakesh: *Adhe Adhure* (Supplementary Unit)**

**Unit 4 : Mahasweta Devi: *Mother of 1084* (Introducing the Author)**

**Unit 5 : Mahasweta Devi: *Mother of 1084* (Introducing the Novel)**

**Unit 6 : Mahasweta Devi: *Mother of 1084* (Themes and Techniques)**

## UNIT- 1

### Mohan Rakesh: *Adhe Adhure* Introduction and Stage History

#### Unit Structure:

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 About the Playwright
- 1.4 About his Works
- 1.5 Mohan Rakesh as a Playwright
- 1.6 Performing *Adhe Adhure*
- 1.7 Summing Up
- 1.8 References and Suggested Readings

#### 1.1 Objectives:

By going through this unit, the learner is expected to–

- *learn* about the life of Mohan Rakesh,
- *gain* an understanding of his works across genres,
- *appreciate* the link between the life and work of Mohan Rakesh,
- *develop* an understanding of the play's stage history.

#### 1.2 Introduction:

Mohan Rakesh stands out as a remarkable Indian playwright and writer of the twentieth century. This unit introduces the playwright, delving into his works and glimpses of the stage history of his play *Adhe Adhure*. Rakesh holds significant importance in the Indian theatrical world, and the play under discussion is notably intriguing. In this piece, Rakesh showcases his ability to incorporate real-life human issues, hopes, and complexities of the middle-class Indian family. He was a key exponent of the Nayi Kahani movement in Hindi literature. The ethos of Nayi Kahani, which I will illustrate shortly, can be felt in *Adhe Adhure* as

well. In fact, Rakesh's fictional world, whether in the form of drama, novel, or short story, shares the very spirit of literary modernity, markedly different from conventional Hindi literature. A central figure of Hindi literary modernism, Rakesh has, over the years, exerted his influence not just in Hindi literature but also in the wider scene of Indian writing and culture. The translation of his work into English and other regional languages, along with the performance of his plays in various Indian theaters of diverse linguistic locations, has established Rakesh as a major figure in Indian literature and culture.

Before we proceed further, a few points merit mention. The historical backdrop of *Adhe Adhure* or his writing, in general, must be kept in mind. He belongs to the post-independence writing phase, where the socio-economic and cultural climate of the post-independent era provided the grounds for Rakesh's emergence as a writer. Amid shattered promises of independence and economic strife, the spread of women's education and empowerment marked this time. Hopes and frustrations, ambition and despair, the struggle for a better life, and widespread disillusionment were part of the emerging middle-class life. The pent-up emotions of patriotism and nationalist fervor, cultivated during years of the independence movement, were overshadowed by a new social-psychological complexity. As you delve into *Adhe Adhure*, you will perceive how the text articulates the peculiar aura of post-independence modern life.

Secondly, this play holds special significance in the history of modern Indian theatre. As you read it, you will appreciate its power not just as a story with characters but as a compelling theatrical experience. In the 'stage history' section, I will provide clues to the play's theatrical power and how important Indian directors have used the text as a touchstone of theatrical performance.

Thirdly, the relationship between man and woman was Rakesh's lifelong obsession, and this play is also a meditation on it. Mohan Rakesh's writing, both plays and fiction, often explores this issue. As mentioned, the play is complex and intriguing. You will find that a facile moral judgment

or the distribution of praise and blame in the face of the unfolding crisis here does not work.

**Check Your Progress:**

1. Mention some key traits of Mohan Rakesh’s writing. (30 words)

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2. Can you make assumptions about the play itself? If you can, mention them. You will be able to revise these assumptions after you go through the units on Mohan Rakesh. (30 words)

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**1.3 About the Playwright:**

Mohan Rakesh, born as Madan Mohan Guglani on February 8, 1925, in Amritsar, hailed from a family with roots in Sindh, as his father had migrated to Punjab long ago and worked as an advocate. Despite his father's strict demeanor, the household hosted engaging discussions with prominent writers, nurturing Rakesh's early affinity for literature, music, and culture. His father's library provided him access to the works of Hindi writers.

Rakesh's childhood was marked by stringent rules and prohibitions, particularly enforced by his grandmother. Restricted from playing with friends or mingling with the banjaras (the so-called low-caste community), he would occasionally venture into the neighborhood only to be promptly brought back home. The family adhered to the Vaishnavite faith, surrounded by various religious rites and superstitious beliefs, creating the backdrop against which Rakesh matured. Despite this upbringing, he developed skepticism towards dogmas and orthodoxies, with little trace of religious ethos in his writing.

Rakesh pursued Hindi and English literature at Punjab University, obtaining a degree in the Sashtri examinations from Oriental College in Lahore at the age of sixteen. The untimely death of his father, coupled

with severe financial struggles at home, had a profound impact on Rakesh. Facing challenges, he continued his studies, earning an M.A. in Hindi and English from Punjab University. His professional journey included teaching positions in Delhi, Jalandhar, Shimla, and Mumbai, along with a stint as a postman in Jalandhar from 1947 to 1949. Later, he served as the Head of the Department of Hindi at DAV College, Jalandhar, taught at Bishop Cotton School in Shimla for two years, and eventually returned to Jalandhar. In 1977, he resigned from his position.

During 1962-1963, Rakesh served as the editor for the Hindi journal, Sarika. Unfortunately, his life was cut short when he passed away on January 3, 1972, at the age of forty-six. His death created a void in the realms of Hindi literature and theatre, but his enduring legacy thrived through a renewed interest in his writing and stage performances of his plays.

#### **Stop to Consider:**

Mohan Rakesh, navigating a path through various trials and tribulations, developed into a sensitive artistic mind. Financial strife characterized most of his life as he sought employment, moving from place to place without establishing a permanent settlement. His unhappy personal life became a backdrop against which he cultivated a creative obsession with the complexities of man-woman relationships. His ultimate aspiration was to sustain himself solely through writing. In the most intimate manner, his acutely sensitive and imaginative self found expression in his diaries.

While Rakesh was not an articulate social commentator, his upbringing occurred against the dynamic socio-political landscape of independent India. Within his writing, whether in fiction, drama, or memoir, you can discern echoes and traces of the uncertainties spanning the poles of the social and the personal. His work delves into the crisis of identity as well as real social crises, reflecting the evolving nature of post-independence India.

#### 1.4 About his Works:

Mohan Rakesh commenced his writing journey with short stories, with "Nanhi" being his inaugural piece in 1944. Published posthumously in 1973 in the Hindi journal *Sarika*, it marked the genesis of a prolific career. His collections of short stories include *Insaan Ke Khandahar* (1950), *Naye Badal* (1957), *Janwar Aur Janwar* (1958), *Ek Aur Zindegi* (1961), *Faulad Ka Akash* (1966), and more. These stories were thematically recompiled in titles like *Aaj Ke Saaye* (1967), *Roye Reshe* (1969), *Ek Ek Duniya* (1969), *Mile Jule Chehre* (1969), among others. In 1972, a comprehensive compilation titled *Mohan Rakesh Ki Sampurna Kahaniya* was published, followed by another edition in 1984 featuring previously unauthorized short fiction (Agrawal 28-29).

Most of Rakesh's stories revolve around the complexities of man-woman relationships, delving less into mutual love and fulfillment and more into tension, estrangement, conflict, and suffering. According to Pratibha Agrawal, characters in his narratives, though in pursuit of happiness and contentment, often find themselves ensnared in ambiguities and indeterminacies (30). In fact, Rakesh's short stories are grounded in the ethos of what came to be known as "Nayi Kahani" in the Hindi literature in 1950s. Nayi Kahani marked a significant departure the narrative tradition in contemporary Hindi literature that upheld quintessentially social problems, patriotism and idealism. (See more about "Nayi Kahani" in Stop to Consider below). There is virtually little explicit representation of social issues in Rakesh's narratives. If social tensions permeate a text of short fiction, it is primarily for the necessity of characterization. Loneliness and alienation constitutes a pertinent theme, as in stories like "Miss Paul" and "Khali". Rakesh casts varied lights into man-woman relationship in stories such as "Suhagine", "Quarter", "Aparichit". "Ek Thehra Huwa Chaku" depicts the reality of urban life. "Uski Roti" is woven around the theme of woman's helplessness, insecurity as well as her compulsions to accept the travails of life. In stories such as "Glass Tank" "Jakhm", "Faulad Ke Akash", Rakesh tried to use symbolism and suggestivity.

### Stop to Consider:

**Nayi Kahani** represents a new wave in Hindi literature, particularly within the realm of fiction, with key figures such as Rajendra Jadav, Mohan Rakesh, and Kamleswar. This literary movement emerged as a reaction against the prevailing romanticism, idealism, patriotic fervor, and ornate language characteristic of the literature of its time. Taking root in the 1950s, Nayi Kahani marked a significant departure, shifting from poetry to prose while emphasizing the capture of the contemporary mood. Beyond the trio mentioned earlier, other writers shared the premise that Hindi short stories, post-Premchand, failed to authentically portray the reality of the time. As Rakesh contends, for conventional practitioners, the short story was often an elaboration of an idea, whereas Nayi Kahani writers were committed to extracting ideas directly from reality itself. Though not united by any specific political ideology, the common focus on capturing the reality and life of people persisted as an overarching ideal.

Nayi Kahani delves into the realm of the individual, with a primary focus on dimensions of man-woman relationships, individualism, and expressions of sexual relations using a language rooted in everyday life.

Rakesh authored three novels: *Andhere Bandh Kamre* (1961), *Na Anewala Kal* (1968), and *Antaraal* (1972). *Andhere Bandh Kamre* explores the clash of modernity and tradition, intertwined with embittered marital relationships. *Na Anewala Kal* delves into the complexities of human relationships, while *Antaraal* presents a portrait of a complex modern mentality.

In the Nayi Kahani movement, Rakesh had his compatriots, but his distinction as a playwright remains singular. His first play, *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* (1958), earned him the initial award from the Sangeet Natak Akademi in 1959. The other major plays include *Lehron Ki Rajhans* (1963) and *Adhe Adhure* (1969). A revised edition of *Lehron Ke Rajhans* was published in 1968. Rakesh intended this second edition to stand as the final version, although the first edition endured for quite some time until Rajklamal Prakashan brought out the second edition in

2004, post-1968. Additionally, Rakesh wrote numerous one-act, audio, and radio plays. *Pair Tale Ki Jameen* is his last play, which remained incomplete.

The three aforementioned major plays exhibit varied settings, plots, and auras. *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* is based on the life of Kalidasa and his relationship with his beloved Mallika. *Lehron Ke Rajhans* unfolds against the backdrop of Gautama Buddha's life. *Adhe Adhure*, as you will discover, revolves around a family entrenched in crisis and grappling with unresolved tensions, set against the post-independence India. Commonalities run through the texts, particularly the constant exploration of the complexities in man-woman relationships, a recurring theme in many other works of the playwright. *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* spans a larger passage of time in three acts, while in the other two plays, the action unfolds within a time span of more than a single day. *Ashadh* and *Lehron* employ a more Sanskritized Hindi, resonating with the socio-historical setting of the dramatic action, whereas *Adhe Adhure* is steeped in modern, everyday idiom.

**SAQ:**

Write a note on the major works of Mohan Rakesh. (in 150 words)

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**1.5 Mohan Rakesh as a Playwright:**

While Mohan Rakesh holds a revered position in Hindi literature, he is predominantly recognized as a playwright. The three plays previously mentioned are not only compelling literary works but also powerful texts for theatrical performance. Although *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* stands out as the critics' favorite; all three plays exhibit a keen theatrical sense, imagination, and power. Rakesh's plays were not only staged across India in Hindi and other languages but also performed abroad in English translations. Eminent theatre directors such as Ramgopal Bazaz, Satyadev Dubey, Om Shivpuri, Ebrahim Alkazi, Tripurari Sharma, Amal Allana, and many others have contributed to bringing Rakesh's plays to



life. *Ashad* and *Lehron*, though set in historical times, transcend the label of historical plays. History and legend are employed to negotiate contemporary issues, a key reason why Rakesh's plays continue to captivate prominent theatre directors and critics.

While his plays deserve a distinctive place in Indian literature, they are also milestones in the trajectory of Hindi theatre, marking a radical shift in its evolution. You may have a sense of Rakesh's acute theatrical sense from various writings on dimensions of the stage performance of his plays as well as from his diary. His play-texts are interspersed with elaborate stage direction. *Ashad Ka Ek Din* starts with a description of the setting, the sound and light of thunder and rain down to an account of the earthen pot and the physical space of the stage. The language of his stage direction deserves some mention, as Rakesh negotiates here the language of fiction and the practical idiom of stage action and setting.

**Stop to Consider:**

What do you think of the necessity of stage direction in playwriting? In a novel or short story, one frequently observes that the account of the setting or characters often precedes the narrative event. In Rakesh's work, stage direction not only provides clues for action but also prepares the audience for what will unfold. A comparison with Shakespeare is insightful, as his stage directions are skeletal and succinct.

Questions of historical authenticity surrounded *Ashadh Ka Ek Din*, with criticisms even suggesting a purported downgrading of Kalidasa's personality, negating his wisdom and saintliness in favor of portraying him as susceptible to human weakness. However, the play foregrounds Kalidasa's humanity. Rakesh's irreverence to orthodoxies and tradition, coupled with his commitment to realism, marks the modernity of the play. Additionally, Kalidasa is presented as a symbol of creativity, extending beyond being a mere historical persona, allowing the playwright to depict a contradiction within the creative process. Rakesh argues that whether Kalidasa as a historical figure experiences this conflict is a marginal issue (*Ashadh K Ek Din* XVI). Mallika, beyond being Kalidasa's beloved, also symbolizes the trust he exudes.

LehronkeRajhans, based on Ashwaghosh's *Southernand*, itself a fictional text, highlights a conflict as modern as *Ashadh K Ek Din*.

Regarding *Lehron Ke Rajhans*, Rakesh initially crafted the storyline in the forties, introducing the four main characters. He later adapted it into a radio play titled *Sundari*. During his stay in Jalandhar, the play underwent further revisions for the stage under the title *Raat Beetne Tak*. Rakesh, dissatisfied with the imbalance of characters and the perceived laborious ending, initiated the writing of *Lehron Ke Rajhans* before *Ashadh*. From 1957 to 1961, the play was written twice, both attempts left incomplete. The final version was completed in April 1963, the same year it was published. This writing history underscores Rakesh's tenacity and seriousness in playwriting. Om Shivpuri, the director of the first-ever performance of *Adhe Adhure*, highlighted the active collaboration between the director and playwright, extending to minute details such as the choice of props. Shivpuri acknowledged instances of clash of opinions and serious debates, yet the collaborative result was agreeable to both (*Adhe Adhure XXI*).

**SAQ:**

Write a short note on Mohan Rakesh as a playwright.(in 100 words)

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Mention the major plays of Mohan Rakesh. (20 words)

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**1.6 Performing *Adhe Adhure*:**

*Adhe Adhure* premiered in 1969, staged by 'Dishantar' in New Delhi under the direction of Om Shivpuri. Initially, it faced strong criticism from theatre reviewers and journalists who dismissed it as an empty drama driven solely by commercial motives. Jaydev Taneja highlighted perceived flaws, including the absence of a clear plot, a redundant

prelude, one actor playing multiple roles, and an overarching sense of despairing fatalism (*Adhe Adhure* VII).

However, the play has continued to captivate creative directors, actors, and theatre artists across India and beyond. Om Shivpuri, reflecting on the play, emphasized its operation on multiple levels of meaning. It serves as a narrative depicting harrowing tensions between man and woman, a meditation on the non fulfillment of human desires, and a saga of family collapse (XVIII-XIX). Shivpuri successfully staged the play in both proscenium theatre and open-air settings. Notable features of his production included the use of floodlights, one actor portraying multiple characters (as directed in the text), and actors appearing without makeup, and, most importantly, a constant dialogue with the playwright himself throughout the production process (XXI).

Lillete Dubey's production of the play at Bharat Bhavan in Bhopal in October 2013 was remarkable, primarily due to the outstanding performances by the artists of Prime Time Theatre, Mumbai. The set depicted a decaying house reminiscent of the sixties, and the brilliant performances by Lillete Dubey (as Savitri) and Mohan Agashe portrayed (performing the multiple male roles) unraveled the family's emotional turmoil and its continuous movement from one crisis to another. However, a reviewer pointed out a lacuna in the absence of music during some crucial moments. The play was adapted into a teleplay titled *Adhe Adhure* under the direction of Lillete Dubey and Rohit Philip, available for streaming on Zee5. A few words about the teleplay are noteworthy. Mohan Agashe, portraying five male characters, delivers his confessions as a narrator at the beginning with decency and directness. In contrast to the engrossed Man in the Black Suit in Rakesh's text, whose act of smoking a cigarette heightens the contemplative air of the narrator, Mohan Agashe delivers his dialogue without much anxiety or indignation. Lillete Dubey, in the role of Savitri, skillfully depicts the personality of a woman who shifts between a varying range of emotions, being assertive, furious, evasive, and even secretive in the ebb and flow of daily life. Ira Dubey, portraying Binni, brilliantly captures the travails of a married woman caught up in an irresolvable conflict with her husband. Her confessions of marital troubles in a climactic scene in the early part of the play,

followed by poignant silence, mark a significant moment in the performance text. The use of camera movement and cuts, along with positioning the characters in a space divided into background and foreground, plays a crucial role in unfolding the complex pattern of action and the various crises of the characters.

Among the various performances of "*Adhe Adhure*," there have been few attempts at re-interpretation. This may be attributed to the structure and content of the play itself, characterized by its obsession with crisis and psychological turmoil engulfing the entire family. The meticulous description of the décor, action, and movements on stage has concretized the dramatic action, making it challenging for re-interpretation. The play presents various points of view with equal force and vigor, rendering any attempt at moral judgment difficult. Noteworthy in the realm of re-interpretation is Amal Allana's production for the National School of Drama Repertory in New Delhi. Allana reworked the formal structure of the play by breaking its two acts into episodic units. She incorporated a chorus from Kabuki origin and utilized the sound of drums and wooden clappers to immerse the audience in the core of the conflict. A triangular space served as the acting area, resonating with the triangular conflict of the play: man, woman, and circumstances. Leveraging the internal tempo and rhythm of the play, Allana juxtaposed scenes and dialogues, integrating sound patterns using human music.

The Jeff Goldberg Studio, Khar, a Mumbai-based theatre group, produced the play, delivering a brilliant production under the direction of Ashok Pandey. Kalam Chabra's outstanding performance as Savitri, alongside Ashok Pandey playing multiple male roles as Mahinder, Juneja, Singhanian, and Jagmohan, showcased the frustration of a woman married to a failed person and struggling to guide her children on the right path.

In Jammu in 2018, "Natyakarmi" produced the play at Abhinav Theatre, directed by Veena Dogra. As described by a reviewer, the production brilliantly highlighted tumultuous confrontations and the claustrophobic environment of a middle-class family, with sudden eruptions of black humor through sarcastic dialogues delivered with perfect tone and timing. Kanchi Khajuria, playing the role of Savitri, portrayed a different character with different men: aggressive and dominating with her husband,

deferential and servile with her boss Singhanian, and a coquettish teenage girl with her ex-admirer. The long monologue of Savitri, where she vents her anger and frustration, was particularly remarkable.

In August 22, 2020, Yamini Culture Society, Jammu, staged the play under Veena Dogra's direction again. Dogra's production is enriched by the use of light and costume, and during key moments, background music is used. The production highlights the predicament of Savitri without downplaying other perspectives, especially that of Juneja. Umesh Singh's performance in five roles of the male characters beautifully captures the imperfections in each character. Juneja sounds a bit intrusive, authoritative, and unacceptably judgmental. Mahendranath appears naive, yet somewhat frivolous. In contrast, key points of Savitri's revelation in climactic moments are highlighted with the use of background music and spotlight. For instance, Ms. Khajuria's enactment of the scene where Mahendranath physically tortures her to gain acquiescence is brilliantly highlighted with the glow of the spotlight on her face, emphasizing her stiff resistance

*Adhe Adhure* was also put up on Bengali stage by Aamish Ghosh under the banner of Shohan Production on 2 June, 2019. Some of the other stage productions of the play include the ones directed by Shakshi Sharma at Jaipur on 28 October, 2022; Kndan Kumar on 28 January, 2020, Shubham Gautam on 22 January, 2023 at Sangeet Natak Adakemi, Gomtinagar, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh; J.P.Singh on 16 January, 2019 at Sri Ram Centre Auditorium, Mandi House, New Delhi. For your information, let me mention that all the stage productions I just referred to are available on youtube.

**SAQ:**

Mention some of the important productions of *Adhe Adhure*. (50 words)

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Watch a certain version of the play available online, and attempt a theatre review. (200 words)

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### 1.7 Summing Up:

By now, you have gained some insights about Mohan Rakesh as a playwright and instances of the stage performances of his works in India. Additionally, we have discussed the life and work of Rakesh, suggesting a closer examination of his personality to gain a deeper understanding of his work. The trials and tribulations of Rakesh's life profoundly influenced his writing, and his diary serves as a window into the inner life of this eminent Hindi writer and playwright. Regarding the performance of the play under discussion, we have provided only a glimpse of some of them. *Adhe Adhure* stands out as one of the few widely performed Indian plays, and it is recommended to explore various performances available online. In the next unit, we will delve into the plot and characters of *Adhe Adhure*.

### 1.8 References and Suggested Readings:

Agrawal, Pratibha. *Mohan Rakesh*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1993.

Basu, K. Dilip, ed. *Adhe Adhure* by Mohan Rakesh, Translated by Bindu Batra. Worldview, 1999.

Cappola, Carlo, ed. *Another Life* by Mohan Rakesh. Harper Perennial, 2018.

Rakesh, Mohan. *Adhe Adhure*. New Delhi: Radhakrishna Prakashan, 2004.

---*Lehron Ke Rajhans*. New Delhi: RajkamalPrakashan, 2004.

---*Ashadh Ka Ek Din*. New Delhi: Rajpal and Sons, 2004.

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## UNIT- 2

### Mohan Rakesh: *Adhe Adhure* (Reading the Play)

#### Unit Structure:

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 What happens in Act 1
- 2.4 What Happens in Act 2
- 2.5 Characters
- 2.6 Summing Up
- 2.7 References and Suggested Readings

#### 2.1 Objectives:

By going through this unit, the learner will be able to—

- *learn* about the plot of the play,
- *appreciate* the key moments in the play,
- *evaluate* the characters,
- *gain* a sense of the basic themes of the play.

#### 2.2 Introduction:

Mohan Rakesh's *Adhe Adhure* is recognized as a modern classic in dramatic literature. It presents a brilliant and piercing exposition of a family fraught with irreconcilable conflicts that involves the characters in pent-up frustration and disquiet and anger. It brings them into their own whirlpools of suffering. Questions of identity are raised in the context of a home dwindling into economic hardship, while search for identity, doomed into frustration. Notion of a home as a stable social-emotional refuge is proven to be dysfunctional, while search for happiness is rendered as almost frivolously meaningless in an almost hostile web of relationships. In other words, to delve into the world of *Adhe Adhure* is to get at the heart of crisis and stasis of a dysfunctional family. We are

now headed for the ‘story’ of the play. Let me suggest how to read the text. What follows is something that you will be better able to appreciate if you go through the text. The characters are named the First Man, the Woman, the Second Man, the Third Man, the Fourth Man, the Boy the Older Girl, the Younger Girl. All of them have a proper name, and these are mentioned occasionally in the dialogues. The narrator, who appears, as I said, in the beginning, is the Man in the Black Suit. Why the playwright does not identify the character with their proper names is a point we will have occasion to ponder, but for our convenience, we will use the proper names while discussing what happens in the play.

### 2.3 What Happens in Act 1:

Before the ‘story’ begins, the Man in the Black Suit, the narrator, faces the audience and starts off with something of a philosophical prelude. He is contemplative and puffing a cigar, saying, “Now the same thing again, the same beginning...” (Rakesh 247). A spotlight detaches the narrator visually from the rest of the décor. Detached from the action, yet profoundly occupied by it, he does not present any outline of what is going to unfold. Rather, he contemplates more philosophically on issues of identity crisis which, he says, is not necessarily confined to the play’s action. He points to a human situation in which individuals play limited and specific roles. One can switch across roles, but there is little possibility of any radical transformation in the situation itself. The Man in the Black Suit bids adieu and the ‘play’ proper starts.

#### Stop to Consider:

An elaborate discussion of the narrator is given in the subsequent unit. For now, think about whether the narrator is an integral part of the play. Can you think of *Adhe Adhure* without the Man in the Black Suit?

The Woman steps into her house, exhausted from office work, and find no one inside. The room is all in a mess, with books torn by the Younger Girl, and images of film actresses cut out from magazines, cups and clothes scattered across. She grumbles against her husband and children



as she keeps tidying up the mess. The First Man enters, slightly submissive and apologetic, saying he just walked out to the market a while ago. The Woman finds that he has not given the Younger Girl (Kinni) her milk.

The Woman (Savitri) informs him about a prospective visit by her boss Singhanian to their house. The First Man (Mahendranath) airs his reservations about the visit, saying she must have invited her boss. A round of scuffle starts from this point when Mahendranath reveals his anxiety and embarrassment about how public knowledge of her association with her boss. Savitri is explicit and outspoken about such visits, and is gruff with her husband's sarcastic comments mocking tone. As she complains, Mahendranath always finds an excuse to step out whenever Singhanian visited. Her disappointment is exacerbated when he adds that he is going to Juneja's. We learn that Mahendranath and Juneja started a business together which eventually collapsed and left the former indebted to his 'friend'. Savitri's bitterness about her husband's business link arises, as can be inferred from her words, from Mahendranath's meaningless gratitude and illusive reliance on that man and from her disillusionment with his patronization and benevolence.

War of words shifts from matters of the past into issues of the present, with Savitri railing against the way both her husband and her son are simply ruining their lives. Mahendranath now has a counterpoint to offer, invoking the Older Daughter: "Who taught her how to ruin her life?" (255)

Mahendranath should be grateful, Savitri contends, that Singhanian has accepted the invitation. She adds that it is all part of an effort gets a job for the Boy (Ashok). Mahendranath replies that that he is grateful for all people who visited their house including Jagmohan and Manoj. Sting of spiteful irony in his words provokes her into an intense jolt of anger and disgust.

The Old Daughter (Binni) arrives, prompting the couple to hush up; and goes inside to wash up her face. They sense a trouble from their daughter's unexpected arrival, and push each other to ask what befalls her. They have an inkling of her marital trouble; and Mahendranath accuses Savitri for the part she played in the past for Binni's failed marriage.

As Binni re-enters, she notices sign of worry on her mother's face and asks what goes wrong. After some hesitations, Savitri asks her: "Are you happy there?"(260) Her blandly affirmative tone only suggests a grim story. More sober, anguished moments followed, when Binni confesses to her predicament. The story of Binni is pushed further, and we learn that the crisis facing her cannot be ascribed to a singular, tangible factor. She suffers unspeakable trauma and claustrophobia in a rather mundane ambience at her new home with Manoj. She has frequent scuffle with Manoj that leaves her frustrated and suffering while Manoj is pushed beyond the limits of his toleration. At that height of despair, as she confesses now, Manoj blames for their conjugal disquiet on certain things she inherited from her home. Mahendranath, safely aloof from the affairs of her daughter, responds only bathetically. Savitri asks him not to interrupt. This again leads to further scuffle between the married couple with Savitri declaring an imminent separation. Mahendranath now incriminates her with her doubtful affair with Jagmohan. (At this point, Binni's resistance is instinctive.)

As for Binni's case, she can only withstand his psychological torture by retaliating with self-destructive acts geared to shock and appall him. In course of time, however, troubles would subside, but only to start all over again. She keeps visiting her home, we learn, just to find out her awful inheritance that has ruined her conjugal life. A long pause ensues.

At this point, Young Daughter (Kinni) enters, complaining about her milk not getting warmed. She declares that she will not go to school next day if she does not get spools of thread for the sewing class. Her peevish, complaining tone and her rash, uninhibited tongue angers Binni. Kinni goes on speaking of her needs with a piercing directness and with little care for how one should speak among elders. She needs new socks, as she feels bad going to school in torn socks. An embarrassing silence prevails for a moment because of the real face of material crisis so unabashedly unmasked by her words.

Savitri changes the topic, saying that someone is about to visit them. It is Singhanian, her boss, as Mahendranath is quick to add. The pain of such

curt, sardonic words only fills Savitri with anger and acrimony. Sensing how her mother suffers, Binni wants to learn what the matter is. Savitri would not open up. Binni gets more intimate with her mother. Mahendranath re-enters from kitchen, and steps towards the bookshelf. Binni speaks of her mother's sacrifice in this house, while Mahendranath bangs a file from the bookshelf, and the topic is thus virtually brought to a close.

Kinni enters, followed by Ashok, complaining that he was pulling her hair. Sabitri scolds him for indulging in such trivialities. Ashok snatched from her a book of Casanova stories, understandably a secret pleasure for him, now sneak-picked by his youngest sister. At this moment explodes his anger, speaking of his humiliation, from his wife and children. As he says, he suffers endless insults from his family in a way that denies him a space and dignity at his own home. In frustration and self-pity, he adds that his position in the household is even less than that of a rubber stamp, stripped of honour and respect. In utter rage of self-denigration, he calls himself a termite that is eating up the house, and finally makes his exit.

Kinni almost spews out the toast she is offered to eat. Angered by her sharp words, Savitri offers to give her a thrashing, but the girl departs from the scene altogether. Ashok is about to follow her; Savitri stops him and asks him to stay till Singhanian arrives. Ashok is averse to meeting Singhanian for his hateful mannerisms. He repudiates and mimics the fellow, and it offends his mother. The visit, she emphasizes, is an opportunity to get him a job. Ashok, however, is not keen to be engaged in any job, having quitted a job in a company. In fact, he is not disposed to settle down with a job he does not like. Savitri replies with bitter words, denouncing his idleness and pointless indulgences. In the midst of this scuffle, the Second Man (Singhanian) steps in. His entry brought a rupture to the prevailing mood.

Singhanian seems more attentive to Binni than Ashok, who does not even pretend to be hospitable. Saddled by a weak memory, Singhanian thinks it was for Binni that Savitri invited him. He is also annoyingly digressive in his talk. Binni offers to make tea; he promptly refuses and resorts to a monotonous discourse on the harmful effects of tea. Savitri offers to

make coffee, and he refuses coffee, too. He now delves into his personal experience with coffee. Bored and exhausted, Ashok offers to leave while her mother tells him to stay.

Under the weight of his self-indulgent and digressive discourse, Singhanian forgets the point of the invitation. Savitri finds an opportunity to remind him about Ashok's job. Singhanian's response is calm and virtually non-committal. As Savitri mentions her cold flue, he finds a pretext to babble on the climate in Europe. He raises issues of employee strikes at his office for their demands and reacts bitterly to these matters. Meanwhile, from a safe distance, Ashok starts sketching out his figure.

Savitri reminds him of Ashok, while Singhanian's affirmative response is just a courtesy; he largely remains aloof. Instead, he asks Savitri to visit his home, as his child misses her so much. Here, we get a sense of Savitri's close connection with her boss. Savitri adds that Ashok should also visit him, and his response is lukewarm. He reiterates his invitation and says that he needs to discuss the trade union issue with her. Singhanian asks for Ashok's opinion regarding the strikes happening everywhere. Ashok does not reply verbally, but makes clear his position in a wittily symbolic way: he kills a mosquito. Singhanian reacts to this symbolic act of violence with a sort of moral horror before he exits, with Savitri to see him off.

### **Stop to Consider:**

#### **The Strike:**

Repeated references to the union, the Strike, and the union's demands, allow us to situate what happens inside a home in the context of an outside--a tumultuous socio-political climate. Not that the worker's agitation is central to the crisis that unfolds in the family, but repeated reference to events happening outside does bring home the fact that the domestic turmoil is not detached from a volatile public sphere. In this context, we can situate the play historically in the post-independence period, where socio-political discontent was rife.

To Binni, Ashok reveals how he was making fun of the fellow by drawing a caricature. Savitri returns and sends Ashok off to help Singhania push his car on the road. Savitri catches sight of Ashok's caricature of Singhania, she gets on her nerves. Exasperated at such humiliation from her son, she says that she cannot tolerate guests in her home being made fun of.

Ashok's retaliation is evident as he bluntly tells her to stop inviting such individuals who, he claims, "come here and make us feel even worse than we are" (288). He asserts that Savitri's invitations are driven by position, money, and power. In her defense, Savitri emphatically states that she desperately needs relief from the mounting economic pressure on the family. She adds that while her husband has ruined his fortune in business and is now idle, her efforts to secure a living for Ashok only invite repudiation. Ashok, in turn, argues that his mother should cease attempting something that never improves people's circumstances. In his argument, he questions Binni about her decision to leave home and elope with Manoj, insinuating that her past marital choice was not motivated by love but other considerations—a point that carries poignantly derogatory suggestions. In the midst of intense cerebral moods, Savitri declares her decision to withdraw all commitments to the home and pursue her own path to happiness

**Check Your Progress:**

Explain the arrival of Binni, Singhania as well as the first entry of Kinni from a theatrical point of view. Do you think that their arrival staves off, albeit temporarily, the dramatic tension of the prevailing moments? (150 words)

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Describe the various conflicts among the characters. Do you see any points of agreement among them? (200 words)

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Sketch out the pattern of entry and exit as seen in Act 1. (100 words)

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#### **2.4 What Happens in Act 2:**

Ashok and Binni engage in a conversation about their father, who is now at Juneja's. Binni plans to make sandwiches in anticipation of their parents' reconciliation. From her words, we gather that Savitri remained silent the previous night, and in the morning, she had a casual chat with Binni before heading to the office in an unusually attire, stating she would be back in the evening. However, her mother's facial expression contradicted her promise to return. Ashok comments that their mother should now stick to a decision that could propel her beyond years of suffering, claustrophobia, and stagnation.

The conversation shifts towards matters of the past, with Ashok bringing up issues of Binni's elopement once again. Both Ashok and Binni express a sense of being strangers in their own home. Ashok notes that there's something peculiar in the air of the house—an echo of Binni's sentiments when she had lamented about the 'doomed inheritance'. Ashok seeks an explanation for her elopement in a manner that unsettles her, and she attempts to evade the matter. Ashok persists in his questioning. Exasperated and tortured, Binni can only sublimate her emotions through an outburst against Kinni.

Sometime later, Ashok, who had exited a while ago, re-enters, almost shoving in the Younger Daughter, Kinni. Infuriated, he is on the verge of physically punishing her for having indulged in sexual talk with her friend Surekha. In turn, Kinni complains about how he takes her possessions to a girl named Varna and beats her if she refuses. Her response only intensifies the conflict, and in the scuffle that ensues, Savitri enters.

Binni is concerned about her mother, ensuring that she won't be disturbed any further. Ashok finds himself in a precarious situation, while Binni tries to soothe and comfort her mother with care and sympathy. She offers to make tea for Savitri, who declines, stating that she is going out for tea with Jagmohan. Upon learning that Juneja is also joining, Savitri flatly refuses any conversation with him.

Binni remains congenial to her mother-- she chooses a purse for her mother to match her saree, obeys her instructions to tidy up things, and at the same time tries to persuade her to come back a little earlier. Ashok is more restless and dissatisfied, presumably at the prospect of his mother's alliance with Jagmohan. He prepares to go out, promising to return when Juneja arrives.

Savitri makes Binni understand that she is leaving home for good. Tense and shocked, Binni pleads with her mother to rethink her decision, and steps inside. All alone now, in desperation and indecision, Savitri finds herself choosing some jewelry from the cupboard, trying some footwear, seeing herself in the mirror, trying to conceal the white hair on her forehead. In a monologue, she expresses her utter disgust and bitterness at her drab, everyday existence. She tries to come to terms with her resolution to abandon her home and family.

The Third Man (Jagmohan) enters. Savitri asks if he comes straight from his office, as she had told him to. From their exchanges, we perceive both a sense of their intimacy and differences. While Savitri foregrounds her 'decision', Jagmohan is more interested in discussing Binni. Jagmohan's subtly evasive words contrast her keenness to express her decision. Binni enters from inside. Jagmohan is amazed to see her, and

exclaims how she grew up as a little girl. His happy memories of Binni as a child in the past are counterbalanced by Savitri's expression of her harrowing ordeal of the present. Jagmohan, it seems, has little idea of Binni's marital trouble. Savitri contends that her present trouble is the harvest of her free and conscious choice. She proposes going out for free talk, and Jagmohan presses to have the conversation at home. As she persists stubbornly, he has to concede. They leave.

Binni enters with tea and finds that her mother already left with Jagmohan. She pours some tea for herself when Kinni enters, railing about how people do not care for her. Kinni wants her mother to give a rebuttal to the disgrace and humiliations people in the neighborhood cause her to suffer. She finds Binni, instead, and presses her to meet the Surekhas. Binni refuses, and Kinni begins to cry.

Juneja enters. He tries to soothe Kinni, who has not stopped crying. Her reaction is impulsive, as she promptly walks off, saying she will not return until her mother returns.

Juneja asks Binni about Savitri, and she feigns ignorance. Even Ashok refrains from telling of Jagmohan's visit. Binni offers to make tea for Juneja, while he instantly learns of Jagmohan's visit from the cup of tea on the tray. Not keen to discuss the matter, Binni and tries to divert the issue, inquiring about things unrelated to her father, such as the new places Juneja visited. An uneasy, intermittent pall of silence presents itself, which speaks volumes of the precarious situation that grips the family.

Binni airs her apprehensions about her father's health. Juneja says that Mahendranath is beyond all persuasions and adds that Mahendranath loved Savitri from his depths. Binni rules it out, as she has seen such an embittered scuffle between her parents, with her father having mercilessly tortured her mother mentally and physically. He knows it all from Mahendranath, Juneja says. Mahendranath is doomed to suffer, as the bonding is unilateral, he comments. When everything goes awry and hopelessly beyond control, Mahendranath is still under the illusion of a possible reconciliation. Juneja bids to depart. Binni, caught in the gloom



of the impasse, asks in desperation whether reconciliation is still possible. Juneja rules out any enduring solution beyond a temporary patch-up.

When he is about to step out, Savitri steps in. She drags her younger daughter inside, who pesters her to accompany her for a face-off with Surekha's mother. Angered, Savitri slaps her on the face. The situation turns embarrassing and tense. Kinni, barely able to withstand the torture and pain of hostility, calls everyone a lump of clay. Juneja tries to intervene to ease the situation, but Savitri cuts him short. She almost shoves Kinni into the inner room and bolts from outside.

When Savitri and Juneja talk, they exchange terse arguments. Juneja starts with a plea to release Mahendranath from her constraints. He adds that Mahendranath cannot stand alone because Savitri has chained her. He loves her so much that he cannot imagine an independent existence. Savitri refutes the very idea of Mahendranath having thrived independently at all. Juneja bids Binni to excuse them for a while, but Savitri asks her to stay on. An extraordinary dramatic situation allows the audience to remain immersed in the family's sordid reality and the peculiar entanglement from which they will not free themselves. *Adhe Adhure* is an out-and-out play of dialogues, and we are prepared for the 'dialogue' between Savitri and Juneja.

Savitri retorts that Mahendranath has always depended on others, especially Juneja, while making every decision. To Juneja, it is a question of trust. Savitri is quick to reply that this 'trust' has, finally, rendered him incapable of making any independent choice.

**Stop to Consider:**

Juneja bids Binni to excuse them for some time. In other words, he does not want Binni to be part of the conversation, and Binni readily agrees to exit. Savitri stubbornly wants her to listen to their exchange. What does all this signify in dramatic terms? It creates in us an expectation of what will unravel now. From Juneja's perspective, it may not be appropriate for Binni to learn specific facts that will unfold.

On Savitri's part, it does not matter. The supposed 'revelation' will not disturb Binni, but will perhaps enable her to discover the roots of the disturbances in which both the mother and the daughter are mired.

Savitri states that from the beginning, Mahendranath has remained a dependent and subservient person, and it is to Juneja that he looks up to in every choice of everyday life. Juneja retorts it is not other than reliance on a friend. Savitri is quick to retaliate that this trust and reliance, in turn, translated into a blind worship of Juneja as the absolute standard of everything Mahendranath does and thinks. Marriage, she argues, impels one to fulfill oneself and realize what remains unfulfilled. Mahendranath is, to her, not somebody seeking self-realization but one remaining subservient to others and in becoming an instrument for other's use. Juneja used him in the past while he set up a press and then opened a factory. Juneja remained safe as the business fell, saying he returned Mahendranath his share. When Savitri says that even Juneja is well aware of the person responsible for Mahendranath's economic downfall, she points her finger at Juneja himself.

Now Savitri heads for a more crucial fact of their married everyday life. Mahendranath's friends, including Juneja, had started complaining about her snapping his ties with them, complaining of the loss of smile and happiness in his life. Mahendranath, she adds, tried his best to remain the way he was before his friends. In a frantic attempt to ensure conviction that he is not a changed man after marriage, he went on in his violent, even self-destructive spree, injuring his head against the door, beating up his children, and torturing his wife. Mahendranath would persistently force her into behaving in a way desired by his friends. He would inflict on her horrendous physical torture to make her follow his rules. Juneja, in his reply, contends that Savitri's words are probably not untrue, but nothing new. She had had similar complaints against her husband years ago. Savitri wants now to be excused of her daughter, but Juneja insists on her presence. As per Juneja's account, Savitri did share her frustrations and marital suffering to him in moments of intimacy. Juneja adds her complaints about her husband were the same, only

Mahendranath's instigators were his parents and not Juneja. Savitri was, he adds, looking for men she can share her experience with, and he should be anyone other than her husband. She did not deem Mahendranath worth to spend her life with. She stays with her husband with repeated efforts to sever the marital bond which is why she is looking for persons such as Shivjit, Jagmohan, even Juneja. Each man she tries to forge a relationship with is endowed with promise material prosperity, and influence and status, yet eventually she finds faults with him. She craves fulfillment, and tries to achieve everything that she wants to achieve, but no one could have given her the desired happiness or complete fulfillment.

Juneja adds that before Savitri, Mahendranath's life was joyful. It was Savitri who made his life miserable demonstrating how he was deficient in comparison to others. An anxious, restless craving for achievements keeps her dwindling between her family and other people she admires outside. It is in this context that Juneja refers to Manoj—Binni's husband. Savitri was angry when she learned that Manoj eloped with Binni. In the turmoil at this loss of choice for spending her life with, she returns to Jagmohan who has recently come back. Juneja even says that he can recount what might transpire between Savitri and Juneja that day. He gives an account of what things happened most probably, a scene of an encounter between them, where she wept and Jagmohan consoled and advised her to go back home. Savitri, listening without a word, explodes with agony of fury. All she says is that she realizes how all men she comes across are for all their varied masks essentially the same. Juneja's reply is even more compelling when he says how she is still deluded in her ability for making choices in life.

Kinni, bolted inside a room, cries out for someone to open the door. Savitri does not open the door. Juneja asks her to open, but she cuts it short, saying she knows what to do because it is her house. Juneja finally says that no reconciliation is possible now simply because of this possessiveness of hers. Juneja further says that Mahendranath is helplessly attached to her, and he needs to be set free. Savitri retorts

that she does not need a man who is unable to stand on his own feet. Juneja gets a decisive answer now—a decisive gesture of breakdown of marriage. Asserting that this breakdown does not necessarily mean loss of all hope for Mahendranath, and taking upon his shoulders all responsibilities for encouraging him for a life on a new basis, Juneja offers to leave when Ashok steps in informing them of the arrival of his father. To get a cane for her ailing father to walk with, Binni presses Kinni to open the door. Kinni won't budge. At that climactic moment, Juneja departs to help her friend.

After a few moments, shadow of Mahendranath, the First Man, appears on the stage. We learn that he has come back.

**SAQ:**

Q.1. Do you think that Ashok and Binni have their own predicament? Do they also share a basis of their suffering? (100 words)

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Q.2. Write a note on Ashok's and Binni's contrasting attitude to Savitri. (150 words)

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Q.3. Sketch out the pattern of entry and exit in ACT 2. Also, dwell briefly on its implications. (100 words)

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**2.5 Characters:**

**The Man in the Black Suit:** He is the narrator who speaks to the audience before the drama unfolds. He does not offer a plot summary

but speculates on the philosophical core of the action of that unfolds afterwards. He foregrounds the central thematic core of the play—the human situation, the general crisis of identity, and man's complicated relationship to circumstances. The prelude he offers before the play's 'action' gives us a perspective on what we see unfolding. It is thanks to the intervention of the Man in the Black Suit, for instance, that we cannot reduce the crisis of the family to a simplistic question of responsibility. As hinted at by him, the play dramatizes a most harrowing human situation in a middle class home without resorting to any facile moral judgment. In other words, the Man in the Black Suit prepares us to encounter a complex human situation beyond the analytical purview of any singular perspective.

**Woman:** The Woman denotes Savitri, a working woman in a middle class family struggling with financial hardship. She invites her boss Singhanian to her home to push him for getting a job for her son Ashok. She is also a familiar figure in Singhanian's domestic life. She has maintained connections with some male friends in a way utterly disliked by her husband. She is hardworking and dedicated to family, struggling to maintain both domestic and work life without care and assistance from her family members. Savitri is, however, not the epitome of 'angel in the house', as propounded by Coventry Patmore. Besides being the sole breadwinner, she pursues happiness and fulfillment.

**Man 1:** Man 1 signifies Mahendranath. He is a middle aged person, husband to Savitri. He started business with his friend Juneja. He went bankrupt and lies idle at home. Mahendranath is helplessly aware of frequent visits of his wife's male admirers to his home. We learn that till the time he had his business he also had his friend circle and pressed his wife to behave the way his friend circle would appreciate. She would not comply. It caused frequent clash among the couple where he would torture her violently both physically and mentally. After he lost his job, however, he grew less aggressive and could react to what he thinks as his wife's objectionable extra-marital links. Verbal tussle was still a regular event, consequent on his frequent escape to Juneja's. He keenly feels

his disgraced and peripheral position at his home, and senses that even his children do not hold him in high regard. In all, he feels marginalized as a husband and father.

**Man 2:** Man 2 is Singhanian, Savitri's boss in the office. He visited Savitri's twice before, and the third visit is dramatized in the play. He is affluent, vivacious in a frivolous way who has a flair for travelling across the globe. He is suggested to be somewhat lewd. He is more keen to talk to Binni than to Ashok. Another trait of this character is his digressive talk and forgetfulness. Though he is invited for Ashok, he forgets the purpose of visit. Though affluent, he is frivolous and annoyingly digressive.

**Man 3:** Jagmohan is the Man 3, friend of Savitri's. He is elegant, soft-spoken and apparently sympathetic to her. Savitri had a romantic link with him. He left the town and after years of absence returns to the town with transfer. They get re-connected. As we see, he spends time with Savitri with an apparent air of sympathy and closeness. While she deems him to be a potential saviour of her embittered life and supplicantly seek his response and commitment, he is more keen to avert such commitment. That Savitri returns home after meeting Jagmohan at a restaurant decisively signals his non-committal attitude. Thus, Jagmohan is more keen for a temporary and superficial flirtation with her rather than resorting to any serious engagement and commitment.

**Man 4:** Juneja is the Man 4 here. He is the former business partner of Mahendranath. Their business got ruined, though there is no indication of him becoming bankrupt. He has a daughter who is recently married off. A close acquaintance of Mahendranath's family, he is virtually a patron for Mahendranath. An ardent advocate for Mahendranath, Juneja anxiously observes Savitri's connections with other men, and as he himself reveals, was even close to her once. Juneja is a crucial character in the play not for what happens in his family but for how he remains a constant point of Savitri's bitter animosity. She alleges him to be one responsible for making her husband an utterly dependant and subservient fellow.

Another aspect of his importance is for revelation of certain aspects of the troubled life of Sabitri-Mahendranath pair. He defends Mahendranath as a victim of that way Savitri lives with dubious links with other men and with persistent railing against her husband's inefficiency. In the absence of Mahendranath throughout the second act, except for his final return back home at the end, Juneja acts as his advocate.

**Elder Daughter:** Binni, the Elder Daughter, eloped with Manoj to create a new home, only to find herself grappling with a challenging emotional and psychological situation stemming from a bitter, acrimonious scuffle with her husband. Life before marriage was far from idyllic, as evident from the rage of domestic violence inflicted by her father on her mother, leaving her with harrowing memories. Despite the turmoil, Binni remained obedient, contrasting sharply with her younger sister Kinni, who displayed a more petulant demeanor. For a woman like Binni, marriage seemed like an escape from the disconcerting circumstances at home, yet troubles only escalated post-marriage. Her marital discontent may lack palpable reasons like financial difficulties or extramarital affairs; instead, her husband's constant humiliation, reminding her of a doomed inheritance from her home, adds to her misery. The absence of mutual love and empathy, mirroring the condition of her home, turns her marriage into a living hell. Binni repeatedly seeks refuge at her parental home after each quarrel with Manoj. As a character, Binni differs from Kinni in behavior and composure, possibly due to experiencing fewer financial difficulties in her childhood. She aligns herself with her mother, offering solace in a situation where Savitri receives little support from the rest of the family. Despite this, Binni remains a complex character, grappling with loneliness, anger, frustration, and a self-destructive disposition, all while harboring hope for parental reconciliation and delicately handling her mother's plight.

**Boy:** Ashok is referred to as the Boy, the elder child of Savitri and Mahendranath, a 22 year youth who does nothing for either study or livelihood. He spends time cutting film actresses' pictures from the

magazines, and stepping out of home quite often. From Kinni we know that he develops some romantic relationship with a girl in the neighbourhood. However, he is frustrated, estranged at home, filled with fury for his mother and sister, and with some sympathy for his father. We discern a similarity in mental disposition between the father and the son. His sincere concern for his father can be discerned from how carefully he conducts his ailing father back home at the end of the play. Ashok does not think about the future much, nor does he remain silent to things that happen to his home. In a sense, Ashok is a somewhat shadowy character, at least in comparison to his parent. For one thing, he does not have any sense of selfhood. There is little clue about his inclinations, and fascination with the popular cinema and erotic stories is just a sort of indulgence. However, he is anxiously aware of how his sister resorts to wayward life, though he himself cannot claim to be self-righteous. He is equally aware of the exploitative nature of the upper officials such as Singhanian and their overtures. His act of killing a mosquito in the Singhanian episode suggests an element of social anger directed against the privileged sections of the society.

**Younger Daughter:** the Younger Daughter is Kinni, a 13 year old school girl. She is peevish, complaining, and stubborn. She finds herself in a barren, uncaring, even hostile environment at her home. She complains about her milk not being warmed. She also complains about her torn socks and how she goes hungry during school hours. She is the worst victim of the financial difficulties her household is struggling with. Whenever she complains about her wants, there is hardly any response from elders but only an evasive reaction. She is also a sufferer of the social disgrace the household is subjected to in the neighbourhood. She is even labeled as a black sheep who would lead her friends astray. She agonizingly suffers the rumour in the neighbourhood about each and every member of her family. The family is collapsing as a meaningful coherent social unit with bonds of affection and responsibility and she is a cruel reminder of it.



**SAQ:**

Q.1. Do you think that each of the characters in the family of Mahendranath and Savitri is an incomplete human personality? Elaborate. (200 words)

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Q.2. Elaborate the role of Juneja in the unfolding of family drama. (200 words)

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**2.6 Summing Up:**

*Adhe Adhure* is a play about circumstances in a middle class home. A family is struggling with financial crisis while intermittent clash of characters has made the sacrosanct space of home least liveable. In this unit, we have discussed the plot of the play which does not display a conventional pattern. In the unfolding of events, you will come across many moments of varying emotional temper-sorrow, disgust, frustration, anger, bitterness, acrimony. Let me once again remind you that along with the ‘What Happens in the Play’ sections, you will do well to read the play which is such a gripping text of Indian theatre. We have also dwelt on the characters. Of course, I hope that as you immerse yourself in the depth of crisis that the characters find themselves in, you will develop fuller understanding of their inner life and external images of themselves.

## 2.7 References and Suggested Readings:

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## UNIT - 3

### Mohan Rakesh: *Adhe Adhure* Supplementary Unit

#### Unit Structure:

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 The Prologue
- 3.4 A Critical Reading of the Play
- 3.5 Themes of *Adhe Adhure*
- 3.6 Some Aspects of the Theatrical Dimension of the *Adhe Adhure*
- 3.7 Summing Up
- 3.8 Reference and Suggested Reading

#### 3.1 Objectives:

By going through this unit, you will be able to:

- *appreciate* the prologue in terms of the plays thematic concerns,
- *critically* analyse the play,
- *evaluate* the themes of the play,
- *read* the play as a theatrical text.

#### 3.2 Introduction:

As I have mentioned, *Adhe Adhure* is an interestingly complex play. It is a problem play in the sense that it analyzes a harrowing reality which is usually covered up through the happy label of a home. It does not offer any solution. In fact, it shows a situation where attempt to escape from the troubled reality of home necessarily gets frustrated. The situations are such that a moral framework for judging the action of an individual seems inevitable, but in the final analysis, the playwright detaches himself from any overarching moral judgement. All the characters--Savitri, Mahendranath, Ashok, Binni, Kinni—have their own

suffering, yet their trajectories of life and pain are intertwined. Mohan Rakesh denies us any external, detached space of observation from which we can assess the ‘courtroom trial’ of home. This is what intensifies the overall effect of the play. Society looms at the margins of the text, be it the social turbulence of workers’ strikes happening everywhere, or scandalized rumours running in the neighbourhood about each of the members of the family. All the same, society impinges on what is seen as the sacrosanct space of domesticity and intensifies the crisis that unfolds in the action of the play.

This play is a talking theatre, and is not amenable for translation into what is known as ‘physical theatre’. The action of the play, at a basic level, is the very articulation of dialogue. You may notice, however, that there is much in the dialogue which is half-articulated, or moments of eloquent silence. We will have occasions to dwell on those aspects of the play. But the characters reveal themselves essentially through words, and their predicament is registered in the dialogue. *Adhe Adhure* also presents a perpetual verbal contestation, a never –ending trail of arguments where a fierce, even merciless battle of assertion and negation takes place.

### **3.3 The Prologue:**

The Man in the Black Suit faces the audience before the ‘play’ begins. He addresses the audience not just as a stakeholder of the theatrical production but as a common sensible human being. He makes suggestions about the distinction between ‘on-stage’ and off-stage’ reality, and introduces himself as a man on the street whom the audience might have come across. In this emphasis on the ordinariness of what he is lies a clue for the audience: the play perhaps does not unfold something extraordinary or great. This creation of anticipation of circumstances or characters familiar to the audience does not give them a sense of certitude. The narrator underscores uncertainty and irresolution as a character of the play itself.

You may still question: why is this reference to a street encounter? The street is a social space characterized by multitudes who use it and do

not have a name or a face. It is a space of modernity where we move about engrossed in our own world, indifferent to who we rub shoulder with. The street encounter can also be seen as a metaphor of how one gets along with other in a modern, dynamic world. Don't you think that Savitri's links with people outside her family are also a series of accidental encounters where a stable and fulfilling relationship beyond a temporary engagement is proven to be just a myth? The MBS says, and rightly so, "It would probably suffice to say that I am a person who you might bump into while walking down the street. You just give me a curious look. Apart from this, what should it matter to you where I live, what I do, whom I meet, or in what circumstances I live?" (247-248) and there is not reason why this indifference cannot describe relationships within a family.

But the space of the street also levels all identities and makes them replaceable with each other. The narrator does not bother about who he rubs shoulder with on the street as much as the other is indifferent to him. Here, then is a fundamental human situation where a moral distinction cannot be drawn between a victimizer and the victimized. The prelude, then, foregrounds a complex human situation which is hardly amenable to facile moral judgement. The narrator thus offers a generalized explanation of a human condition formed through an intricate equation between the subject, circumstances and family. The ambivalence of the subject persists irrespective of the circumstances and what the family is.

In terms of dramatic function, the narrator creates expectations about the dramatic action and sets the tone of the play. At the same time, you may notice that the play ends only to begin with the first sentence uttered by the narrator, "Now the same thing again, the same beginning—" (247). In other words, the prelude is also a postscript. The reader after going through the text will be in a position to speculate on the philosophical import of the narrator's prelude.

### 3.4 A Critical Reading of the Play:

*Adhe Adhure* is centered on a crisis of a family. The crisis is economic, psychological, emotional. Who is responsible for whose predicament is a persistent question here, yet the question remains unanswered. Towards the end of the play Juneja and Savitri present their arguments in favour of the husband or the wife, but the play develops sympathy with both. There is a philosophical point of empathy that Rakesh demonstrates here, which is hinted at by the title of the play itself. We find in the characters, or rather, share with them, a sense of an incompleteness and uncertainty about who we are. The characters we encounter, excluding the outsiders, are a family. Being part of a family they have expectations of mutuality and responsibility from each other. Had they been all part of a chance encounter no drama would have unfolded. It is the idea of home and family that essentially gives provides ground for them to assert, express, wish, complain, denounce, even decry. On the flip side, it is this reality of persistent conflict and contradiction that questions the very idea of family or home as a sort of refuge.

Let us start with Savitri's entry. She arrives at her home only to find everything in a mess. She runs her family singlehandedly, yet it does not spare her the household chores: the male members are least disposed to share the labour. Savitri tidies up the mess and Mahendranath sits idle, averting his gaze to the newspaper and commenting on the union strikes. He has not warmed milk for Kinni while he had drunk up tea himself. Ashok cuts up photos of Hollywood actress, and reads Casanova stories—a guilty pleasure. He quits his job in a company, even his education is incomplete. No wonder such indulgences should anger a mother who tries so hard to maintain a balance between outside work and domestic labour. His 'act' of cutting up images of actresses aptly describes his idleness, his lack of concern for the future, even suggests his incompleteness. Unlike the rest of the characters, he does not have any preoccupation. All we know about him is his dislike of any demanding job or frivolity of a person who can give him work.

Mahendranath, presenting himself as something of a simpleton who feels guilty for not having given his daughter her milk or being absent when his wife arrives, emerges by degrees as a most complex character. He detests Savitri's boss paying a visit at his home. We learn that Savitri maintains a personal connection with Singhanian, a lewd and annoyingly frivolous person. (Remember Ashok's assessment of him before the 'Singhanian episode'). Mahendranath's hatred of Singhanian does have a ground. But he is also capable of inflicting acute mental torture on Savitri with the matter of Singhanian's visit or with her 'connection' with Jagmohan. You may bring in here comparison with Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters In Search of an Author*, where we have the picture of a family mired in irreconcilable contradiction. Unlike the Father in Pirandello's play, Mahendranath is not an epitome of remorse. He constantly insinuates that his wife has extra-marital connections with men. But, as we can see, she calls Singhanian only to get a job for her son, to ease up a little her burden of responsibility. Mahendranath resorts to a method of indirectness whenever he speaks of her male connections. He cannot incriminate her explicitly because of what she would give as excuse of her dubious relationships, nor can remain aloof from how she negotiates her official relationship. His position in the family, especially after his bankruptcy and Savitri's financial support, does not allow him any explicit voice. We learn from Juneja how he still loves her and depends on her emotionally. But the playwright counter balances his reservations about Singhanian's visit with Savitri's more explicit hatred of Juneja. She thinks that a reason behind her husband's bankruptcy is Juneja himself. We do not have a detailed picture of Mahendranath's downfall in business, but we can assume that increased expenditure and luxuries also played a key part. Savitri's longing for material prosperity is an aspect of her personality which is touched upon later.

The play's action spans across two days. On the first day, Mahendranath quits home to stay at Juneja's. Savitri remains quiet the whole night, goes out to office next morning, arrives home only to give her daughter a clue that she is leaving for good. Jagmohan arrives and they talk and leave. Juneja arrives, and after some time Savitri, comes back too.

Savitri and Juneja argue intensely. Finally Mahendranath, a physically vulnerable person now, comes back. There is more to entry and exit. The pattern of movement that emerges finally is cyclical Savitri shuttles between home and office, a regular cyclical pattern, normalized because of its everydayness. But this repetitive everyday life leaves no room for redemption to her. There is a long moment before Jagmohan's arrival when we find her expressing her pent-up frustrations with this vicious cycle of 'home and office'.

The reason behind having a single actor play the four male characters—Mahendranath, Juneja, Singhanian, Jagmohan---has to do with the central theme of the play, the question of choices one makes and role one plays vis-à-vis the circumstances. The play unfolds a complicated human situation where choices made to attain fulfillment turn out to be a mere illusion. On its flip side, questions of commitment and responsibilities that are usually attached to human relationships are necessarily, in effect, nothing but a set of typical and predictable responses to typical life situations. It is the structure of circumstances itself that impel man to play quite a predictable role in concrete life situations. From this angle, Savitri has not made a wrong choice in her pursuit of fulfillment; she has no choice at all. On the other hand, refusal for further commitment at crucial moments of her need render Singhanian or Jagmohan as essentially the same. This sameness the inner character of the male personages is at once posited as a point of masculine defense and a feminist critique. From Juneja's point of view, Jagmohan's refusal to concede to Savitri's assumed plea for making home together is not only understandable but only a reasonable response one can identify with. Juneja's identification with Jagmohan is premised on a recognition of the character of Savitri as one deluded by the myth of complete fulfillment and material possession. Savitri, on the other hand, recognizes this sameness of male characters who share a devilish solidarity to shatter, even mock at, the pursuit of happiness of a struggling woman.

To the younger daughter Kinni, home is not a place of care and affection; she makes frequent forays into the neighbourhood only to experience



social disgrace. Ashok, as mentioned by Savitri, follows his father in staying out for more than a single day. And Mahendranath, quite predictably, shuttles between home and his friend Juneja's. Binni, who left home through elopement with Manoj, is not happy there, and keeps coming back to her maternal home. Her arrival home has become quite understandable to her parents, as Mahendranath says, "It must be the same thing again." (256)

While home is the locus of varied temporalities of the characters, the idea of home by itself has become problematic. While the cherished notion of home as a binding force that keeps the relatives in bonds of mutuality, *Adhe Adhure* presents a home which binds people together as something of a prison. Ashok, averse to his mother's extra-marital connections, still thinks that she should arrive at a decision, presumably, to leave home forever to find her happiness. Ashok is not liberal here; all he wants is somehow to rid himself of the disgraceful visit of people like Singhanian. But for Savitri to make a decision is not as easy. She can only threaten to leave home for good.

The question of making a decision is a complex one. Savitri must somehow transfer the financial power to someone else in the house, but Ashok is not disposed to shoulder responsibility. Secondly, the decision itself is a difficult one which is why she keeps deferring it. Juneja gives an account of what transpired between Savitri and Jagmohan that day, with her expressing her decision to quit her home, and Jagmohan relying that she should have come to this conclusion a few years ago. (328)

But to choose to find fulfillment as a trait of Savitri's character also involves a delusion: fulfillment is itself a myth. Savitri pursues happiness when her own marriage has failed. Juneja contends that Savitri's pursuit of happiness is doomed to failure because she looks for a complete personality. In the two episodes with other men, Singhanian and Jagmohan, we have seen how they frustrate what she desires through subtle, evasive ways. Singhanian cares little for the reason why he is invited to her home. There is a subtle mode of blackmailing the woman under the garb of familiarity, as he urges upon her to visit his home. In

the same way, Jagmohan enjoys her company without sharing the trouble she suffers. Juneja , apparently a voice of reason, is nonetheless an ardent advocate of Mahendranath, and evades issues of how Mahendranath inflicted horrendous torture on the woman. Savitri finally perceives that all male characters she come across do not have distinctive personality but essentially the same person under different masks. Juneja , at this moment, says “You still thought you could make a choice.”(329)

*Adhe Adhure* is a talking theatre: its action is utterance. Various modes of verbal tussle are played out within the fixed frame of home, and utterance leads to revelations. But perhaps the sanctity of home or family does not allow everyone for explicit statement. When Mahendranath cannot explicitly accuse his wife, he resorts to insinuation, indirectness, irony. The play is replete with incomplete dialogues, while it makes the play auditory compelling because of its power of suggestiveness. The characters’ contestations are constituted through subtle and swift manipulation of meaning and intention. Unlike what may be seen in a play like Swadesh Dipak’s *Court Marshal*, the courtroom trial that we see in Rakesh’s play is not not a contestations of claims and assertions. A given assertion is subtly twisted by the opponent and its emphasis shifted and re-presented in favour of a contrary claim. You will find many instances of this ‘politics of utterance’ within the discursive fabric of the play. Let me give you a few examples. Ashok ridicules Singhania by drawing a caricature of him. Savitri is arguing with Ashok about Singhania.

“Woman: He makes 5000 rupees a month and manages the entire office.

Boy: He makes 5000 rupees a month and manages the entire office but he doesn’t even know to button up his fly after...

Woman: Ashok!”

Further, look at how Mahendranath reacts to Binni’s account of her marital troubles.

Man 1: So, he says all that, does he? What else does he say?

Woman: Right now, she isn’t talking to you.

Man 1: But this concerns my home.

Woman: Your home? Hah!

Man 1: Then it's not my home. Say it's not.

Woman: If you really thought it was your home, then...

Man 1: Speak up, speak up-whatever's on your mind.

When Binni's condition is under discussion, discourse subtly shifts to condition of her father here, with Mahendranath foregrounding his predicament with an implicit accusation of her other male connections, and she on her part points out his lack of basic commitment to his home with an equally implicit accusation of her husband's parasitic relations to Juneja.

The battle of words is fierce and merciless, creating a trail of crisis as the action unfolds. Yet, silence is as much a role to play. The words uttered are often quite loaded, suggestive as they are of the inner life of the characters. Rakesh's use of silence enhances the moments of crisis on various dimensions—psychological, emotional, economic. Kinni is blatant and sharp in her words. Her family fails to provide her with little necessities. She says, "All the girls have to have them. And as you said I'd definitely get the clips and socks this week. Did you bring them? You don't know how bad I feel going to school in torn socks." The satge direction says:"for a moment dead silence". Again, go back to Binni's revelation of her marital trouble. She reveals that Manoj accuses her of an awful inheritance from her home. In a climactic moment, Binni desperately asks every one about that ominous thing that she carried along from her home. There is a long pause after her dialogue. There is a description of the gaze of the characters in the long moments of silence. We are thus brought to the core of the crisis facing each character.

**Stop to Consider:**

In the last unit, we have referred to the pattern of entry and exit in *Adhe Adhure*. Hope you are in a position now to speculate on the implications of this pattern. In Aristotle's theory of tragedy, the hero passes from happiness to misery in a linear path demonstrated by the plot. *Adhe Adhure* is circular in terms of the pattern of movement

of the characters in their trajectories. Think about the entry and exit pattern in this new perspective of circular movement. Does this notion of circularity carry some absurdist overtones?

### **3.5 Themes of the Play *Adhe Adhure*:**

*Adhe Adhure* deals with the themes of man-woman relationship, crisis of identity, the question of woman, the irony of pursuit of happiness, breakdown of middle-class family and incompleteness of human self. Savitri works in an office and runs the family. Mahendranath's business is ruined and sits idle at home. He has to contend with her supposedly extra-marital connections with other people—Singhania and Jagmohan, for instance. In one moment he denigrates himself and compares himself to a termite that has eaten up the house. Is it a confession, or an embittered presentation of others' views of him? Perhaps not. Through such outburst of feeling, he foregrounds his own predicament, his loss of identity in his own home. On her part, Savitri abhors her husband's blind dependence on Juneja, avoidance of all commitments for the family, and lack of recognition for her toil to keep the family together. They are concerned with Binni's troubles, but Mahendranath makes Savitri responsible for her present lot. Towards the end, Juneja enters the scene, and represents Mahendranath. In the ensuing high drama a more somber aspects of their relationship is brought to the fore. Mahendranath did torture her horrendously just to make her behave that his friends would deem appropriate. Savitri did not yield to his demand, and this sustained the violent tension between them. On the other hand, Mahendranath, as Juneja contends, loves his wife on whom he has grown utterly dependant. But he had to contend with her persistent extra-marital links. As we see in Act 1, he steps out of home whenever Singhania visits. The story of Binni is too a version of that of her parents, in a different way. She elopes with Manoj and made a home. But the they find themselves in frequent tussle where she resorts to self-destructive ways just to hurt her husband. Her frequent visit home is a reminder of the unresolved tension with Manoj who accuses her of having inherited some awful thing from her family.

In this persistent and bitter environment of conflict and contestations neither Savitri nor Mahendranath receive the recognition they deserve. Mahendranath feels utterly helpless in the face of Savitri's move to invite Singhania. His bankruptcy lends him a sense of inferiority. Secondly he suffers endless accusations from his wife about his imperfections that has threatened his sense of selfhood. He sees his children speaking of Casanova book in an explicit way in front of him. Mahendranath expresses his crisis of identity in a sudden outburst before he makes his exit to stay with the Juneja's, saying he is not even a rubber stamp in this house. Savitri, on the other hand, suffers endless toil to sustain the family, but she desires to live happy and fulfilling life. She also has to contend with insinuations and banter, while her sacrifice goes unrecognized.

In this way, the family disintegrates whose daily manifestations are the many moments of crisis and tension. At the economic level, with Savitri's limited income all requirements are not fulfilled. Kinni, the Younger Daughter, is a cruel reminder of how the family fails to meet up the minimum requirements for the girl, who goes hungry during school hours. At the social level, rumours about scandals of all the members of the family spread in the neighbourhood, this makes the younger daughter miserable. Kinni is also a reminder of the emotional insecurity of the family. She is scolded by her friend's mother and blames her for spoiling their daughter. Kinni wants support from her mother and Binni. Back at home, there is hardly any point of agreement between two persons. Savitri is trying hard to get a job for Ashok but he is not interested for the job. He even asks his mother to stop inviting people like Singhania for him, an angry, restless and rebellious youth, Ashok idles away his time cutting pictures of actresses. In the beginning of the Act 2, we have him persistently asking Binni the reason why she eloped with Manoj, revealing finally that it is not for love of him. As for Savitri, she leaves no stone unturned to keep each of the members of the house together. But the consequences of her labour are frustrating. Let us read the dialogues:

Old Daughter: So You think that whatever Mama does..

B: That's what I want to know. Why does she do so? Whom does she

do it for?

Old Daughter: She did it for me.

Boy: You left home.

OD: She did it for Kinni.

B: She's becoming more and more impossible everyday.

OD: she does it for Daddy.

B: Don't you feel sorry for him?

OD: and most of all, she does it for you.

B: and I'm probably the worst of all.

But it is not the peculiar crisis of a family that we are facing. All characters are given generic names. One man plays all male roles, except that of Ashok. There is a prelude attached to the text, whose significance I have already dwelt on. *Adhe Adhure* presents a general human condition where the human being is destined to live with uncertainty and incompleteness. Each of the characters we face are incomplete in some way or the other. Each of the men Savitri meets in her life lacks a complete human personality. As seen from Singhanian and Jagmohan, they the first one is almost like a caricature whom Ashok is drawing as a caricature. Jagmohan is only superficially congenial and caring for her but in crucial moments subtly evasive. While Savitri's search for fulfillment can attract sympathy for the reader, notion of completeness and fulfilled happiness turns out to be a myth.

**SAQ:**

Q.1. How does *Adhe Adhure* dwell on the relationship between man and woman? Do you think that all human relationships are fractured? (150 words)

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Q.2. *Adhe Adhure* is about the disintegration of a middle class family.”  
Comment on it with reference to the text. (80 words)

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### 3.6 Some Aspects of the Theatrical Dimension of the Play *Adhe Adhure*:

- The action unfolds gradually and so do the characters, through scattered information and conflicting assessments from the present. Vague suggestions, oblique comment, ironic gesture, mutual accusations, and plain facts—all of these make us aware of a human situation which is too complex to be readily analyzed from a moral or ethical perspective. The mode of exposition of the action needs some investigation. Theatrical performance would require more than two hours, with an implied shift in time in the second act. There is no flashback, but the past constantly keeps hovering over the present through arguments and revelations. In fact, the only means through which the whole plot is exposed, albeit through bits and pieces, are the dialogues. Through these fragments of the past and events happening in other spaces (in Binni’s new home, or at the restaurant where Savitri and Jagmohan meet) we can make sense of a totality of the action. There is event happening elsewhere but recounted now, such as Binni’s account of her domestic troubles, while there is also an imagined action, such as Juneja’s account of what probably transpired between Savitri and Jagmohan. As for unfolding of a character, the famous Aristotelian notion of character as the product of action, is contested. Mahendranath looks like a passive non-aggressive personality on stage, if we keep aside his intrusive and ironic remarks on his wife. But the narratives of Binni and Savitri herself unmask the darker side of him who would beat up children and wife in violent rage in the past. Though there may be explanations for the reason behind this violence, truth claims of these narratives are not a point of argument here.

- The play is patently a series of verbal battles where dialogues are the mainstay of performance. However, the play is endowed with an intricate tonal structure. Agony, suffering, pain, exasperation, frustration, alienation, anger and bitterness, helplessness sense of guilt, acrimony, neglect, condescension, profound speculation, irony and sarcasm, --these indicate some of the tones and temperaments that any stage production must take care of. Tonal variation and shifting temperament is an important aspect. Reference to Jagmohan and Manoj suddenly raises the tension, while the arrival of the older Daughter poses a break. Attention now shifts to the reality of her domestic life. After a couple of moments we find ourselves at the height of another climax, when she agonizingly speaks of her doomed inheritance from this house—a moment, which, if well performed, could transfix the audience into a pall of silence.
- The play advances through several junctures and ruptures of mood. Patterns of entry and exit are crucial for such rupture. Conversation, however 'normal' or commonplace at the start, would rapturously sway towards moments of conflict, and the tempo can quickly build up to an extreme—be it a crisis, an impasse, or an act of physical violence, (as with Kinni) or a painful silence. The entry of another character diffuses it towards a hushed-up state of normalcy or silence. This pattern of rise and fall of dramatic tempo persists throughout the text. It exemplifies Mohan Rakesh's art of drama and his extraordinary ability to engage the audience/reader throughout the text/performance.
- In this way, Mohan Rakesh carries us inexorably to the threshold of a realization of a human condition where a categorical assessment in terms of praise and blame does not work. For instance, if the male characters are seen and defended, even in all their atrocities and deceits, as a necessary outcome of circumstances, how can Savitri's acts, however transgressive or 'immoral' not be seen as a result of her own life circumstances? Juneja defends Mahendranath by demonstrating the power of circumstances over his free will, while he indicts Savitri on the basis of her choices.



**SAQ:**

Q.1. In the light of the above discussion, give a critical estimate of *Adhe Adhure* as a theatrical text. (150 words)

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**3.7 Summing Up:**

In this unit, we have discussed the role of the narrator in terms of the thematic concerns of the play. We have also dwelt on the play itself as a whole highlighting how the text depicts crisis on many levels and uses language in a special way to create suggestively. We have also discussed the basic themes, and aspects of the play as a performance text. I hope you are now in a position to analyze the play in terms of theme, characterization and theatrical performance.

**3.8 Reference and Suggested Reading:**

Agrawal, Pratibha. *Mohan Rakesh*. Sahitya Akademi, 1993.

Basu, K. Dilip, ed. *Adhe Adhure* by Mohan Rakesh, Translated by Bindu Batra. Worldview, 1999.

Cappola, Carlo, ed. *Another Life* by Mohan Rakesh. Harper Perennial, 2018.

Rakesh, Mohan. *Adhe Adhure*. Radhakrishna Prakashan, 2004.

---. *Lehron Ke Rajhans*. Rajkamal Prakashan, 2004.

---. *Ashadh Ka Ek Din*. Rajpal and Sons, 2004.

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## UNIT- 4

### Mahasweta Devi: Mother of 1084 (Introducing the Author)

#### Unit Structure:

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 Literary Career
- 4.4 Important Works
- 4.5 Mahasweta Devi as an Activist Writer
- 4.6 Awards and Recognition
- 4.7 Summing Up
- 4.8 References and Suggested Readings

#### 4.1 Objectives:

After finishing this unit, you will be able to–

- *learn* about the life of Mahasweta Devi,
- *learn* about the literary career of Mahasweta Devi,
- *know* the important works of Mahasweta Devi,
- *learn* about Mahasweta Devi as an activist writer,
- *know* about the awards and recognitions conferred on Mahasweta Devi.

#### 4.2 Introduction:

Mahasweta Devi is one of the foremost literary figures of Bengali literature, born on January 14, 1926, in Dhaka, British India. Her father, Manish Ghatak, was the older brother of the renowned filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak, while her mother, Dharitri Ghatak, was herself a writer and social worker. Dharitri Ghatak also happened to be the sister of Sachin Choudhury, the founder-editor of The Economic and Political Weekly,

and the sculptor Sankho Choudhury. Mahasweta Devi began her early schooling at Dhaka's Eden Montessori School before moving to West Bengal, where she continued her education at Midnapore Mission Girls' High School. She obtained her B.A. degree from Visva-Bharati University and completed her M.A. from Calcutta University, after which she began her teaching career at Vijaygarh Jyotish Ray College. She passed away on July 28, 2016, at the age of 90 years.

**Self-Assessment Question**

How is Mahasweta Devi related to Ritwik Ghatak? (50 words)

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**4.3 Literary Career:**

Mahasweta Devi's extensive literary career began with her first book, *Jhansir Rani* (1956), which is a retelling of the rebellion of Rani Laxmi Bai through oral accounts and regional folklore (Sethi). It was followed by *Nati* in 1957. Soon after, she entered the most productive phase of her literary career, and the 1960s and 1970s saw her produce some of her best novels, such as *Kavi Bandyoghoti Gayiner Jivan O Mrityu* (*The Life and Death of Poet Bandyoghoti Gayin*), *Andhar Manik* (*Jewel of Darkness*), and *Hajar Churashir Ma* (*Mother of 1084*). Throughout her extensive literary career, she continued to write books of fiction and non-fiction, mainly focusing on the life and struggles of marginalized sections of society.

Although Mahasweta Devi primarily wrote in Bengali, her works are available in other Indian languages through translation. Most of her works have been translated into languages such as Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Telugu, Gujarati, Marathi, Oriya, and even into the tribal language 'Ho'. In addition to Indian languages, her major works have been translated into international languages such as English, Japanese, Italian, and French.

Mahasweta Devi is also notable for her valuable contribution to literary and cultural studies in India. Perhaps her most significant contribution is the empirical research she undertook on the oral histories embedded in the cultures and memories of tribal communities. Through her works, she powerfully portrays the exploitation faced by marginalized classes, attracting the attention of feminist scholars and ordinary readers across the country. Not only are the subject matters of her works unique, but her use of language is also distinctive. Her innovative use of language has been praised for expanding the boundaries of Bengali as a literary language. With her unwavering courage to address questions of gender, class, and politics, Mahasweta Devi has established herself as a leading figure in socially committed literature.

#### **4.4 Important Works:**

Mahasweta Devi was a prolific writer who produced more than 100 novels and 20 collections of short stories. She wrote primarily in Bengali although many of her works have been translated into English and other languages. Some of her important works are:

- *Mother of 1084: A Novel*. (Translated and introduced by Samik Bandyopadhyay)
- *Breast Stories*. (Translated with introductory essays by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak)
- *Five Plays: Mother of 1084, Aajir, Uruashi and Johnny, Bayen, Water* (Adapted from her fiction by the author. Translated and introduced by Samik Bandyopadhyay. )
- *Rudali: From Fiction to Performance* (This volume consists of the story by Mahasweta Devi and the play by Usha Ganguli. Translated and introduced by Anjum Katyal)
- *The Activist Writings of Mahasweta Devi* (A collection of articles published in Economic and Political Weekly, Frontier, and other journals. Introduced and translated by Maitreya Ghatak)
- *Bitter Soil* (Palamau stories by Mahasweta Devi Translated by Ipsita Chanda. Introduced by the author)

- *Our Non-Veg Cow and other Stories* (Translated by Paramita Banerjee. Introduced by Nabaneeta Dev Sen)
- *The Armenian Champa Tree* (A novella. Translated by Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee)
- *Old Women* (Two stories. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.)
- *Titu Mir* (Translated by Rimi B. Chatterjee)
- *The Queen of Jhansi* (Translated by Mandira and Sagaree Sengupt).
- *Till Death Do Us Part* (Five stories. Translated by Vikram Iyengar)

**Self-Assessment Question**

Write a note on Mahasweta Devi as a writer, mentioning some of her important fictional works. ( in 70 words)

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**4.5 Mahasweta Devi as an Activist Writer:**

Mahasweta Devi is widely recognized as one of the most prolific activist writers in the annals of Indian literary history. As an activist, she dedicated many years of her life to advocating for the rights of tribals in Bengal and Jharkhand. She waged a war against the prevailing social conditions that divided society into two separate groups—the "haves" and the "have-nots." Continuously, she fought for the rights of the marginalized and the underdogs of society, endeavoring to bring their lives, suffering, and struggles to the forefront through her writings. As an activist writer, she never attempted to hide or camouflage her ideological inclinations. Upon reading her works, one notices frequent authorial interventions, the use of extended prefatory remarks, and conclusions that reflect her undaunted courage and ideological agenda. Most of her writings, such

as *Hazaar Chaurasi ki Maa (Mother of 1084)*, *Aranyer Adhikar (The Occupation of the Forest, 1977)*, *Agnigarbha (Womb of Fire, 1978)*, *Choti Munda Evam Tar Tir (Choti Munda and His Arrow, 1980)*, revolve around the landless, dispossessed, uprooted, or grief-stricken, highlighting the writer's unwavering support for these underprivileged groups in society.

#### **4.6 Awards and Recognition:**

Mahasweta Devi's contribution as a writer and social activist has been widely recognized, and she has been honored with several awards. These include the Sahitya Academy Award (1979), Padma Shri Award (1986), Jnanpith Award (1996), and Ramon Magsaysay Award (1996). In acknowledgment of her contribution to the arts and literature, the French government conferred upon Mahasweta Devi the second-highest civilian award, Officer Des Arts et Des Lettres, in 2003. Additionally, the Government of India bestowed upon her the prestigious Padma Vibhushan in 2006.

#### **4.7 Summing Up:**

This Unit has introduced you to the life and works of the famous Indian writer and activist Mahasweta Devi. As a novelist, Mahasweta Devi delved deep into the lives of the oppressed, shedding light on their hardships and resilience. Her narratives are often characterized by raw honesty and a fierce advocacy for social justice. Devi's novels such as *Hazar Chaurasi ki Maa (Mother of 1084)*, *Aranyer Adhikar (The Occupation of the Forest)*, and *Choti Munda Evam Tar Tir (Choti Munda and His Arrow)* vividly depict the struggles of the landless, dispossessed, and marginalized sections of society. Through her powerful storytelling, Devi challenged societal norms and advocated for the rights of the downtrodden. Her works serve as a poignant reminder of the inequalities and injustices prevalent in society while also inspiring readers to confront and address them.

#### **4.8 References and Suggested Readings:**

Devi, Mahasweta. *Mother of 1084*. Translated by Samik Bandyopadhyay, Seagull Books, 2008.

Chaubey, Kripashankar. *Mahaaranya Ki Maa*. Adaakar Publications, 1998, Pp-65-66.

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## UNIT - 5

### Mahasweta Devi: *Mother of 1084* (Introducing the Novel)

#### Unit Structure:

- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 Introduction
- 5.3 Synopsis of the Novel
- 5.4 Character of Sujata
- 5.5 The Title of the Novel
- 5.6 Ending of the Novel
- 5.7 Summing Up
- 5.8 References and Suggested Readings

#### 5.1 Objectives:

After finishing this unit, you will be able to

- *learn* the summary of the novel *Mother of 1084*,
- *learn* about the character of Sujata,
- *learn* about the significance of the title of the novel,
- *learn* about the ending of the novel *Mother of 1084*.

#### 5.2 Introduction:

Mahasweta Devi's epoch -making novel *Mother of 1084* was written in September 1973 and was first published in the October issue of the same year in the periodical Prasad. Later it was considerably revised and the enlarged version was published in 1974. The novel is set in the backdrop of the Naxalite Movement that originated from the Naxalbari village of Bengal. Speaking about the relationship between the Naxalite movement and the novel, she made the following remark in her interview with Sunil Sethi:



“Movements such as the Naxalite outburst of the 1970s made up a mighty decade. Many of our boys were being killed. I think the reason why *Hazaar Chaurasi ki Maa* was an instant success was because of the way, the technique, in which it was told—a mother remembering her son’s life. It touched the hearts of many mothers and these killings were happening all over India. But these are things I have to write about and can’t stop” (Sunil Sethi 103).

#### **Stop to Consider:**

##### **Naxal Movement:**

The Naxal Movement is a left-wing extremist movement in India. It started with the tribal-peasant uprising against landlords in Naxalbari village of Dargiling District of West Bengal in 1967. The main leaders of this uprising included Charu Majumdar, Kanu Sanyal and Jangal Santhal. By and by, it spread to the whole of West Bengal and other adjoining states. The main motivating force of the Naxalites is the Maoist motto—“power flows from the barrel of the gun”. Today, Naxalism is regarded to be one of the major challenges to the internal security of India.

### **5.3 Synopsis of the Novel:**

Mahasweta Devi’s novel *Mother of 1084* is divided into four chapters, namely, ‘Morning’, ‘Afternoon’, ‘Late Afternoon’ and ‘Evening’. The protagonist of the novel is Sujata, an upper-middle-class mother whose youngest son Brati was just killed by the police. His identification has now been boiled down to the number that has been attached to his body—that is, corpse number 1084. Nobody in the family can relate to Sujata’s suffering. Dibyanath, her spouse, is a dishonest accountant. Her three children have adopted the cruel, insensitive, and materialistic traits of their father and grandmother.

By means of the flashback technique, the author transports her readers twenty-two years into the past, to a time when Sujata, the main character,

was expecting her fourth child, Brati. Sujata had found courage to visit the nursing home alone as she found no one to accompany her. The physician was taken aback upon finding her coming to the hospital with no attendant. But Sujata was well aware that Dibyanath would never go with her. She questioned why the physician wanted to see him. The baby was born on January seventeenth. January 17th is also today, and precisely two years ago on the same day, the phone rang in the wee hours of the morning. Sujata was asked by a cold and mechanical voice as to how she was connected to Brati Chatterjee and asked her to come to Kantapur.

Unlike his elder siblings, Sujata's youngest child, Brati, never came under the influence of his father or his grandmother. He not only remained alienated from his father and his siblings but also from their materialistic and worldly-wise outlook. However, there was a very close bonding between Brati and his mother. Despite her beauty and Loreto education. Sujata accepted an early arranged marriage and endured mental torture from her husband and mother-in-law, who blamed her for her son's moral perversion. It was only Brati who supported her as she coped with her tortuous existence. Ironically, however, the moment of true liberation never came for Sujata and Brati.

Brati, unaware of his parents' knowledge, joined the Naxalite movement, evading Sujata's queries until his death in a police shootout, transforming Sujata's life forever. Brati's death marked a significant challenge for the family as he had connections with the Naxalites—a fact that threatened their prestige in the society. Sujata, on the other hand, was embroiled in a different struggle. She was haunted by many questions for which she could find no answers. She had no clue as to what forced Brati, a bright student, to join the Naxalite movement. What drove him away from both his family and the society to which his family belonged. Sujata was at a loss regarding the societal indifference towards non-conformists. She inferred that it was this callous indifference that drove the young people to the edge, causing discontent and rebellion within them.

Sujata visits the families of Somu and Lalu, two friends of Brati who were brutally killed by the police. She learns that these poor people knew about attempts to foil the movement and that underprivileged sections persuaded their children against it. Sujata meets Nandini, her son's girlfriend, who shares her traumatic experience in detention. Before saying goodbye to Nandini, Sujata presents her a photograph of Brati. As they part ways, both the women realize that they may never meet again.

The novel ends with the poignant last chapter "Evening" that highlights the agony of a mother who loses her favourite child. Sujata's family is so insensitive that they arrange Tuli's engagement on Brati's birthday which also happens to be the day when Sujata received the news of his death.

For the first time, she decides to express her disgust at her husband and decides to leave her household and avoid places where Brati doesn't stay. She wishes she had mustered such courage against her husband, Dibyanath before Brati's death. She should have left the household of Dibyanath and should have lived only with Brati to understand his point of view in a sympathetic manner.

In the last Chapter, we see that Sujata manages to ascend the staircase braving the excruciating pain in her body that reminds her of the time of Brati's birth, wondering if it's because Brati will remain an everlasting pain in her heart. She takes a cold bath which also reminds her of the cold water and the blood-stained body on the ice. As the story progresses, we find that Sujata is forced to sit with callous and insensitive guests who discuss her son's killing. Her son-in-law introduces her to a journalist from a Bombay magazine who wants to interview her about her feelings regarding the killing of her son. But Sujata refuses to play into his hands and politely asks to be excused.

The story highlights the viciousness of a decadent society, where corrupt and morally debased people seek to annihilate it. Sujata's husband, Dibyanath, also shows hypocrisy and lack of sensitivity by inviting the police officer, Saroj Pal who had refused to hand over the dead body of Brati to his mother.

Sujata's pain and grief are shaken by the killers who are present everywhere, causing her to collapse. Her husband suspects her appendicitis has burst and she may never return to the house, which has wiped out all signs of Brati's memories.

**Check Your Progress:**

1. Why did Sujata have to visit the nursing home without any attendant? (50 words)

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2. How was Brati different from his siblings? (80 words)

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**5.4 Character of Sujata:**

Sujata is the central character of Mahasweta Devi's novel *Mother of 1084*. She is a fifty-six years old woman who worked in a bank as Section-in-Charge. She was born in an orthodox but rich family and got her B.A. degree from the prestigious Loreto College. But her graduation was meant only as a preparation for her marriage. After she earned her degree, her father had fixed her marriage with Dibyanath. He was not rich but came from a well-known family and Sujata's father believed that he had a great future ahead of him. In course of time, they had four children-Jyoti, Neepa, Tuli and Brati.

Although she was born in a rich family and was well-educated, Sujata was a basically a simple woman. She was quiet, taciturn and old-fashioned in appearance. She was not one of those independent-minded radical women who were conscious of their rights. She also did not belong to that group of women for whom it was fashionable just to be working. She used to commute to her office in a tram rather than using the family car. She rarely went out or socialized with friends or relatives.

Sujata had taken up the bank job three years after the birth of her youngest child Brati. She had taken up the job in the bank initially to help her family financially but later on she continues because she had little respect in the family. Dibyanath and his mother controlled everything about the family affairs where Sujata's participation was not welcome. She got the job because of her family connections and her aristocratic bearing. When she had started working, she got the support of her in-laws because her husband was going through financial turmoil during that time. Everyone except Brati seemed to be happy with her decision to work. None but the three years old Brati really missed her presence at home during the day.

Sujata shared a special bonding with her youngest son Brati—a bond she did not share with her other children. Unlike his elder siblings, Brati, never came under the influence of his father or his grandmother. He not only remained alienated from his father and his siblings but also from their materialistic and worldly-wise outlook. Sujata was treated by Brati as a child, and he almost sounded fatherly when talking to her. But with the passage of time, Sujata could realise that Brati had fast become a stranger to her. Without her knowledge he joined the Naxalite movement, evading Sujata's queries until his death in a police shootout, transforming Sujata's life forever.

Brati's death marked the most serious challenge in the life of Sujata. She was haunted by many questions for which she could find no answers. She had no clue as to what forced Brati, a bright student, to join the Naxalite movement. What drove him away from both his family and the society to which his family belonged. Sujata was at a loss regarding the societal indifference towards non-conformists. She inferred that it was this callous indifference that drove the young people to the edge, causing discontent and rebellion within them.

Sujata was a woman who was against the pseudo bourgeois values but was unable to express her aversion in words. When Dibyanath and Jyoti were trying to make her understand that police had done the right thing by exterminating an antisocial element like Brati, Sujata had shaken

her head in denial. She refused to accept that Brati was a criminal or to believe that his death was futile. In fact, the death of her son transformed Sujata from a timid, a political woman to one who could point a finger against the society inhabited by ‘spineless, opportunist time servers masquerading as artists, writers and intellectuals’.

Although Sujata could not identify herself with the society where she lived, she also failed to go beyond the limitations of the high/middle class society that she belonged to. That is why she failed to understand Brati and his actions properly and after his death she used to visit Somu’s mother to know him better. As we find in the novel:

“Sujata may have had an aristocratic bearing, a stiff upper lip, a watch on her wrist, and an expensive handloom sari. But Somu’s mother did not know that Sujata as a mother had lost out to several thousand mothers, for she had never known what Brati was up to” (Bandhopadhyay 69).

Again, her meeting with Nandini brings out that she had very little knowledge of the Naxalite movement going on around her. That is why she finds it hard to believe that Anindya’s betrayal had brought about the deaths of Brati and his fellow Naxalites. She even candidly admits before Nandini that she did not know the whole story surrounding the deaths of Brati, Somu and others. The indifference of high class people like Sujata towards the society as a whole is scathingly criticized by Nandini in the following words:

“I know. You people never know anything. For people like you, these are just stray episodes. But now you know that it’s wrong to carry on presuming that one needn’t know why and how such things happen” (Bandhopadhyay 72).

The death of Brati and the subsequent meeting with Nandini brought about a transformation in Sujata. From the day of her marriage, she could hardly imagine that she could revolt against the wishes of Dibyanath even though she shared no emotional connection with her notorious

husband. On the day of Tuli's engagement, Sujata rebelled against her despotic husband and threatened to leave the house for good in such a way that Dibyanath had felt her comments as a slap on his face. In their thirty-four year long married life, Sujata had never spoken to him like that. Brati's death also helped her to realise the real character of the society where she lived:

"Everything rocked and swayed and spun. As if someone was making the cadavers dance. Putrefying cadavers, all of them—Dhiman, Amit, Dibyanath, Mr. Kapadia, Tuli, Tony, Jishu Mitter, Molly Mitter, Mrs Kapadia—" (Bandhopadhyay 127).

At the end of the novel, we see Sujata's pain and grief are shaken by the killers who are present everywhere, causing her to collapse. Her husband suspects her appendicitis has burst, and she may never return to the house, which has wiped out all signs of Brati's memories. Actually, Sujata's character has been used by the novelist to comment on the society that reeks of corruption, moral degradation and artificiality. Her character invites the readers to engage in reassessing the social mores and values and revolt against the social malpractices when necessary.

**SAQ:**

1. How does the novel *Mother of 1084* expose the pseudo values of the bourgeoisie? (100 words)

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2. Why did Nandini feel that people like Sujata never know anything? (50 words)

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**Check Your Progress:**

1. Attempt a character sketch of Sujata. (200 words)

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**5.5 The Title of the Novel:**

The title of Mahasweta Devi's novel, *Mother of 1084*, holds significant symbolic and thematic relevance to the story. The number "1084" refers to the identity given to Sujata's son, Brati, after his death. He becomes a statistic, depersonalized and dehumanized by the state, reduced to a mere number.

The title highlights the dehumanizing nature of bureaucratic and authoritarian systems, where individuals lose their personal identities and are reduced to mere statistics, particularly in the context of political upheavals and state oppression. In the novel, Brati's identity transforms into a numerical code, emphasizing the callousness of the state towards those who challenge the established order.

Additionally, the title reflects the broader theme of the novel – the impact of political activism on families, specifically mothers. Sujata, as the "Mother of 1084," symbolizes the collective experience of mothers whose children become casualties in political struggles. The title serves as a powerful commentary on the devaluation of individual lives in the face of systemic oppression and political violence.

Overall, the significance of the title lies in its representation of depersonalization, loss, and the dehumanizing effects of political conflict on individuals and families, particularly on mothers who bear the weight of their children's revolutionary choices.



**Check Your Progress:**

1. Analyze the appropriateness of the title of the novel *Mother of 1084*. (100 words)

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**5.6 Ending of the Novel:**

In the ending of the novel, Sujata, the central character, undergoes a profound transformation as she grapples with the aftermath of her son Brati's death. The novel concludes with Sujata coming to terms with her son's radicalization and the harsh realities of his involvement in revolutionary activities.

As Sujata delves deeper into Brati's life and the circumstances that led him to take up arms against the state, she undergoes a transformation. She begins to question her own role in the political landscape and grapples with the complexities of the socio-political environment. The novel ends with a sense of ambiguity and reflection, as Sujata comes to terms with the personal and political turmoil that has engulfed her family.

The conclusion of *Mother of 1084* is not neatly tied up, leaving room for contemplation and interpretation. It emphasizes the enduring impact of political activism on individuals and families, and the complex emotions that arise in the aftermath of a loved one's involvement in revolutionary activities. The novel encourages readers to reflect on the broader themes of sacrifice, loss, and the human cost of political resistance.

**5.7 Summing Up:**

This Unit has introduced you to summary of the novel *Mother of 1084* and its protagonist Sujata. You have also learnt about the significance of the title of the novel as well as about its ending.

### **5.8 References and Suggested Reading:**

Devi, Mahasweta. *Mother of 1084*. Translated by Samik Bandyopadhyay, Seagull Books, 2008.

Chaubey, Kripashankar. *Mahaaranya Ki Maa*. Adaakar Publications, 1998, Pp-65-66.

Satyanarayan, E. *The Plays of Mahasweta Devi: A Critical Study*. Prestige Books, 2000.

Sethi, Sunil. *The Big Book-Shelf: Sunil Sethi in Conversation with 30 Famous Writers*. Penguin Books, 2011.

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## UNIT- 6

### Mahasweta Devi: *Mother of 1084* (Themes and Techniques)

#### Unit Structure:

- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Introduction
- 6.3 Major Themes
  - 6.3.1 Multifaceted Violence
  - 6.3.2 Attack on the Bourgeoisie
  - 6.3.3 Disintegrating Relationships
  - 6.3.4 Protest against Patriarchy
- 6.4 Techniques
- 6.5 Summing Up
- 6.6 References and Suggested Readings

#### 6.1 Objectives:

After finishing this unit, you will be able to–

- *identify* the major themes of the novel *Mother of 1084*,
- *learn* about the narrative techniques employed in the novel.

#### 6.2 Introduction:

As we all know, a theme is a point of a story. Explaining the term “theme”, Peter Childs and Roger Fowler point out that it “traditionally means a recurrent element of subject matter, but the modern insistence on simultaneous reference to form and content emphasizes the formal dimension of the term. A theme is always a subject, but a subject is not always a theme: a theme is not usually thought of as the occasion of a work of art, but rather a branch of the subject which is indirectly expressed through the recurrence of certain events, images and symbols.

We may apprehend the theme by inference—it is the rationale of the images and symbols, not their quantity” (239).

In the above paragraph, we have learnt what is the theme of a story is. Another important concept that is closely related to the reading of a story is that of the narrative technique. In our attempt to understand the concept of the narrative technique, the following excerpt by James Phelan and Wayne C. Booth may be quite helpful:

Narrative techniques are the devices of story-telling. Most approaches to narrative recognize the utility of a general division between a what and a how. The what is the domain of states, existents (including character), and events; the how is the domain of technique. It is variously called the discourse or the narration, and its main components are temporality; voice (who speaks?); vision or focalization (who perceives?); and style. However, narrative technique also includes matters that overlap with but are not fully explicable in terms of textual features such as (1) a narrator’s reliability; and (2) how a given narrative follows, flouts, or otherwise relates to conventions, especially those of its particular genre (370).

**Self-Assessment Questions:**

1. What is the difference between theme and plot? (50 words)

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2. What are the different narrative techniques employed by a novelist? (200 words)

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**6.3 Major Themes:**

Like all other works of fiction, *Mother of 1084* is also noted for themes it seeks to highlight. Let us now try to explore the main themes of this novel:

### 6.3.1 Multifaceted Violence:

Mahasweta Devi's novel *Mother of 1084* has violence as one of its major themes. Here the novelist has highlighted the fact that violence is usually not one-dimensional. It often takes in a multifaceted character. Here we find the novelist showing that the state, the administration, the police force, the Naxals and the society as a whole taking part in violent activities.

The violence depicted in this novel had its roots in the Naxalite movement that spread over many Indian states in the 1970s, especially in the areas officially known as the 'Red Corridor'. This movement plays a significant role not only in shaping the narrative of *Mother of 1084*, but also in providing a lens through which societal issues such as oppression, violence, and the plight of marginalized communities are explored. The novelist has highlighted how the violence associated with the Naxalite movement had a profound impact on the lives of people of Bengal. As pointed out by Sarkar, "The 1970s remains an unforgotten decade in Bengal's memory because there was total break that happened in the communication between the people and a popularly elected government of a democratic nation, a situation that bred mutual suspicion and distrust. It took a decade, many lives and a change in political dispensation before a semblance of order could return to the state (255)." The novelist's portrayal of Naxalism in *Mother of 1084* can be termed as a critique of both the Naxalite movement and the state's response to it. She highlights the complexities within the Naxalite movement, the response of the people towards it as well as the repressive measures undertaken by the government agencies to crush the movement.

Although the novelist critiqued both the Naxalite movement as well as the violent state response, even a cursory reading of the novel reveals that the novelist was deeply impressed by the guts of the youths who were ready to die for a cause and she appears to have endorsed their violent activities which she regarded as a kind of counter reaction to the violence indulged in by the state machinery. The clinical details of the so-called encounters, the cruel interrogation methods and that of the dead bodies are enough to convince the readers of the fact that violence

had spread to every segment of the society. Speaking about the wanton killing of the cadres of the Naxalite groups, the novelist points out:

“Anybody was permitted to kill them. People in all the Parties, people of all creeds had the unlimited, democratic right to kill these young men who had rejected the Parties of the Establishment. To kill them one did not need any special sanction from the law or the courts of justice... Individuals and gangs of killers had equal right to kill these faithless young men. They could be killed with bullets, knives, hatchets, spears, with any weapon whatsoever. They could be killed any time any place for any audience present” (Bandyopadhyay 20).

The novel also attracts the attention of the readers to the usual fact that violence sponsored by the state is acceptable to the guardians of law. Those who protest against the unjust and corrupt ways of the establishment are regarded as enemies of the society and everybody is licensed to violently hunt down these protesting voices. In the *Mother of 1084*, Mahasweta Devi highlights that the violence of the Naxalites was actually a weapons to secure justice for themselves. She believes that the violence sponsored by the state is far more terrible as it serves to dehumanize its agents who are ready to butcher anyone who dares to raise their voice against the injustice and corruption of the state.

In Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1984*, we not only find various agencies perpetrating violence, we also discover diverse forms of violence such as physical, mental and psychological violence etc. The whole narrative is replete with chilling details of physical violence, for instance when Sujata goes to identify Brati's dead body at the morgue, the description that follows is an ample testament to the cruelty of the state machinery:

“There were three bullet holes in his body, one on the chest, one on the stomach, one on the throat. Blue holes. The bullets had been aimed from close range. The skin around the holes was blue. The cordite had left had left its burns. Chocolate coloured blood. The cordite had scalded the skin around the holes to leave it parched and cracked into hollow rings” (Bandyopadhyay 11).

The description of the “soundproof” interrogation room and the methods practiced there shows ugliness and cruelty of the violence at its worst. Nandini’s account of her blindness is also equally appalling. The optical nerves of her eyes got damaged during interrogation as her eyes were exposed to the glare of the lamp for forty-eight, seventy-two hours at a stretch.

Along with the physical violence, the psychological violence also occupies a significant space in the narrative. The mental violence Sujata became fully conscious of the psychological violence meted out to her on the day of Brati’s death. Dibyanath’s reaction to the news of his youngest son’s death revealed the insensitive and selfish nature to Sujata:

“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. It had burst upon her with explosive force. Like one of those massive meteors upon the ancient world billions of years ago. Like one of those explosions that broke up the solid mass of the continent into continents separated by the oceans.”

The mental violence on Sujata was enough to obliterate her individuality. Her husband and her mother-in-law were the epicenters of the family. Her own existence in her family can be best be termed as shadowy. Because of constant psychological violence meted out to her Sujata had become “subservient, silent, faithful, and without an existence of her own”. When Sujata took the decision not to quit her job, it created resentment in her husband and her mother-in-law. They kept on harassing her mentally complaining that Sujata had no inclination to share the responsibilities of running the household or bringing up her children. They even brainwashed her daughter Tuli who continued to harass Sujata mentally. They all behaved as if Sujata belonged to the enemy’s camp. Dibyanath continued to cause her mental suffering by fooling around with women. Not only his mother but also his daughter supported the womanizing nature of Dibyanath as a mark of his virility. It was only Brati who was against the debauchery of his father and stood by his mother.

Dibyanath had perpetuated psychological violence against Sujata not only through his debauchery, but also by denying her the most common rights that a mother has. It was his mother who held the reins. For Dibyanath, to honour his mother meant to dishonour one's wife. That is why he always kept his mother aloft while keeping Sujata under his feet. He never tried to understand her wounds or give her due respect. However, Dibyanath's mental violence was not reserved for Sujata alone. He also disliked Brati because the later did not support his opportunistic attitude to life. He used to taunt Brati by calling him "a milksop", "Mother's boy" who had "no manliness" etc. It was because of such psychological harassment that led Brati away from Dibyanath who became "the boss" instead of his father.

The violence of the state agencies had a traumatic effect on the victims and their family members. Somu's father died soon after the murder of Somu, while his mother was also crushed. Similarly, the pain of losing her son was too much for Partha mother and the sickly woman took to her bed and even refused to eat anything. The trauma of the violence was equally intense for the younger members of those unfortunate families. Parth's brother had to leave his home because he was threatened that if he ever came back, he would be cut to pieces. The gangs of opportunistic criminals were having a heyday and by exercising extrajudicial powers they were traumatizing the relatives of the unfortunate victims even after their deaths. The traumatic existence of Somu's sister, who had already realized that she had no chances of getting married or getting a job, is aptly summarized by her mother:

"My daughter is scared. She comes home late in the evening after her tuitions, she has to do the marketing. She is scared of them. They are capable of anything" (Bandyopadhyay 63).



**Self-Assessment Question**

- How does the novelist of *Mother of 1084* castigate the state-sponsored violence? (150 words)

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**6.3.2 Attack on the Bourgeoisie:**

Another theme of *Mother of 1084* is its attack of the Bourgeoisie. The novelist has left no stone unturned in her attempt to castigate the hypocrisy of the pseudo-civilized section of the society. The protagonist of the society, Sujata, found herself alienated from the section of the society that promoted hypocrisy and triviality in the name of modernity. The narrator has pointed out the incomprehensibility of such a superficial life-style to Sujata :

“Sujata’s eldest son and his wife were deeply in love. They had separate beds from the time Suman was eight months old. Still, they had a reputation as a loving couple. Sujata had always valued a flesh and blood happiness. But Bini and her husband had successfully separated a flesh and happiness from love” (Bandyopadhyay 21).

The novel reflects powerfully the fact that for the members of the bourgeoisie, natural feeling and emotions have no value in their lives. For them, it is the social status that is far more significant. That is why Sujata finds Dibyanath’s reaction to the message of Brati’s death quite strange:

“A father gets the message and doesn’t feel for a moment the urge to rush to see his dead son! The first thing that strikes him is that it would be unwise to keep the car waiting before Kantapukur” (Bandyopadhyay 29).

Mahasweta Devi has juxtaposed the conduct of Dibyanath with that of Somu's poor father to stress the moral degeneration of the members of the upper echelon of the society:

“Somu's father had never thought of saving his skin, never thought such behaviour possible. Somu's father—the poor shopkeeper! who had no capital!—had never come to know the kind of people who could think in such ways. The two fathers, Somu's and Dibyanath, lived in the same country, but poles apart” (Bandyopadhyay 66).

The novelist has taken every opportunity to highlight the lack of morals and principles in the life of the bourgeoisie as we find in the following excerpt from the novel:

“If Brati drank like Jyoti, if he could go about drunk like Neepa's husband, if he could flirt with slip of a typist the way Brati's father did, if he could be a master swindler like Tony Kapadia, if he could be as loose as his sister Neepa, who lived with a cousin of her husband's, then they could have accepted Brati as one of them” (Bandyopadhyay 30).

Sujata's family belonged to the bourgeoisie and shared its insensitivity, hypocrisy and love of affectation. The insensitivity of the members of her family comes to the fore most intensely when they fix the engagement ceremony of Tuli on seventeenth of January. Incidentally, seventeenth of January is the date when the family had received the information of the death of Tuli's brother, Brati. No one in the family seems to regard the date as significant in their lives. It is only Sujata, the mother, and Hem, the housemaid, who remembers the date. However, the people from the lower strata of the society appears to be different from those of the bourgeoisie. Somu's mother, for instance, was shedding tears for her dead son years after his death. While no member of Brati's family gave any importance to his sensitive nature, it was only Nandini who tried to understand Brati. Again the contrastive attitude of Sujata's family members and Hem to the death of Brati is enough to highlight the negative attitude of the novelist to the superficiality of the bourgeoisie class:

“Back home she (Sujata) had found the members of the family stunned, silent, deeply disturbed over how to explain Brati’s death to others; suddenly, like Somu’s mother, Hem had broken down in spontaneous grief,, weeping unashamedly, knocking her head against the wall, lamenting—” (Bandyopadhyay 107).

**Self-Assessment Questions**

• Do you believe that Hem was not influenced by the bourgeois mentality of the Chatterjee family? Elucidate with reference to the text. (80 words)

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• Comment on the relationship between Brati and his father. (200 words)

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**6.3.3 Disintegrating Relationships:**

Besides a scathing attack on the bourgeoisie, Mahasweta Devi’s *Mother of 1084* also focusses on the disintegration of relationships in the contemporary society. This disintegration of relationships was mainly the outcome of people’s materialistic attitudes and their desire to climb the social ladder at any cost. In the novel, we find that the relationship between Sujata and Dibyanath is defined by nothing but indifference and apathy. It was not only Sujata towards whom Dibyanath had cold feelings, he was equally uncaring towards his children:

“Dibyanath never came with her, never accompanied her when it was time. He slept in a room on the second floor lest the cries of the new born disturbed his sleep. He would never come down to ask about the children when they were ill” (Bandyopadhyay 3).

The disintegration of relationships becomes all the more stark when Dibyanath refused to allow Sujata to use the family car to go to Kantapukur to identify the dead body of their youngest son Brati. Dibyanath was afraid that anybody could identify the car as belonging to him. He had placed his own position and his own social security before his father-son relationship with Brati. Instead of crying for the death of his son, he was more keen to ensure that the news of the killing was not reported by the media.

However, it was not only Dibyanath, rather, every member of the Chatterjee family was trying to forget Brati. For them he did not exist in their lives anymore—physically and mentally. This is what is reflected in the following words of Tuli when she advises her mother that the latter should focus on the living rather than on the dead:

“Enough is enough Ma. You’ve turned this house into a tomb, ma. Father doesn’t dare say a word when you’re about. Brother has a guilty look all the time. . .Everybody tries to hush up an incident like the one we had. That’s natural. Brati is dead. You must think of the living” (Bandyopadhyay 29).

It was not only the personal relationships that were disintegrating, even social relationships had also lost their significance. Every member of the society appeared to have lost the feelings of sympathy and brotherhood. In order to emphasize the fast-fading feelings of sympathy and compassion from the society, the novelist has narrated this incident in the novel:

“In East Calcutta, a group of young men seated the bloodstained corpse of a young man who had grown up with them in a rickshaw, and escorted it with drums and a brass band, dancing alongside, like some divine idol being taken for immersion. . .The radical citizens of Calcutta found nothing unnatural in the spectacle” (Bandyopadhyay 50).

The portion of the narrative that deals with the strange relationship between Amit and Neeпа confirms that the disintegration of relationships has spread to every single relationship including the relationship between

a husband and a wife. Although Neepa was legally married to Amit, she was maintaining an illicit relationship with his cousin. The three lived in the same house with Neepa being closer to Balai than her husband. Quite strangely, Amit never protested against this illicit relationship and took to drinking as a solution to the problem.

#### **6.3.4 Protest against Patriarchy:**

Protest against patriarchy may be seen as an important theme of *Mother of 1084*. From the very beginning of the novel, the novelist highlights the patriarchal mentality and its negative effects on the life of women. Dibyanath was totally apathetic towards his wife Sujata, but he was quite keen to have children with her and for that he never felt the need to have any discussion with her. He believed it to be his right to beget children with Sujata who must submit to his demands. However, the ideas of patriarchy were not confined to the male members of the society alone. Many women of the society were also supporters of patriarchy and they had no idea that they could raise their voice against the oppression of the patriarchal system. As the novelist points out:

“She (Sujata) 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. She had been hurt at times. Hurt badly. Dibyanath had always fooled around with women. His mother looked around his indiscretions with indulgence. For her it was a mark of her son’s virility; her son was no henpecked husband. Sujata was hurt. But she had consoled herself with the thought that nobody in life had uninterrupted happiness” (Bandyopadhyay 31).

It was because of his patriarchal mindset that Dibyanath never made any attempt to understand Sujata’s feelings. He believed that a wife must love, respect and obey her husband. A husband need not do anything to win his wife’s love, respect and loyalty. He even did not care to hide his affairs with other women as he felt that it was his right as a man. It was Brati alone who did not support the chauvinism of his

father. However, after the death of Brati, we find Sujata to embrace a new attitude to life. She decided to raise her voice against the oppression of patriarchal society. She threatened to leave the household of Dibyanath for good if he did not leave the room immediately. Her protest against him appeared as a slap on the face. When he asked her where she had been all day, Sujata retorted by telling him not to ask this question as she had never been given the right to ask him the same question in the thirty-four years of their married life. Her condemnation of the patriarchal mindset is very powerfully reflected in the following dialogue of Sujata:

“When I was younger, I didn’t understand. Then your mother covered up your sins—yes, sins—and I didn’t feel like raking things up. Then I had no interest to know. But I have never spent my time, like you, stealing away, slinking away from your home, from your family, the way you have done all your life. Would you like to hear more?” (Bandyopadhyay 94).

Her words hit Dibyanath like a whiplash and when Sujata ordered him to get out of the room, a crestfallen Dibyanath tamely went out of the room wiping the nape of his neck.

#### **6.4 Techniques:**

In the novel, Mahasweta Devi has used her narrative technique to evoke the illegitimacy that was rampant in every walk of the society—in politics, in administration, in cultural-intellectual establishment etc. The antisocial killers were dear to any organized political force—whether one was an extreme Rightist or an extreme Leftist party. The narrative style that she employs serves a dual purpose--to expose the illegitimacy of the society as well as to focus on an individual’s independent realization of the same. The novelist makes use of a circular narrative where she begins the novel by exposing the degraded morality of the Chatterjee family and then makes Sujata move out of the confines of her social class and makes her interact with characters far outside that circle. Towards the end, however, the novelist brings her back to her family and social circle where she revolts and, at the same time, makes an attempt to adjust to the norms of that

society before she collapses. The circularity of the narrative lies in the fact that it starts and ends with the Chatterjee home and in Sujata's journey from home to the outside world back to home again.

In order to bring out the illegitimacy and corruption of the society, the novelist has used a matter-of-fact, documentary and even a clinical narrative style in *Mother of 1084*. Her use of a neatly structured grid of time, series of precise references to dates and specific moments in time and the division of the novel into chapters entitled "Morning", "Afternoon", "Late Afternoon" and "Evening" show the precise nature of the narrative the novelist had tried to achieve. The layering of different timelines on the base timeline of a single day is actually a crucial aspect of the narrative technique as the four divisions also gives the reader the idea of Sujata's life. In the morning she remembered the incident which took place twenty-two years ago when she was undergoing labour pain as well as the brutal killing of his youngest son Brati, in the afternoon we find Sujata visiting Somu's mother as a part of her quest know about unknown aspect of her dead son's life, in the late afternoon she met Nandini, who told her about the betrayal by Anindya that led to the killing of Brati and his Naxalaites colleagues, and in the evening we find Sujata in the Engagement party of her daughter Tuli. Although she did not like the idea of holding the engagement on the death anniversary of Brati, she was trying to adjust herself to the mechanical and insensitive ways of her family. However, when she discovered that Saroj Pal, the police officer responsible for Brati's brutal killing, had also been invited, she lost all control before collapsing to the ground.

Her descriptions of events are often factual and unadorned as we find in the following excerpt from the novel:

Somu had twenty-three wounds in his body. Bijit, sixteen. Laltu's entrails had been pulled out and wrapped around his body. All this surely could not have smacked of barbarity, of bestiality. If it had, then the poets and writers of Calcutta would have spoken of the barbarities on this side of the border along with those on that side of the border (Bandyopadhyay 50).

However, from time to time, her narrative rises from the documentary, factual style to a passionate and lyrical strain so that she is able to convey the emotional turmoil of characters such as Sujata, Nandini or Somu's mother in the most poignant manner:

The thoughts that troubled her were cried aloud by Somu's mother: Why did they have to kill them, didi? They could have maimed them but let them alive! At least I would have known my Somu was alive!... He could have lived far from my sight. They could have kept him in prison. Still, at least I'd have known that he lived! Tell me why I've been punished like this (53-54).

In her narrative in *Mother of 1084*, Mahasweta Devi does not provide any historical account of the Naxalite Movement that spread over the whole of Bengal in the 1960s and 70s. Rather, she tried to document the various events that she saw taking place around her. As she says herself:

“In the seventies, in the Naxalite movement, I saw exemplary integrity, selflessness, and the guts to die for a cause. I think I saw history in the making, and decided that as a writer it would be my mission to document it. As a writer, I feel a commitment to my times, to mankind, and to myself. I did not consider Naxalite movement an isolated happening. . . In the Naxalite movement I saw only a further extension of the movements of the past, especially the Tebhaga, Kakdwip and Telengana uprisings.”

In the *Mother of 1084*, the novelist has portrayed the Naxalite movement in its urban phase in 1971—74 and set against it an apolitical mother's quest to know her dead son who was killed for being a Naxal, to know his motives for joining the movement although he belonged to an entirely different social class. Mahasweta Devi highlights the fact that the mother failed to understand her son while he was alive, but her death has awakened her to the social reality surrounding her, something she always tried not to recognize as a part of her life.

The novelist also uses her narrative not only to evoke images of killing of the Naxalites in the state but also to stress the lack of reaction from



two different sections of the society—firstly, a group of survivors who suffered intolerably but accepted the suffering silently. The following lines spoken by Somu’s mother testify to this:

“They tell me, don’t cry mother. He will never come back. They tell me, why don’t you think of the others? Think of Partha’s mother. She lost Partha. And since then Parth’s brother can’t come home. He has to stay with his aunt or who knows where.”

Again, those who survived those violent days in simulated singularity also refrained from expressing any reaction against the wanton killing of the Naxalites in their home state. Instead of uttering anything against the killing of the Naxalites, these indifferent people were more interested in Bangladesh war, in literary radicalism and other commercial and amorous activities.

According to Samik Bandopadhyay, the narrative of *Mother of 1084* is also noted for its attempt to make a particular situation not paradigmatic (which may lead to over-simplification), but to place it at the centre of a complex historical developments. In this novel, we find three homes—Sujata’s, Somu’s mother’s and Nandini’s. The three households allow the novelist to realistically portray the family structures and their economic implications on the individual and how they also influence one’s attitude to society.

While the novel is primarily about the killing of the Naxalite cadres by the security forces in the name of government intervention, the novelist has used the technique of alternating points of view to provide the readers a better perspective of the whole scenario. These diverse points of views have not been placed in a linear fashion, rather these have been inserted alternately that keeps the readers on their toes all the time. This is evident from the novelist’s description of the reactions of the people to violence that varied from group to group. For a group of youngsters like Brati who believed in the “cult of faithlessness”, the violence was a necessary antidote to purge the society of its numerous ills. On the other hand, for the “opportunist timeservers” like Dibyanath and Jyoti, the state intervention is the only way to teach these “faithless”

young men not to indulge in antisocial activities. But Sujata was not convinced by the logic offered by her husband or her elder son. She could not accept that by killing Brati, the authorities had succeeded in destroying the burning faith in faithlessness that Brati and his compatriots had stood for. Brati was dead, no doubt. But Sujata was not sure that his death meant the end of the cause that he cherished. The novelist also alternately inserts the perspective of the poor family members of the Naxalite cadres. With the passage of time, they had lost all their fighting powers to protest against the violence of the state machineries. They began to accept the violence meted out to their near and dear ones as something inevitable. Somu's sister, for instance, did not like Sujata to visit her mother not only because it opened the psychological scar of her mother but also because she had learnt from experience that crying over the dead members of the family would not change anything. As she says: "Don't cry Ma. He won't come back. He kicked you in the chest, ma, and he went off. Ma, look at me and pull yourself together" (Bandyopadhyay 54).

Another noteworthy aspect of Mahasweta Devi's narrative style is that it is enriched with voices from the streets and fields, the voices of the common people as well as the voices of the exploited and downtrodden, the language of the graffiti on the walls as well as by the language of the slogans shouted by the exploited as they revolted against the existing system of governance.

#### **Check Your Progress**

1. Critically discuss the major themes of the novel *Mother of 1084*.
2. Critically comment on Mahasweta Devi's treatment of violence in *Mother of 1084*.
3. Critically analyse Mahasweta Devi's narrative technique in her novel *Mother of 1084*.

### 6.5 Summing Up:

This Unit has introduced you to the major themes of the novel *Mother of 1084*. You have also learnt about the narrative technique employed by the novelist to highlight the issues that she wanted her readers to become conscious of.

### 6.6 References and Suggested Readings:

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