Manonmaniam Sundaranar University

DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

TIRUNELVELI - 627 012, TAMILNADU

B.A ENGLISH (FIFTH SEMESTER)

INDIGENOUS LITERATURE

(From the Academic Year 2025-2026 onwards)

Prepared by

Dr. U. Kethrapal

Assistant Professor, Department of English,

St. John's College, Palayamkottai - 627 002

Most student friendly University-Strive to Study and Learn to Excel

for More Information Visit : http://www.msuniv.ac.in

INDIGENOUS LITERATURE

UNIT I: INTRODUCTION TO INDIGENOUS LITERATURE

- Definitions: Indigenous, Adivasi, First Nations, Aboriginal, Native
- Oral vs. Written Traditions
- Colonization and Language Suppression
- Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Storytelling Practices

UNIT II: POETRY

- To the Rest of India from Another Indian – Esther Syiem
- No More Boomerang – Oodgeroo Noonuccal
- War – Lee Maracle

UNIT III: SHORT STORIES

- Draupadi – Mahasweta Devi
- The Adivasi Will Not Dance (Chapter 10) – Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar

UNIT IV: NOVEL

- *Aranyer Adhikar* (Rights over the Forest)– Mahasweta Devi
- *Arrow of God* - Chinua Achebe

UNIT V: DRAMA

- Budhan (From *Painted Words: An Anthology of Tribal Literature*) – G.N. Devy
- Mother of 1084 – Mahasweta Devi

SUGGESTED TEXT:

Devy, G. N. *Indigenous Imaginaries: Literature, Region, Modernity*

Devi, Mahasweta. "Mother of 1084." *Five Plays*. Trans. by Samik Bandyopadhyay. Seagull, 2011.

---. "Draupadhi." *Breast Stories*. Ed. Gayathri Chakrovarty Spivak. Seagull, 2014.

Devy, G. N., "Drama: Budhan." *Painted Words: An Anthology of Tribal Literature*. Penguin Books, 2002. PDF file.

Kuokkanen, Rauna. *Reshaping the University: Responsibility, Indigenous Epistemes, and the Logic of the Gift*. UBC Press, 2007. PDF file.

Shekhar, Hansda Sowvendra. *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*. Speaking Tiger, 2015. PDF file.

WEB SOURCE:

- https://www.writersworkshopindia.com/books/many-sides-of-many-stories/.
- https://www.staff.vu.edu.au/syson/1002/oodgeroo.html.
- https://poetryinvoice.ca/read/poems/war.

UNIT I: INTRODUCTION TO INDIGENOUS LITERATURE

Indigenous literature represents the voices, memories, and cultural expressions of the original inhabitants of various regions across the world. Rooted in oral traditions, communal histories, and spiritual relationships with land and ancestry, Indigenous literature differs significantly from dominant Western literary traditions. It encompasses myths, legends, songs, rituals, and contemporary written texts that articulate Indigenous ways of knowing and being. The emergence of Indigenous literature as an academic field has been closely linked to decolonization movements, cultural revival, and political struggles for recognition and self-determination. Studying Indigenous literature allows readers to understand histories that were marginalized or silenced by colonial narratives and offers alternative perspectives on identity, language, environment, and storytelling. This unit introduces key concepts essential for understanding Indigenous literature, including terminology, oral and written traditions, the impact of colonization on language, and Indigenous knowledge systems.

Definitions: Indigenous, Adivasi, First Nations, Aboriginal, Native

The terminology used to describe Indigenous peoples is deeply embedded in historical, cultural, and political contexts. The term “Indigenous” broadly refers to communities that are the original inhabitants of a particular land and who have maintained cultural continuity despite colonization. Internationally, the term is recognized through frameworks such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which emphasizes self-identification, ancestral ties to land, and distinct social and cultural institutions. The use of “Indigenous” fosters global solidarity while acknowledging diversity among these communities.

In the Indian context, the term “Adivasi” is commonly used to describe tribal populations. Derived from the Sanskrit words adi (original) and vasi (inhabitant), Adivasi refers to communities such as the Santhal, Gond, and Bhil, who possess distinct languages, customs, and oral traditions. Despite their historical presence, Adivasi communities have often faced displacement and marginalization due to colonial forest policies and post-independence development projects.

The term “First Nations” is primarily used in Canada and signifies Indigenous peoples who are neither Inuit nor Métis. This terminology emphasizes sovereignty, nationhood, and political autonomy, rejecting the colonial label “Indian.” Similarly, in Australia, the term “Aboriginal” has been used to describe the Indigenous peoples of the mainland, along with Torres Strait

Islanders. Although “Aboriginal” remains in legal and institutional use, many prefer the inclusive term “Indigenous Australians” to assert self-identification.

In the United States, “Native American” or simply “Native” refers to the Indigenous peoples of North America. However, many individuals prefer identification by specific tribal names, reflecting the diversity of nations and cultures within the broader category. Understanding these terms is crucial, as naming is not merely descriptive but a political act that reflects power, identity, and resistance.

Oral vs. Written Traditions

Oral tradition has historically been the primary mode of storytelling and knowledge transmission in Indigenous cultures. Through myths, legends, songs, chants, and ceremonial performances, Indigenous communities preserved their histories, belief systems, and social values without written records. Oral narratives are dynamic and adaptive, changing according to context, audience, and time, thereby keeping cultural knowledge alive and relevant. Storytelling is often a communal activity, led by elders or designated storytellers who are regarded as custodians of collective memory.

The oral tradition serves multiple functions, including moral instruction, environmental education, and spiritual guidance. Stories explain the origins of the world, the relationship between humans and nature, and the responsibilities individuals owe to their communities. Unlike written literature, oral storytelling emphasizes performance, tone, repetition, and audience interaction, making each narration a unique event.

Written Indigenous literature emerged largely as a result of colonization and the introduction of Western literacy systems. Early Indigenous texts were often mediated through missionaries or colonial authorities, leading to distortions and censorship. Over time, Indigenous writers began using writing as a means of cultural preservation and resistance. By recording stories, histories, and experiences, they sought to reclaim voices that had been silenced.

Contemporary Indigenous authors frequently blend oral storytelling techniques with written forms, incorporating circular narratives, repetition, and non-linear structures. While writing offers permanence and wider reach, it also raises ethical concerns, particularly regarding the recording of sacred or community-owned stories. Thus, the relationship between oral and written traditions remains complex, reflecting both cultural continuity and adaptation.

Colonization and Language Suppression

Colonization profoundly disrupted Indigenous societies by dismantling their social, political, and cultural structures. One of the most damaging effects of colonization was the systematic suppression of Indigenous languages. Colonial governments and missionaries imposed European languages through education systems, religious institutions, and administrative policies, often punishing Indigenous children for speaking their mother tongues. Residential and boarding school systems in countries such as Canada, the United States, and Australia exemplify how language suppression was used as a tool of cultural assimilation.

Language loss had severe consequences for Indigenous communities, as language is the primary medium through which oral traditions, spiritual beliefs, and cultural knowledge are transmitted. The erosion of language resulted in the loss of stories, rituals, and ecological knowledge accumulated over generations. Moreover, language suppression contributed to identity crises, cultural alienation, and intergenerational trauma.

Despite these challenges, Indigenous communities have consistently resisted linguistic erasure. Literature has played a vital role in this resistance, allowing writers to reclaim and revitalize their languages. Many Indigenous texts incorporate native words, phrases, and storytelling patterns, asserting linguistic presence within colonial languages. Bilingual and multilingual writing serves both as an act of survival and a declaration of cultural pride.

In recent decades, Indigenous literature has become a powerful instrument in language revitalization movements. By foregrounding Indigenous languages and narratives, writers challenge colonial histories and reaffirm the importance of linguistic diversity as a foundation of cultural identity and self-determination.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Storytelling Practices

Indigenous knowledge systems are holistic frameworks developed through centuries of interaction with the natural world, community life, and spiritual beliefs. Unlike Western epistemologies that often compartmentalize knowledge into separate disciplines, Indigenous knowledge integrates science, ethics, spirituality, and art. This knowledge is experiential, place-based, and transmitted primarily through storytelling.

Storytelling functions as a central method of teaching and preserving Indigenous knowledge. Through stories, communities pass down lessons about survival, environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and moral conduct. These narratives often emphasize the

interconnectedness of all living beings and portray humans as part of, rather than superior to, nature. Land is not viewed as property but as a living entity with which humans share a reciprocal relationship.

Indigenous storytelling practices frequently employ non-linear structures, where time is cyclical rather than chronological. Past, present, and future coexist, and ancestral presence remains active within contemporary life. The storyteller holds a position of responsibility, ensuring that stories are told with respect to cultural protocols and community values.

In the modern context, Indigenous storytelling continues to challenge dominant knowledge systems and literary conventions. By asserting alternative ways of knowing and narrating the world, Indigenous literature contributes to the broader project of decolonization and offers valuable insights in to sustainability, community, and cultural resilience.

UNIT II: POETRY

To the Rest of India from Another Indian – Esther Syiem

About the Author:

Esther Syiem teaches in the Department of English at the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong. Her publications include two volumes of poetry: Oral Scriptings and of follies and frailties of wit and wisdom, both published by Writers Workshop, India. She also writes in Khasi and has published a play entitled Ka Nam. Her book, The Oral Discourse in Khasi Folk Narrative is an important resource for understanding Khasi culture. Ka Jingïamareh Kob ki Wah, is her retelling of a Khasi folktale that she has also translated into English, The Race of the Rivers. She is a member of the PLSI's National Editorial Collective, founded by Professor Ganesh Devy, a grass-roots initiative to document the languages of India, and is the editor of the Meghalaya volume: People's Linguistic Survey of India, Vol 19, Part II, The Languages of Meghalaya. She has also co-edited the Khasi translation of the book. Syiem is founder member of the Shillong Forum for English Studies.

Summary

"To the Rest of India from Another Indian" by Esther Syiem is a reflective and critical essay that addresses the marginalization of India's Northeastern region within mainstream national consciousness. Written as a direct address to "the rest of India," the essay highlights the cultural

ignorance, stereotyping, and political neglect faced by people from the Northeast, despite their legitimate and equal citizenship

Syiem begins by asserting her identity as an Indian, immediately challenging the assumption that Northeasterners are somehow less Indian or culturally foreign. She emphasizes that people from the region are often treated as outsiders because of their physical features, languages, and customs. Casual racism—being mistaken for foreigners or subjected to racial slurs—is presented as a common experience that reveals how narrow definitions of Indian identity operate in everyday life.

The essay also discusses how the Northeast is geographically and psychologically distant from the national imagination. Syiem notes that the region is often ignored unless there is political unrest or violence. This selective attention reinforces stereotypes of the Northeast as troubled and unstable while erasing its cultural richness and diversity. She argues that this ignorance is not accidental but the result of historical neglect and a lack of interest in understanding the region's complex past.

Another important theme in the essay is the role of history and politics. Syiem points out that the Northeast's relationship with India has been shaped by colonial boundaries, post-independence conflicts, and militarization. However, these historical realities are rarely taught or discussed in mainstream education. As a result, people from the region are blamed for tensions without acknowledgment of the broader political context.

Syiem also critiques media representations, which often reduce the Northeast to clichés—either as a violent zone or as an exotic tourist destination. Such portrayals deny the people of the region their individuality and agency. The essay stresses that these misrepresentations contribute to continued misunderstanding and alienation.

Throughout the essay, Syiem maintains a calm and thoughtful tone. Rather than accusing or condemning, she invites readers to reflect on their assumptions and prejudices. Her approach is persuasive because it combines personal experience with reasoned argument, appealing to the reader's sense of fairness and responsibility.

In conclusion, "To the Rest of India from Another Indian" calls for a more inclusive and informed understanding of Indian identity. Syiem urges the rest of the country to recognize the Northeast not as a distant or problematic region, but as an integral part of India's social, cultural, and political fabric. The essay ultimately argues that true national unity can only be

achieved through mutual respect, awareness, and the willingness to listen to marginalized voices

Critical Analysis

Esther Syiem's "To the Rest of India from Another Indian" is a powerful intervention into the dominant national discourse that often marginalizes India's Northeast. Written in the form of a personal address, the essay combines lived experience with political critique, exposing how cultural ignorance, stereotyping, and systemic neglect shape the relationship between the "mainland" and the Northeastern states. Syiem's central argument is not merely that the Northeast is misunderstood, but that this misunderstanding is sustained by historical amnesia, racial prejudice, and a failure of empathy.

One of the most striking features of the essay is its second-person address, which allows Syiem to speak directly to "the rest of India." This rhetorical strategy transforms the essay into a conversation rather than a detached critique. By positioning herself as "another Indian," Syiem claims national belonging even as she challenges the idea of a homogeneous Indian identity. This assertion is crucial, as it resists the tendency to treat the Northeast as culturally foreign or peripheral. The title itself is ironic: the need to clarify that the author is "another Indian" reveals how conditional and selective Indian identity can be.

Syiem critically examines the racialization of Northeastern bodies, particularly the casual labeling of people as "Chinese," "Nepali," or "foreigners." These stereotypes are not presented as isolated incidents of ignorance but as symptoms of a deeper failure to recognize India's ethnic diversity. By highlighting everyday acts of discrimination—mockery, suspicion, and exoticization—Syiem exposes how nationalism often excludes those who do not conform to dominant North Indian physical and cultural norms. Her tone remains restrained rather than accusatory, which strengthens the moral force of her critique.

Another significant aspect of the poem is its engagement with history and political neglect. Syiem points out that the Northeast's complex relationship with the Indian state—marked by colonial boundaries, insurgency, and militarization—is frequently ignored in mainstream narratives. The region is remembered only in moments of crisis or conflict, reinforcing its portrayal as unstable or dangerous. By foregrounding this selective remembrance, Syiem critiques a national consciousness that benefits from forgetting inconvenient histories.

The poem also challenges media representations of the Northeast. Syiem argues that mainstream media reduces the region to stereotypes of violence, backwardness, or scenic beauty, rarely acknowledging its intellectual, cultural, or political contributions. This reductionism strips the people of agency and complexity. Her critique implicitly questions who gets to tell national stories and whose voices are deemed authoritative.

Stylistically, Syiem's poem is calm, reflective, and precise. The absence of overt anger is deliberate; instead, she appeals to reason and moral responsibility. This restraint prevents the essay from becoming polemical and allows it to function as an ethical appeal. By refusing victimhood, Syiem asserts dignity and self-representation, reinforcing her demand for recognition rather than sympathy.

Ultimately, "To the Rest of India from Another Indian" is not a plea for inclusion on unequal terms, but a demand for reimagining Indian identity itself. Syiem urges readers to confront their assumptions and recognize that unity cannot be built on ignorance or exclusion. The essay stands as both a critique of dominant nationalism and a vision for a more inclusive, plural understanding of what it means to be Indian.

NO MORE BOOMERANG - OODGEROO NOONUCCAL

No more boomerang
No more spear;
Now alll civilized-
Colour bar and beer.

No more corroboree,
Gay dance and din.
Now we got movies,
And pay to go in.

No more sharing
What the hunter brings.
Now we work for money,
Then pay it back for things.

Now we track bosses
To catch a few bob,
Now we go walkabout
On bus to the job.

One time naked,
Who never knew shame;
Now we put clothes on
To hide whatsaname.

No more gunya,
Now bungalow,
Paid by hire purchase
In twenty year or so.

Lay down the stone axe,
Take up the steel,
And work like a nigger
For a white man meal.

No more firesticks
That made the whites scoff.
Now all electric,
And no better off.

Bunyip he finish,
Now got instead
White fella Bunyip,
Call him Red.

Abstract picture now-
What they coming at?

Cripes, in our caves we
Did better than that.

Black hunted wallaby,
White hunt dollar;
White fella witch-doctor
Wear dog-collar.

No more message-stick;
Lubras and lads
Got television now.
Mostly ads.

Lay down the woomera,
Lay down the waddy.
Now we got atom-bomb,
End everybody.

The poem ‘No More Boomerang’ was first published in 1985. It also appears in the poetry collection “Australian Voices: A Collection of Poetry and Pictures”.

About the author

Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1920–1993), born Kath Walker, was a pioneering Aboriginal Australian poet, activist, and educator, widely recognized as the first Aboriginal woman to publish a book of poetry in Australia. She belonged to the Noonuccal people of Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island), Queensland, and her writing is deeply rooted in Indigenous identity, cultural survival, and resistance to colonial oppression.

Her landmark poetry collection *We Are Going* (1964) marked a turning point in Australian literature by bringing Aboriginal voices and experiences into the mainstream. Oodgeroo’s poetry is known for its direct, accessible language, political urgency, and strong moral appeal. She addressed themes such as dispossession, racial injustice, loss of land, cultural erasure, and the struggle for Aboriginal rights, often blending personal emotion with collective history.

Beyond literature, Oodgeroo Noonuccal was a committed civil rights activist. She played a significant role in campaigns for Aboriginal citizenship and was actively involved in the movement that led to the 1967 Referendum, which recognized Aboriginal people as citizens in Australia. In 1988, she rejected the Order of Australia in protest against the ongoing marginalization of Indigenous Australians.

Through both her poetry and activism, Oodgeroo Noonuccal emerged as a powerful voice of Indigenous resistance and cultural pride. Her work continues to be studied for its contribution to postcolonial literature, Indigenous studies, and social justice discourse, making her an essential figure in world literature.

Summary

‘No More Boomerang’ by Oodgeroo Noonuccal describes how the indigenous culture of Australia is at stake and depicts the impact of colonization on people’s minds.

This poem describes various aspects of indigenous Australians. After the colonizers set their foot on their land, their culture was gradually destroyed. One after another, the things once the people used to embellish as their identity, lost their significance. The instruments such as the boomerang, stone axe, fire sticks, message-stick, woomera, and waddy have become obsolete as the people revamped their lifestyle replicating the style of the colonizers. Apart from that, Noonuccal talks about the impact of capitalism, consumerism, and materialism on aboriginal Australians in this poem.

This poem is written from the perspective of an aboriginal who is aware of the effect of colonization on their indigenous culture. It is a satire on both the colonizers and the colonized. This poem consists of 13 quatrains or stanzas having four lines. The rhyme scheme of this piece is ABCB. This rhyming scheme can be seen in the ballad stanza form. For example, in the first stanza, “spear” (in the second line) rhymes with “beer” (in the fourth line). This poem is mostly composed of iambic dimeter with a few metrical variations. The sound scheme of this poem creates a sing-song-like effect.

Stanza 1

The main idea of the poem is that the native culture of the Australian people is in trouble. “Boomerang” and “spear” are the words for tradition and culture in the first two lines. The Australian Aboriginal people used the boomerang to hunt. It is a flat, curved piece of wood that

comes back to the person who threw it after it is released. The spear is another old-fashioned weapon that was thrown or thrust.

Since the native people have grown up, they no longer use those weapons. These days, they like beer and everything that has to do with the colonisers more. In the last line, the speaker talks about the “colour bar” that was used to tell the difference between white people and native people who were not white.

Stanza Two

The speaker in the second stanza talks about the Corroboree, which is an Australian Aboriginal dance ceremony or social event. Once, they shared their happy times with other people in their community. They sang and danced together. Now pay for their entertainment that is only about them. In the past, things of enjoyment were not linked to any monetary equivalent. Happiness was more important than having a lot of money. Now, though, money is the only thing that matters. As a joke, Noonuccal says that's why they now pay to go to the movies.

Stanza Three

The third line talks about how cultural values are being lost. Sharing isn't something that only one culture does. It is the most important thing about being human. A long time ago, hunters brought food to their community and let everyone eat it. The whole village celebrated when the hunters came back with a lot of food. No one held a grudge when they shared. Sharing is seen as bad these days because of the emphasis on buying things. At one time, the native Australians shared without expecting anything in return. Anyway, they work now just to get money and use it to buy things they want.

Stanza Four

In modern times, all they care about is getting ahead in life by making money. That's why people who have a boss always try to please him. Their only goal is to get a few 'bob', which is a figure of speech for a pay rise. In this case, it can also mean money. The speaker also talks about how people live their everyday lives. Monday through Friday, people take the bus to get to work. The person goes home the same way they came when they were done with work. They don't have time to dance or go on a parade.

Stanza Five

In this line, the speaker talks about how the colonisers changed the natives' looks and ways of life. Once, they stayed naked and didn't feel bad about it because they didn't mind being naked. They lived with it. The way they looked in public shows how unique they were. Then the colonisers came and made their own rules. They taught them that being naked was embarrassing. “To hide whatsaname,” the speaker hints in the last line. It means the person speaking doesn't know what part of the body they shouldn't show.

The colonists came to do business with them. That's why teaching them their rules would help the trade and commerce of their country. They got rid of the originality in this way so they could plant the seeds of their hegemony.

Stanza Six

The first two lines of this stanza create anthesis, which depicts both a transition and the destruction of the people's original culture. The Aboriginal Australian people lived in traditional huts made of wood or bark, called “gunya” in the local tongue. Over time, the opulent English-style bungalows won their hearts, and they associated happiness with the size of the house. This contrast also suggests the impact of capitalism on indigenous culture. They paid a high price and invested all of their savings to purchase a large bungalow, even though it may take them up to twenty years.

Stanza Seven

This verse of “No More Boomerang” goes on to discuss the effects of colonisation. The speaker claims that they picked up the steel and put down the stone axe. The instruments made with this element are referred to as “steel.” Synecdoche is being used. The phrase “stone axe” represents indigenous culture and identity. The indigenous culture is represented by this instrument. Their traditional objects were replaced by colonisers' “steel” instruments. As a result, their culture was destroyed. They now labour like niggers in order to receive a “white man meal.” The themes of racism and colonial hangover are illustrated in the final two lines.

Stanza Eight

Similar to the “stone axe,” the “firesticks” became worthless. In order to create fire through friction, the native people rubbed and twirled a fire stick. The white people scoffed when they used it to start a fire. The colonists believed that electricity would be a better substitute. The

locals are still in no better situation. Because they believed that white people were destined to civilise the colonised people, the colonisers mocked their inventiveness. They were therefore contemptuous of their way of life and culture.

Stanza Nine

Noonuccal makes references to the legendary creature Bunyip in this stanza. Australian Aboriginal mythology makes reference to it. Throughout Australia, traditional Aboriginal beliefs and tales included the creature. Thus, the Bunyip represents their culture. It was also eliminated from their belief system when the white people arrived. The term “Red” refers to the characters they inserted. Additionally, the colonists are symbolically represented by the colour. In this way, the poet explains how the colonists filled the area with indigenous cultural elements while destroying the indigenous people's cultural beliefs.

Stanza Ten

The speaker is perplexed after saying all of this. She is unable to visualise her own culture clearly. The indigenous culture has become hazy, much like an abstract image. “What are they coming at?” is a rhetorical question she uses to convey her despair. She maintains that her native culture is superior to the alien one in the final two lines. “Cripes,” a reference to their cave paintings, outperformed the abstract art of the colonisers' culture, in her opinion. She draws a comparison between white art and Aboriginal art in this way.

Stanza Eleven

There is sarcasm in this stanza. According to the first line, a “wallaby” is a smaller animal that resembles a kangaroo. While the “white” people only hunted dollars, the “Black” or Aboriginal people hunted this animal. Noonuccal depicts the materialistic mindset of white people in this way. She discusses Christian preachers in the lines that follow. Her people believed them to be witch-doctors when they first arrived in their nation. They “wear dog collars,” she says sardonically. She highlights an issue with institutional religion in this way. A person cannot be freed from all of his burdens by such religion. Instead, it subdues the spirit and exploits the person for the good of the organisation.

Stanza Twelve

The “message-stick” is mentioned in this stanza. The indigenous people use this type of graphic communication. On a piece of wood, they painted a message and fastened it to a stick. A

messenger disseminated the message by carrying the stick over long distances. Now that they have televisions, “lubras and lads” (ladies and men) can watch the shows they want. They mimic the cultural cues depicted in television programs. Another intriguing concept is mentioned by the speaker. She says they primarily watch TV commercials. A seller uses advertisements to encourage customers to purchase their goods. It is now utilised for commercial purposes as a contemporary “message-stick.”

Stanza Thirteen

Anaphora opens the final stanza. Noonuccal uses the terms “woomera” and “waddy” in the first two lines. A waddy is an Aboriginal war club, and a woomera is a wooden spear-throwing weapon. These two weapons were employed by the indigenous people during clan conflicts. It was among the earliest weapons ever employed by humans. Atom bombs are among the more potent and destructive weapons used in the modern era. The entire city can disappear in a matter of seconds. Irony can be heard in the final line, “End everybody.” It alludes to the mindset of the countries that continue to openly display their atomic weapons.

WAR - LEE MARACLE

In my body flows the blood of Gallic
Bastille stormers and the soft, gentle
ways of Salish/Cree womanhood.

Deep throated base tones dissipate,
swallowed by the earth; uproarious
laughter sears, mutilates my voice.

Child of the earth-tear of west
coast rain; dew drop sparkling in
the crisp, clear sun of my home.

Warm woman of the Mediterranean sunscape,
bleaching rough cotton-sweatshop
anniversary.

Thunderous, rude earthquakes that
split my spirit within. Tiny grapes
of wine console me.

Can I deny a heritage blackened by
the toil of billions, conceived in
rape, plunder and butchery?

In the veins, that fight to root themselves

in the wondrous breadth of my
homeland, races the blood of base
humanity.

European thief; liar, bloodsucker.
I deny you not. I fear you not. Your
reality and mine no longer rankles me.

I am moved by my love for human life;
by the firm conviction that all the world
must stop the butchery, stop the slaughter.

I am moved by my scars, by my own filth
to re-write history with my body
to shed the blood of those who betray themselves

To life, world humanity I ascribe
To my people… my history… I address
my vision.

About the Author

Lee Maracle (1950–2021) was a prominent Canadian Indigenous writer, poet, novelist, essayist, and activist, best known for her powerful contributions to Indigenous literature and feminist thought. She was a member of the Stó:lō Nation from the west coast of Canada, and her writing is deeply rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems, oral traditions, and lived experiences of colonial oppression.

Maracle was the first Indigenous woman in Canada to publish a novel, *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* (1975), a groundbreaking autobiographical work that combines personal narrative with political resistance. Her literary works—including *Ravensong*, *Celia's Song*, *I Am Woman*, and several poetry collections—address themes such as colonial violence, racism, gender oppression, identity, memory, and Indigenous resurgence. Her writing challenges Western literary conventions by privileging storytelling, community, and relational ethics.

Beyond her literary career, Lee Maracle was an influential teacher and public intellectual. She taught at Simon Fraser University and the University of Toronto and was a founding member of the En'owkin Centre, an Indigenous cultural and educational institution. Her work consistently advocated for social justice, decolonization, and the reclamation of Indigenous voices.

Lee Maracle's legacy lies in her fearless articulation of Indigenous truth and resistance. Her writing continues to inspire readers and scholars worldwide, positioning her as a central figure in Canadian Indigenous literature, postcolonial studies, and feminist discourse.

Summary

Lee Maracle's poem "War" is an intense lyrical meditation on identity, history, colonial violence, and moral responsibility. Speaking in a powerful first-person voice, the speaker presents herself as a product of mixed heritage, carrying within her body the blood of both European colonizers and Indigenous women—specifically Salish and Cree. This embodied duality becomes the central tension of the poem.

The opening lines juxtapose the revolutionary legacy of "Gallic Bastille stormers" with the "soft, gentle ways of Salish/Cree womanhood," immediately establishing conflict between histories of European political upheaval and Indigenous cultural continuity. As the poem progresses, the speaker describes how laughter, voice, and spirit are fragmented, symbolizing the psychological violence inflicted by colonial histories.

Nature imagery—rain, earth, sunlight, dew—anchors the speaker in Indigenous connection to land, while European imagery such as sweatshops, wine, and Mediterranean landscapes reflects industrial exploitation and material comfort. These contrasting images highlight the clash between Indigenous relational worldviews and capitalist, colonial systems.

The speaker confronts the brutal legacy of European expansion—rape, plunder, and genocide—acknowledging that this history flows within her veins. Yet she neither denies nor fears this inheritance. Instead, she seeks to confront it honestly. The poem culminates in a moral awakening: the speaker rejects cycles of violence and calls for an end to slaughter and betrayal of humanity. War, therefore, is not only physical but also internal, historical, and ethical.

Critical Essay

"War" is a deeply embodied political poem that transforms the speaker's body into a site of historical conflict. Maracle resists abstract discussions of colonialism; instead, she situates violence in flesh, blood, voice, and memory. The poem's strength lies in its refusal to simplify identity into victim and oppressor. The speaker contains both, and this complexity becomes the foundation for ethical responsibility rather than paralysis.

The poem's title, "War," is deliberately expansive. While it evokes armed conflict, the poem primarily explores war as inherited trauma, waged within the self. The speaker's spirit is "split," her voice "mutilated," suggesting that colonial violence continues long after formal conquest ends. This aligns with Indigenous theories of intergenerational trauma, where history persists in the body.

Maracle's use of natural imagery contrasts sharply with images of European industrialization. Nature is portrayed as nurturing and grounding, while European modernity appears violent and alienating. However, Maracle avoids romanticizing Indigeneity. The speaker acknowledges her own "filth" and scars, insisting that ethical clarity requires confronting internalized violence as well as external oppression.

A key moment in the poem is the speaker's address to the "European thief; liar, bloodsucker." Rather than denying or erasing this lineage, she claims it without fear. This refusal to disown parts of herself challenges simplistic nationalist or purist identities. Maracle suggests that liberation does not come from denial but from reckoning.

The poem's ethical turn occurs when the speaker declares her commitment to "human life" and the necessity to stop slaughter. This marks a shift from inherited violence to conscious resistance. Importantly, Maracle does not advocate revenge but transformation—"to re-write history with my body." The body becomes a site of healing, resistance, and testimony.

Stylistically, the poem is fragmented, visceral, and confrontational. Its lack of conventional structure mirrors the fractured identity it depicts. The direct address, rhetorical questions, and abrupt tonal shifts force readers into discomfort, refusing passive consumption. Language itself becomes an act of resistance.

In conclusion, "War" is a powerful articulation of Indigenous feminist consciousness that exposes colonial violence while insisting on ethical responsibility and human solidarity. Lee Maracle transforms personal identity into political vision, arguing that true resistance begins with honesty, embodied memory, and a refusal to perpetuate inherited brutality. The poem ultimately redefines war—not as destruction of others, but as a struggle to reclaim humanity.

UNIT III: SHORT STORIES

Draupadi – Mahasweta Devi

About the author

Mahasweta Devi (1926–2016) was one of India's most influential writers, activists, and intellectuals, renowned for her unwavering commitment to social justice and the rights of marginalized communities. Writing primarily in Bengali, she focused on the lives of Adivasis, Dalits, landless laborers, and oppressed women, bringing their struggles into the literary and political mainstream.

Her literary career spans novels, short stories, essays, and journalistic writings, many of which expose state violence, class exploitation, patriarchy, and systemic injustice. Works such as *Mother of 1084*, *Rudali*, *Aranyer Adhikar*, and *Draupadi* are marked by stark realism, moral urgency, and political intensity. Rather than romanticizing suffering, Mahasweta Devi confronts readers with uncomfortable truths, using literature as a tool of resistance.

Beyond writing, Mahasweta Devi was a lifelong activist who worked closely with tribal communities across India, fighting for land rights, education, and dignity. Her activism deeply informed her literary vision, blurring the boundary between art and action. She received numerous awards, including the Jnanpith Award (1996), for her contribution to Indian literature.

Mahasweta Devi's legacy lies in her role as a conscience of the nation—a writer who transformed storytelling into a form of ethical and political engagement. Her works remain central to postcolonial studies, subaltern discourse, and feminist criticism, making her an indispensable figure in Indian and world literature.

"Draupadi" by Mahasweta Devi is a powerful short story about Dopdi Mejhen, a Santhal tribal woman and Naxalite revolutionary in West Bengal, who becomes a symbol of fierce resistance against patriarchal and state oppression after being captured, tortured, and raped by police, ultimately transforming her body into a defiant site of agency, subverting the mythological Draupadi to critique real-world caste, class, and gender injustice.

Key Aspects of the Story:

Character: Dopdi Mejhen: A tribal woman fighting for her people's rights, particularly access to water, against landlords and the state.

Context: Set during the Naxalite movement (late 1960s/early 1970s), highlighting the struggles of marginalized tribal communities.

Mythological Reinterpretation: Devi renames her protagonist “Draupadi,” referencing the Mahabharata, but contrasts her with the mythological figure; instead of divine intervention, Dopdi relies on her own defiance.

Climax: After being brutally raped by police, Dopdi walks out naked and defiant, challenging her tormentors and reclaiming her body and honor through her own strength, not divine grace.

Themes: Explores subaltern studies, gendered violence, state oppression, caste/class struggle, and female empowerment, making it a seminal work of Indian feminist and postcolonial literature.

Mahasweta Devi's Role:

A renowned Indian writer and activist (1926-2016) known for her advocacy for tribal and marginalized communities.

Her writing, often in a mix of Bengali dialects, gives voice to the oppressed, using literary realism to expose social injustices.

“Draupadi” remains a significant text, analyzed through feminist and postcolonial lenses (like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's work on the subaltern) for its potent critique of power structures.

Detailed Summary of Draupadi

“Draupadi” by Mahasweta Devi is a stark and unsettling short story that exposes the brutal realities of state violence, gendered oppression, and the silencing of tribal resistance in postcolonial India. Set against the backdrop of counter-insurgency operations in tribal regions, the story focuses on Dopdi Mejhen, a Santhal tribal woman who becomes a symbol of resistance against patriarchal and state power.

The narrative is set during a time of political unrest, loosely associated with the Naxalite movement, when the state conducts armed operations to suppress tribal insurgents. Dopdi and her husband Dulna Majhi are accused of participating in rebel activities, including the killing

of a landlord. They are declared fugitives, and a manhunt is launched to capture them "dead or alive."

Dopdi and Dulna live a life of constant movement, hiding in forests and surviving on meagre resources. Dulna is eventually captured and killed by the security forces. His death is reported casually, underscoring how the lives of tribal rebels are treated as expendable. Dopdi, however, manages to evade capture for a while, using her knowledge of the terrain and the support of local villagers.

Eventually, Dopdi is betrayed, captured, and brought to the army camp. Here the narrative takes a horrific turn. On the orders of Senanayak, the army officer in charge of the operation, Dopdi is subjected to systematic gang rape throughout the night. The violence is not portrayed as an act of individual lust but as a deliberate weapon of state power meant to break her spirit and extract information.

The following morning, Dopdi is ordered to be presented before Senanayak. Instead of covering herself, she walks naked toward him, her body wounded and bleeding. When told to clothe herself, Dopdi refuses. She confronts Senanayak, laughing defiantly and asking him how he expects her to cover a body that has been violated beyond repair.

The story ends with this powerful moment of confrontation. Dopdi, stripped of everything—clothes, dignity, physical safety—reclaims agency through her refusal to feel shame. The final image reverses traditional power relations: Senanayak, armed and authoritative, feels fear, while Dopdi, naked and wounded, stands unafraid.

Thus, the story transforms Dopdi from a victim into a figure of resistance, redefining strength, dignity, and protest.

Critical Essay

Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi is one of the most powerful works of resistance literature in Indian writing. Through its uncompromising portrayal of custodial rape and state violence, the story challenges dominant narratives of nationalism, democracy, and gender morality. It foregrounds the intersection of gender, class, caste, and power, making it central to feminist and subaltern discourse.

One of the most striking features of the story is its rewriting of the mythological Draupadi from the Mahabharata. In the epic, Draupadi is disrobed in a royal court but saved by divine

intervention. In contrast, Dopdi Mejhen receives no divine rescue. The absence of Krishna underscores the harsh reality of tribal women whose suffering goes unnoticed by society and the state. Mahasweta Devi thus dismantles mythic consolation and replaces it with political realism.

The story powerfully critiques the use of sexual violence as a tool of state repression. Dopdi's rape is not accidental or incidental; it is institutional, sanctioned, and systematic. By presenting rape as an act of political domination rather than individual crime, Mahasweta Devi exposes the brutal logic of counter-insurgency operations.

From a feminist perspective, Dopdi's refusal to clothe herself becomes a radical act. Traditionally, female nudity signifies shame and vulnerability. Here, it becomes a weapon of defiance. Dopdi rejects the patriarchal logic that equates a woman's honour with her body. Her nakedness confronts the male gaze and destabilizes masculine authority.

The narrative also functions within subaltern studies, giving voice to those excluded from mainstream history. Dopdi does not speak the language of law or ideology, yet her silence, laughter, and body become forms of political expression. Mahasweta Devi demonstrates that resistance need not be articulated through formal discourse; it can exist through embodied protest.

Stylistically, the story is marked by spare, unsentimental prose. The violence is narrated without melodrama, making it more disturbing. The authorial voice remains controlled but morally charged, refusing to allow readers the comfort of emotional distance.

The character of Senanayak represents the cold rationality of the state. He sees rebellion as a problem to be solved, not as a symptom of injustice. His fear at the end of the story reveals the fragility of institutional power when confronted with moral courage.

In conclusion, Draupadi is a profound indictment of patriarchal nationalism and state brutality. It redefines heroism by locating it in the broken yet unyielding body of a tribal woman. Mahasweta Devi transforms literature into an act of witnessing, forcing readers to confront uncomfortable truths about power, gender, and justice.

Character

1. Dopdi Mejhen

Dopdi is the central figure and a symbol of tribal resistance. She evolves from a hunted rebel into an icon of defiance. Her refusal to feel shame after sexual violence challenges patriarchal norms and reclaims agency. Dopdi embodies moral courage and political resistance.

2. Dulna Majhi

Dopdi's husband and fellow rebel. His death represents the expendability of tribal male bodies under state violence. Though his role is brief, his execution highlights the brutality of counter-insurgency tactics.

3. Senanayak

The army officer leading the operation. He symbolizes bureaucratic, patriarchal state power. His fear in the final scene reveals the limits of institutional authority when confronted with ethical resistance.

The Adivasi Will Not Dance (Chapter 10) – Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar

About the author

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar is a contemporary Indian writer known for giving a powerful voice to Adivasi (tribal) life and experiences in Indian English literature. He was born in Jharkhand and belongs to the Santhal Adivasi community, which deeply influences his writing. Professionally, he is trained as a medical doctor, but literature remains his strongest medium of social expression.

Shekhar's writing focuses on the real, lived realities of Adivasi communities, including displacement, poverty, cultural exploitation, state violence, and identity struggles in post-independence India. He is particularly known for rejecting romanticized portrayals of tribal life and instead presenting raw, honest, and often uncomfortable truths.

His most acclaimed work, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015), is a collection of short stories that critiques development politics and the marginalization of indigenous people. Other notable works include *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* and *My Father's Garden*. His bold themes have sparked debates and even controversy, highlighting the political courage of his writing.

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar stands out as an important voice in contemporary Indian English literature, especially for bringing Adivasi resistance, identity, and dignity into the literary mainstream in a direct and uncompromising manner.

Summary

The Adivasi Will Not Dance: A story of self-realization and helplessness: The title story of the book is about Mangal Murmu, an old Santhal man who has trained a dance troupe for years. The short story speaks of his refusal to perform a dance for a high-profile function and accordingly his and his group's humiliation and suffering they have to undergo. Hansda reveals that the main inspiration to pen down this particular story came to him in 2013 when the then Indian President Sri Pranab Mukherjee visited Jharkhand in West Bengal to inaugurate a thermal power plant project. The occasion had caused turmoil and agitation especially among the Adivasis on fear that the ambitious project would displace them from their homeland rendering them homeless and the concerned State government's indifference towards preserving their interests made them restless. Shekhar in this story gives voice and words to the untold sentiments and outlooks of the Santhal. His narrative breaks the Stereotyping where generally the depressed and downtrodden remain silent under the tyrannical circumstances. Here, Mangal Murmu, being the epitome of marginalized group, shuns all his fears and on behalf of the all Adivasis, he boldly announces that "We Adivasi will not dance anymore' what is wrong with that? We are like toys ---someone presses our 'ON' button, or turns a key in our backsides, and we Santhals start beating rhythms on our tamak and tumdak, or start blowing tunes on our tiriyo while someone snatches away our very dancing grounds. Tell me, am I wrong?" (Shekhar 170).

His self-realization speaks for all the Santhals in general who are obviously tormented by the unanswered questions like "All of us Adivasis are fools. Down the years, down generations, the Diku have taken advantage of our foolishness. Tell me if I am wrong." (Shekhar 170. Over the ages, the uneducated Santhals are hoaxed and outwitted. The political leaders use(mis) them for their own benefits and regard them just as puppets. The ruling government overlooks how the rich sections of the society like merchant, businessman and officerstake advantages of their physical labour. An explicit demarcation prevails between higher class society comprising of affluent all Diku like Marwari, Sindhi, Mandal, Bhagal, Muslim and lower-caste Dalits like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Shekhar highlights the boundary between these two classes thus: "They have built big houses for themselves in town; they wear nice clothes; they

send their children to good schools in far away places; when sick, they get themselves treated by the best doctors in Ranchi. Patna. Bhagalpur. Malda. Bardhaman. Kolkata. What do we Santhals get in return? Tatters to wear. Barely enough food. Such diseases that we can't breathe properly, we cough blood and forever remain bare bones. For education, our children are at the mercy of either those free government schools where teachers come only to cook the midday meal, or those Kiristan missionary schools where our children are constantly asked to stop worshipping our Bonga-Buru and start revering Jisu and Mariam." (Shekhar 172). Owing to want of adequate education, proper knowledge, and having no significant Santhal leaders, they fail to make them united and to make them feel how they are robbed of their vital energy and taken away their identities and distinct cultural formation under the bourgeois social systems. Under industrialization, they are exploited and even no capitalist is interested inprotecting unique cultural heritage of its labour class. Anthony Imoisi Hegbinosa in his article entitled An Analysis of Karl Marx's Theory of Value on the Contemporary Capitalist Economy (2012) points out that "Marx claims that due to economic inequality among these two classes, the purchase of labour cannot occur under 'free conditions'. Since capitalists control the means of production and workers control only their labour, the worker is naturally coerced into allowing their labour to be exploited. He believes that private ownership of the means of production enriches the capitalists (owner of capital) at the expense of the workers ('the rich get richer and the poor get poorer'). The capitalists place a higher value on the monetary value of man rather than the unique characteristics of each person." (Hegbinosa). Besides the State Government seems callous to the right claims of the aboriginal people as it pathetically comes under the control of the dominant ruling classes, i.e., capitalists. It is rather mindful to defense its political interests than safeguard oppressed classes' necessary rights. A societal system under such political atmosphere strengthens predominance of those ruling classes, inevitably bringing a diplomatic unrest between ruling class and labour class. In the chapter entitled Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy in book Marxism, Socialism and Religion (2001), Frederick Engels's comment is worthy to be mentioned here: "The state presents itself to us as the first ideological power over man. Society creates for itself an organ for the safeguarding of its common interests against internal and external attacks. This organ is the state power. Hardly come into being, this organ makes itself independent vis-à-vis society; and indeed, the more so, the more it becomes the organ of a particular class, the more it directly enforces the supremacy of that class. The fight of the oppressed class against the ruling class becomes necessarily a political fight, a fight first of all against the political dominance of this class." (Marx & Engels 78).

In such critical moments of political milieu, Mangal Murmu realizes that they have no remarkable descendants of the great rebels Sido and Kanhu. They are devoid of essential power, velour and encouragement to establish their rights. Rather they passively accept their misfortunes. These self-realization echoes in the words of him: "Yes, there are no shouters, no powerful voice among us Santhals. And we Santhals have no money-though we are born on lands under which are buried riches. We Santhals do not know how to protect our riches. We only know how to escape." (Shekhar 176).

The moving ending of this short story raises several thought-provoking issues validating the flourishing industrialization at the cost of demolishing the tribal community. A contradictory milieu has been grown among the Santhals. They are at a loss. A booming economy of the country puts them in a pendulum-ridden stance, absorbing their simple happiness in life and destroying their peace of minds. No doubt, they barely require economic development but for this, they are not ready to be uprooted from their original soil and not ready to forsake their cultural matrix. The plea becomes a general document for all the tribals and marginalized Dalit people in course of their retaining and growing unique existence in a society. They are forced to yield to civilized snares. They are treated as playthings in the hands of affluent merchant class and high-caste people. This helplessness and self-realization finds its best expression in the final words of Mangal Murmu thus: "We will sing and dance before you but tell us, do we have a reason to sing and dance? Do we have a reason to be happy? You will now start building the power plant, but this plant will be the end of us all, the end of all the Adivasi. These men sitting beside you have told you that this power plant will change our fortunes, but these same men have forced us out of our homes and villages. We have nowhere to go, nowhere to grow our crops. How can this power plant be good for us? And how can we Adivasis dance and be happy? Unless we are given back our homes and land, we will not sing and dance. We Adivasis will not dance. The Adivasis will not (Shekhar 187). Surely his voice is chocked with overflowing of sorrow, mortification, insult, humiliation, exploitation and what not that a Dalit experiences being a part of so-called civilized society.

UNIT IV: NOVEL

Aranyer Adhikar (Rights over the Forest)– Mahasweta Devi

About the author

Mahasweta Devi (1926–2016) was one of India's most influential writers, activists, and intellectuals, renowned for her unwavering commitment to social justice and the rights of marginalized communities. Writing primarily in Bengali, she focused on the lives of Adivasis, Dalits, landless laborers, and oppressed women, bringing their struggles into the literary and political mainstream.

Her literary career spans novels, short stories, essays, and journalistic writings, many of which expose state violence, class exploitation, patriarchy, and systemic injustice. Works such as *Mother of 1084*, *Rudali*, *Aranyer Adhikar*, and *Draupadi* are marked by stark realism, moral urgency, and political intensity. Rather than romanticizing suffering, Mahasweta Devi confronts readers with uncomfortable truths, using literature as a tool of resistance.

Beyond writing, Mahasweta Devi was a lifelong activist who worked closely with tribal communities across India, fighting for land rights, education, and dignity. Her activism deeply informed her literary vision, blurring the boundary between art and action. She received numerous awards, including the Jnanpith Award (1996), for her contribution to Indian literature.

Mahasweta Devi's legacy lies in her role as a conscience of the nation—a writer who transformed storytelling into a form of ethical and political engagement. Her works remain central to postcolonial studies, subaltern discourse, and feminist criticism, making her an indispensable figure in Indian and world literature.

Detailed Summary of Aranyer Adhikar

Aranyer Adhikar ("Rights over the Forest") is a powerful historical narrative by Mahasweta Devi that focuses on the tribal resistance led by Birsa Munda, a legendary Adivasi leader of the late nineteenth century. The text foregrounds the struggle of indigenous communities against colonial exploitation, forest laws, and feudal oppression, presenting history from a subaltern perspective.

The narrative is set in Chotanagpur, a forested region inhabited by the Munda tribe. The Mundas traditionally lived in close harmony with nature, believing that land and forest were

communal resources. However, British colonial policies disrupted this relationship. Through the introduction of forest laws, private ownership, taxes, and moneylenders, the British systematically dispossessed the tribals of their ancestral lands.

Mahasweta Devi shows how the zamindari system, backed by colonial authority, turned the Mundas into bonded labourers on their own land. Forests, once sacred and life-sustaining, were declared government property. Tribal access to wood, food, and shelter was criminalized. Hunger, displacement, and cultural erosion followed.

At the center of this exploitation emerges Birsa Munda, a charismatic young tribal leader who awakens his people to the idea that the forest is their birthright. Birsa is portrayed not merely as a political leader but as a spiritual and cultural force. He combines religious reform with political resistance, urging the Mundas to reject alien religions, landlords, and colonial authority.

Birsa's movement, often referred to as the Ulgulan (The Great Tumult), seeks to reclaim tribal land and forest rights. He mobilizes the community by invoking indigenous beliefs and collective memory. His leadership instills courage and a sense of dignity among the oppressed tribals, transforming fear into resistance.

The British administration responds with brutal repression. Birsa is arrested, imprisoned, and subjected to inhuman treatment. The narrative exposes the colonial state's fear of tribal unity and its reliance on violence to suppress dissent. Despite Birsa's imprisonment and eventual death in jail under mysterious circumstances, his struggle leaves a lasting impact on tribal consciousness.

Mahasweta Devi does not romanticize Birsa's rebellion. She shows the limitations of tribal resistance against a powerful imperial system. Yet, Birsa's sacrifice becomes symbolic of an unfulfilled struggle for justice. The forest, in the end, remains contested terrain—claimed by the state but spiritually owned by the tribals.

The narrative concludes with a sense of historical irony: although Birsa dies young and defeated, his vision continues to inspire future movements for tribal rights. The text thus preserves a suppressed history and asserts that the fight for forest rights is inseparable from the fight for human dignity.

Critical Essay

Mahasweta Devi's Aranyer Adhikar stands as a landmark work of resistance literature that challenges colonial historiography and foregrounds tribal voices silenced by mainstream history. Through the life and struggle of Birsa Munda, the text interrogates issues of land, power, identity, and justice, making it a crucial contribution to subaltern studies and eco-political discourse.

One of the central concerns of the text is colonial exploitation of natural resources. The British forest policies transformed nature into a commodity and criminalized indigenous ways of life. Mahasweta Devi exposes how the colonial state used law as an instrument of dispossession. The forest, once a shared ecological space, becomes a symbol of power and control. Thus, Aranyer Adhikar critiques not only colonialism but also capitalist modernity.

The text is deeply rooted in subaltern historiography. Conventional history often marginalizes tribal revolts as sporadic or insignificant. Mahasweta Devi, however, reconstructs Birsa Munda's rebellion as a legitimate political movement. By writing history from below, she challenges elite narratives and restores agency to tribal communities.

Another significant aspect is the fusion of spirituality and politics. Birsa's leadership draws strength from indigenous religious beliefs. His spiritual authority becomes a means of political mobilization. This challenges Western notions of secular resistance and highlights how tribal epistemologies differ from colonial rationalism.

Mahasweta Devi's narrative technique is uncompromising and realist. She avoids sentimentalism while documenting violence, hunger, and exploitation. Her language is sharp, direct, and charged with moral urgency. The authorial voice often intrudes, reminding readers that this is not distant history but a continuing injustice.

The text also functions as an eco-critical narrative. The struggle for forest rights is shown as inseparable from environmental sustainability. Tribal communities emerge as custodians of nature, in contrast to colonial extractive practices. This anticipates contemporary debates on environmental justice and indigenous knowledge systems.

Importantly, Aranyer Adhikar critiques the failure of postcolonial India to fully address tribal marginalization. Though set in colonial times, the text implicitly questions modern democratic structures that continue to deny tribals their rights. Mahasweta Devi thus transforms historical fiction into a political warning.

In conclusion, Aranyer Adhikar is not merely a historical account of Birsa Munda's rebellion; it is a powerful indictment of systems that privilege profit over people. The text asserts that the right over the forest is a fundamental human right. Mahasweta Devi redefines literature as an act of resistance, memory, and moral responsibility.

Arrow of God - Chinua Achebe

About the author

Chinua Achebe (1930–2013) was a Nigerian novelist, poet, essayist, and critic, widely regarded as the founding figure of modern African literature in English. Born in Ogidi, Nigeria, Achebe belonged to the Igbo community, whose culture, traditions, and worldview strongly shape his writing. He wrote in English while infusing it with Igbo idioms, proverbs, and oral storytelling techniques, thereby reshaping the colonial language to express African realities.

Achebe rose to international prominence with his first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), which challenged colonial stereotypes of Africa by presenting a complex, dignified portrayal of pre-colonial Igbo society and the disruptive impact of European colonialism. His other major novels—*No Longer at Ease*, *Arrow of God*, *A Man of the People*, and *Anthills of the Savannah*—collectively explore themes such as colonial encounter, cultural conflict, political corruption, leadership failure, and post-independence disillusionment.

As a literary critic, Achebe famously argued that Africa must "write back" to imperial narratives, particularly criticizing works like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* for dehumanizing representations of Africans. His essays, including those collected in *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, articulate his belief that literature carries a social and moral responsibility.

Achebe's contribution extends beyond literature to cultural and political thought. He served as a professor, editor, and public intellectual, using literature as a means of reclaiming African history and voice. Widely honored for his work, Achebe remains a central figure in postcolonial literature, whose writings continue to influence writers and scholars worldwide.

Summary

The novel is set in the rural villages of the Igbo people of Nigeria during the 1920s and the story begins with a bitter feud between the villages of Umuaro and Okperi. The residents of Umuaro are at the brink of war with their neighbors in Okperi over a piece of disputed land.

Nwaka, a man of considerable wealth and influence in Umuaro, pushes for the war against the advisement of Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu, ruling deity of Umuaro. In doing so, Nwaka audaciously defies Ulu, disregarding the deity and his chosen representative, Ezeulu, the only man who advises against engaging in tribal warfare.

The fight comes to a sudden halt through the involvement of an English colonial official, Capt. T.K. Winterbottom, who enforces the peace by destroying all the firearms within Umuaro. Winterbottom is compelled to side with Okperi after Ezeulu, resentful of his people's heedlessness, testifies that Umuaro has no legitimate claim to the land. Despite the avoidance of bloodshed, some residents of Umuaro—including Nwaka—see Ezeulu's testimony as a betrayal of his people.

A period of five relatively peaceful years passes, and a sense of normalcy returns to Umuaro. Christian missionaries have now made their way into Umuaro, converting whoever they can and convincing the people that the worship of their old gods is sinful and an exercise in futility. Seeing the faith of the white man slowly take root and gain ground in their community, Ezeulu sends one of his sons, Oduche, to learn as much as he can of the white man's culture by having him attend a church that the missionaries have set up in Umuaro. Meanwhile, the enmity between Ezeulu and Nwaka has worsened and is now full-blown antagonism. Nwaka bolsters his position through his friendship with Ezidemili, high priest of the lesser god, Idemili, who has long been jealous of Ezeulu/Ulu's reigning power.

Ezidemili's ill will toward Ezeulu is worsened when Oduche—whom John Goodcountry has tasked with killing a totemic python, symbol of Idemili—locks the venerated serpent inside a box in a botched attempt to kill it outright. Any attempt to move or harm the holy snake is taken as a terrible insult to Idemili. When news of the violation reaches Ezidemili, he sends an envoy to Ezeulu to ask how he intends to make amends for his son's crime. Ezeulu takes this questioning poorly and insults the high priest of Idemili in response.

While the tensions within the various Igbo factions continue to rise, Winterbottom prepares to carry out the British policy of indirect rule, which aims to appoint Africans as puppet leaders. T.K. Winterbottom sends emissaries to invite Ezeulu, whom he remembers favorably from the Okperi dispute, to Government Hill in order to name him "Paramount Chief." Ezeulu refuses to comply and is eventually imprisoned for two months for his defiance.

Ezeulu rejects the new title, but Clarke, Assistant Deputy Officer to the now-ill Winterbottom, releases him nonetheless. Back in Umuaro, Ezeulu finally decides to take revenge on his people

for their defiance five years ago and subsequent irreverence by refusing to initiate the New Yam Feast, the important harvest festival. He refuses to open the harvest because, due to his detention, he could not eat the ritual yams at two new moons and thus has two left over from the previous crop (the New Yam Feast can only be called when there are no yams left). Thus on Ulu's authority, and exploiting this technicality, Ezeulu refuses the people their staple crop. The village elders even agree to accept Ulu's punishment if Ezeulu announces the harvest, but the Chief Priest rebuffs them.

News of the infighting attracts the attention of John Goodcountry, a Christian missionary, who sees the unrest as an opportunity to exploit in order to win more converts. The shrewd catechist announces that anyone who wishes to harvest his or her yams free of divine retribution has only to make an offering to the Christian God, instead of to Ulu.

The killing blow to Ezeulu/Ulu's reputation comes with the tragic, untimely death of one of his sons, the strong, handsome Obika. The villagers take this turn of events as a sure sign that their god, Ulu, has abandoned his chosen cleric, undermining or possibly even destroying himself in the process. Rather than starve, the villagers flock to the church to make offerings to the Christian God.

Critical Analysis

Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* is a profound exploration of power, religion, and colonial disruption in Igbo society. Often regarded as the most complex novel in Achebe's African trilogy, the novel shifts focus from cultural clash alone to the internal tensions within African society that colonialism exploits. Through the tragic fall of Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu, Achebe presents a nuanced critique of authority, rigidity, and the fragile balance between tradition and change.

At the center of the novel is Ezeulu, the chief priest of the deity Ulu, whose role is to mediate between the god and the six villages of Umuaro. Unlike Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, Ezeulu is an intellectual and reflective figure, deeply conscious of his sacred duty. However, his understanding of power is problematic. He believes himself to be merely an "arrow in the hand of Ulu," a servant executing divine will. Ironically, this belief enables his authoritarian rigidity and contributes to his downfall. Achebe thus interrogates the dangers of confusing religious authority with personal pride.

Achebe presents colonialism not simply as an external evil but as a force that enters through existing cracks in indigenous systems. The rivalry between Umuaro and Okperi, and the internal divisions among Umuaro's elders, weaken communal unity. The British colonial officers—Captain Winterbottom and Mr. Clarke—misunderstand Igbo political and religious structures, attempting to impose indirect rule by appointing Ezeulu as a "paramount chief." This misreading leads to chaos, highlighting the arrogance and ignorance of colonial administration.

Religion functions as a central metaphor in the novel. Ulu, the communal deity, symbolizes collective harmony, while Ezeulu's increasing isolation reflects the erosion of that unity. When Ezeulu refuses to eat the sacred yams on time—thereby delaying the harvest—he claims obedience to divine law. However, the community perceives his action as personal vengeance against Umuaro for refusing to support him during his conflict with the colonial authorities. Achebe raises a critical question: Who interprets divine will—the god or the priest?

Achebe's portrayal of Christianity is complex and strategic. Unlike the violent rupture in *Things Fall Apart*, Christianity in *Arrow of God* appears as a subtle alternative rather than a direct assault. Missionaries exploit the crisis caused by Ezeulu's refusal, offering harvest salvation to starving villagers. The conversion of Ezeulu's son, Obika's tragic death, and the gradual shift toward Christianity symbolize how colonial religion gains ground not through force but through opportunism and necessity.

Tragedy in *Arrow of God* is deeply classical in structure. Ezeulu's fall resembles that of a Greek tragic hero whose hamartia is excessive pride and inflexibility. His refusal to compromise—even for the survival of his people—reveals the limits of absolute devotion to tradition. Achebe does not portray Ezeulu as a villain but as a tragic figure trapped between divine duty and human responsibility.

Stylistically, Achebe's use of Igbo proverbs, rituals, and oral traditions strengthens the authenticity of the narrative. The language balances ethnographic detail with philosophical depth, making the novel both culturally specific and universally resonant. Achebe avoids idealizing pre-colonial society, instead presenting it as dynamic, contested, and human.

In conclusion, *Arrow of God* is not merely a novel about colonial encounter but a meditation on power, responsibility, and moral failure. Achebe suggests that societies collapse not only due to external invasion but also due to internal rigidity and misjudgment. Through Ezeulu's

tragic end, Achebe warns against absolutism in any form—religious, political, or ideological—making *Arrow of God* a timeless and deeply relevant work.

UNIT V: DRAMA

Budhan (From Painted Words: An Anthology of Tribal Literature) – G.N. Devy

About the author

G. N. Devy (Ganesh Narayan Devy) is a distinguished Indian literary critic, cultural theorist, linguist, and activist, widely known for his work on tribal literature, language preservation, and postcolonial studies. Born in 1950 in Gujarat, Devy has played a crucial role in expanding Indian literary studies beyond canonical and metropolitan traditions to include Adivasi, oral, and marginalized voices.

He is best known for his influential critical work *After Amnesia: Tradition and Change in Indian Literary Criticism* (1992), in which he critiques the dominance of Western literary theories in Indian academia and argues for the recognition of indigenous literary traditions and oral cultures. Devy challenges the idea of a single literary canon and emphasizes the plurality of Indian languages and narratives.

Beyond scholarship, G. N. Devy is a leading language rights activist. He founded the Bhasha Research and Publication Centre in Baroda and initiated the People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI), a landmark project documenting India's endangered and lesser-known languages. Through this work, Devy highlights the link between language loss, cultural erosion, and social marginalization.

Devy has also served as an academic, editor, and mentor, shaping contemporary debates on translation studies, cultural memory, postcolonial identity, and indigenous knowledge systems. His contribution lies in redefining literature as a living cultural practice rather than a purely textual tradition. G. N. Devy remains a vital figure in Indian intellectual life, bridging scholarship, activism, and cultural preservation.

Summary of Budhan

"Budhan" by G. N. Devy is a powerful prose narrative that exposes the harsh realities faced by India's nomadic tribes through the tragic life and death of Budhan Sabar. The text is based on real events and combines elements of biography, social documentation, and protest literature.

It focuses on Budhan, a member of the Sabar tribe, historically branded as a “criminal tribe” under British colonial rule.

The narrative begins by placing Budhan within the broader context of India’s denotified tribes—communities that were stigmatized as criminals by birth during colonial times. Even after Independence, the label continued to haunt them socially and institutionally. Budhan’s life becomes representative of the collective suffering of such marginalized groups who remain outside the protection of law and citizenship.

Budhan is portrayed as a simple, illiterate tribal man whose life is shaped by poverty, displacement, and constant surveillance by the police. The police treat him not as an individual citizen but as a suspect by default. His repeated arrests, harassment, and custodial abuse reveal how the colonial mindset survives in postcolonial governance. Budhan is arrested on flimsy charges and subjected to brutal interrogation, highlighting the routine violence inflicted on tribal bodies.

The narrative reaches its tragic climax when Budhan dies in police custody. The police attempt to pass off his death as suicide, claiming that he hanged himself inside the lock-up. However, the circumstances surrounding his death raise serious doubts. The injuries on his body suggest custodial torture rather than suicide. Devy carefully documents these inconsistencies to expose the truth behind state violence and institutional cover-ups.

After Budhan’s death, his family—especially his wife—faces indifference and intimidation. There is no immediate justice, no accountability, and no sympathy from authorities. The tribal community is left helpless, fearful of further reprisals. The silence imposed on them becomes another form of violence.

Devy also narrates his own role as an activist-intellectual who takes up Budhan’s case. He investigates the death, mobilizes public opinion, and attempts to secure justice through legal and civil society channels. The text thus moves beyond individual tragedy to become a narrative of resistance. Budhan, though dead, emerges as a symbol of protest against systemic oppression.

The essay concludes with a sense of unresolved injustice. While Budhan’s case brings attention to the plight of denotified tribes, structural change remains elusive. The narrative leaves the reader with discomfort and moral urgency, forcing them to confront the failures of democracy, law, and human rights in India.

In essence, Budhan is not merely a life story but a social document that records the continued marginalization of tribal communities. It transforms personal suffering into collective memory and challenges the reader to acknowledge voices that history and literature have long ignored.

Critical Essay

G. N. Devy's Budhan is a seminal work of tribal and subaltern literature that interrogates the ethics of modern democracy, the legacy of colonialism, and the politics of exclusion in postcolonial India. Through the life and death of Budhan Sabar, Devy exposes how marginalized communities remain trapped in systems of surveillance and violence long after the formal end of colonial rule.

One of the most striking aspects of Budhan is its exposure of colonial continuity. The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 classified certain nomadic communities as criminals by birth. Although repealed after Independence, its psychological and administrative impact persists. Budhan's repeated arrests demonstrate how legal abolition does not necessarily translate into social emancipation. Devy critiques the state for reproducing colonial attitudes, thereby questioning the moral foundations of Indian modernity.

The text is also significant as an example of activist literature. Devy does not maintain the distance of a detached observer; instead, he participates directly in the struggle for justice. This challenges conventional notions of literary objectivity. By inserting himself into the narrative, Devy asserts that writing about oppression without intervention is ethically inadequate. Literature, for him, becomes a tool of resistance and social transformation.

From a subaltern studies perspective, Budhan gives voice to those excluded from mainstream historiography. Budhan does not leave behind written records; his story survives through mediation by an intellectual ally. While this raises questions about representation, Devy remains self-conscious about his position and uses his privilege to amplify, rather than appropriate, the tribal voice. The narrative thus attempts to bridge the gap between the oral world of tribal life and the written world of academic discourse.

The theme of custodial violence is central to the essay. Budhan's death symbolizes the vulnerability of marginalized bodies within state institutions. The police station, meant to uphold law and order, becomes a site of terror. Devy exposes how law functions selectively, protecting the powerful while criminalizing the poor. This critique aligns Budhan with human rights literature and protest writing.

Stylistically, Budhan is marked by simplicity and documentary realism. Devy avoids ornamental language, allowing facts and lived experiences to speak for themselves. This restraint enhances the moral force of the narrative. The blending of reportage, testimony, and reflection blurs the boundary between literature and social science, making the text interdisciplinary in nature.

Symbolically, Budhan represents not just an individual but an entire community erased from national consciousness. His name becomes a metaphor for countless unnamed victims of state violence. The essay compels readers—especially educated, urban audiences—to confront their complicity in sustaining systems of exclusion.

In conclusion, Budhan is a profound indictment of social injustice and a landmark in Indian tribal literature. It challenges dominant literary canons, questions the success of postcolonial democracy, and redefines the role of the writer as a moral witness. Through Budhan's silenced voice, Devy forces literature to speak truth to power and demands accountability from society at large.

Mother of 1084 – Mahasweta Devi

About the author

Mahasweta Devi (1926–2016) was one of India's most influential writers, activists, and intellectuals, renowned for her unwavering commitment to social justice and the rights of marginalized communities. Writing primarily in Bengali, she focused on the lives of Adivasis, Dalits, landless laborers, and oppressed women, bringing their struggles into the literary and political mainstream.

Her literary career spans novels, short stories, essays, and journalistic writings, many of which expose state violence, class exploitation, patriarchy, and systemic injustice. Works such as *Mother of 1084*, *Rudali*, *Aranyer Adhikar*, and *Draupadi* are marked by stark realism, moral urgency, and political intensity. Rather than romanticizing suffering, Mahasweta Devi confronts readers with uncomfortable truths, using literature as a tool of resistance.

Beyond writing, Mahasweta Devi was a lifelong activist who worked closely with tribal communities across India, fighting for land rights, education, and dignity. Her activism deeply informed her literary vision, blurring the boundary between art and action. She received numerous awards, including the Jnanpith Award (1996), for her contribution to Indian literature.

Mahasweta Devi's legacy lies in her role as a conscience of the nation—a writer who transformed storytelling into a form of ethical and political engagement. Her works remain central to postcolonial studies, subaltern discourse, and feminist criticism, making her an indispensable figure in Indian and world literature.

Summary

Mother of 1084 is set in Calcutta during the early 1970s, a period marked by political unrest and the rise of the Naxalite movement. The novel opens on January 17, 1970, with a stark and unsettling scene in a police morgue. Sujata Chatterjee, a middle-class woman, arrives to identify the dead body of her son, Brati Chatterjee, who has been killed in a police encounter. In the morgue register, Brati is identified not by name but as corpse number 1084, immediately establishing the theme of dehumanization.

Brati's death shocks Sujata, but what hurts her even more is the reaction of her family. Her husband Dibyanath Chatterjee, a successful corporate executive, is more concerned about social reputation and professional consequences than about his son's death. He urges silence and secrecy, fearing that Brati's association with Naxalite politics will tarnish the family's image. Sujata's daughters also distance themselves from Brati's memory, reflecting the family's emotional and moral disconnect.

As the narrative progresses, the novel moves between present and past, reconstructing Brati's life through Sujata's memories and encounters. Sujata recalls Brati as a sensitive, thoughtful young man who grew increasingly disturbed by social inequality, exploitation, and injustice. Unlike his affluent family members, Brati rejects material comfort and becomes involved with revolutionary politics.

Driven by grief and a growing need for understanding, Sujata begins to meet Brati's friends and comrades, including Nandini, a young woman who shared Brati's political commitment. Through these interactions, Sujata gradually learns about the ideals and motivations behind Brati's activism. She realizes that her son was not a misguided criminal, as the state portrays him, but a deeply ethical individual who chose resistance over privilege.

The novel reveals the brutal suppression of the Naxalite movement by the state. Brati and his companions are hunted, tortured, and killed by the police. Their deaths are covered up as "encounters," and their bodies are disposed of without dignity. The state machinery works in

collaboration with elite social structures, ensuring that revolutionary voices are silenced and erased.

Sujata's emotional journey forms the heart of the novel. Initially isolated and powerless, she slowly undergoes a transformation. As she listens to the stories of Brati's comrades, her personal grief evolves into political awareness. She begins to question the values she once accepted—family respectability, social conformity, and passive obedience.

In contrast, Dibyanath Chatterjee remains unchanged. He represents the moral emptiness of the bourgeois class, benefiting from the existing system while ignoring its violence. His refusal to acknowledge Brati's humanity deepens the emotional gap between husband and wife. Sujata's alienation within her own home reflects the broader alienation of those who resist injustice.

The novel ends not with closure but with continuing grief and resistance. Sujata does not achieve justice for her son, nor does she find comfort. Instead, she gains clarity and resolve. By remembering Brati as a person rather than a number, she reclaims his identity from state erasure. Her transformation signifies the awakening of conscience and the possibility of moral resistance, even in the face of overwhelming power.

In conclusion, *Mother of 1084* traces the journey of a mother from silent suffering to political consciousness. Through Sujata's story, Mahasweta Devi exposes the cruelty of state repression, the hypocrisy of middle-class society, and the human cost of silenced revolutions. The novel stands as a poignant testimony to memory, resistance, and maternal courage.

Critical Analysis

Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084* is a powerful political novel that exposes the brutality of the Indian state and the moral bankruptcy of middle-class society during the period of the Naxalite movement in the 1970s. Through the personal grief of a mother whose son is reduced to a number in the morgue, Devi interrogates themes of state violence, class oppression, and the silencing of revolutionary voices. The novel transforms maternal sorrow into political awakening.

At the center of the narrative is Sujata Chatterjee, the mother of Brati Chatterjee, whose corpse is identified only as "1084" in the police morgue. This numerical erasure symbolizes how the state strips political rebels of identity and humanity. Brati's death is not merely an individual tragedy but a reflection of systemic violence against dissent. Mahasweta Devi uses this dehumanization to critique a state that prioritizes order and power over justice and compassion.

Sujata's grief is sharply contrasted with the reaction of her family, particularly her husband Dibyanath Chatterjee, a self-serving corporate executive who represents bourgeois hypocrisy. Dibyanath's primary concern is social reputation rather than moral responsibility. His indifference highlights the moral emptiness of the elite class that benefits from existing power structures while remaining detached from social injustice. Through this contrast, Devi condemns the complacency of the middle class.

One of the novel's major strengths lies in its non-linear narrative structure, which moves between past and present. This fragmented storytelling mirrors Sujata's psychological state and gradually reconstructs Brati's ideological journey. Through conversations with Brati's friends and comrades, Sujata begins to understand her son's political awakening and the reasons behind his rebellion. Her mourning thus evolves into political consciousness.

Mahasweta Devi portrays the Naxalite movement not as blind extremism but as a response to deep-rooted inequalities, exploitation, and systemic failure. While the novel does not romanticize violence, it insists on acknowledging the conditions that produce rebellion. Brati and his comrades are shown as ethically driven individuals who reject the comfort of middle-class life to stand with the oppressed. Their deaths expose the state's fear of transformative ideas.

Motherhood in the novel transcends biological bonds and becomes a site of resistance. Sujata's journey challenges the traditional image of the passive, self-sacrificing mother. Unlike other women in her family who conform to patriarchal norms, Sujata questions authority and confronts uncomfortable truths. Her silence gradually turns into defiance, symbolizing the awakening of suppressed voices.

The novel's language is stark and unsentimental, reflecting the harsh realities it depicts. Mahasweta Devi avoids melodrama, allowing political critique to emerge through lived experience. The repeated imagery of the morgue, blood, and absence reinforces the theme of loss while emphasizing institutional cruelty.

In conclusion, *Mother of 1084* is a searing indictment of state repression and social apathy. By linking private grief with public history, Mahasweta Devi demonstrates how personal loss can become a catalyst for political awakening. The novel challenges readers to confront uncomfortable questions about justice, responsibility, and complicity. It remains a landmark work in Indian literature, giving voice to those erased by power and restoring dignity to resistance.