



## Voice of a Mother's Protest in Mahasweta Devi's "Mother of 1084"

Dr. Sumit Kumari Dahiya, Assistant Professor of English  
MKJK Mahavidyalya, Rohtak

### Abstract:

Mahasweta Devi was awarded Jnanpith Award in 1996 for "Mother of 1084" by South African Freedom fighter and president Nelson Mandela. It is outcome of Devi's witness of the Naxalite movement and its after effects Devi successfully depicts merciless killing of youth and its impact. The story embodies four chapters, Dusk, Afternoon, Evening and Night. Sujata shows mirror to the members of her family as an outcome of suffocation due to patriarchal system. No Mother ever forgets her dead child. This personal loss bears a universal phenomenon. Sujata thinks that the human society is devoid of humanity. At last Sujata decides to leave the house. Her appendix bursts which symbolizes bursting breaking and spreading the protest for rights and against exploitation.

ISSN : 2348-5612 © URR



**Key Word:** *Naxalite Movement, Patriarchy, Protest, Rebellion, Novel, Symbolism.*

Mahasweta Devi's literary recitations, through different genres novels, short story, drama, essay etc. delve as narratives of protest. Her works are committed to strive towards its aim of achieving the transformation of the unjust system. She was awarded with Sahitya Akademi Award (1979), Padam Shri(1986), Jnanpith Award (1996) Raman Magsaysary Award (1997), Padam Vibhushan (2006), Yashwantrao Chawan National Award (2010), Bangabibhushan (2011), Hall of Fame Lifetime Achievement Sahityabrahama (2012) and many more. She has written 100 novels and 20 short stores. 'Rudali' and Hazar Chaurasi Ki Maa' are internationally acclaimed films from her novels. She bridges the gaps between multiple dimension from subaltern existence to urban civilization. She has transformed human existence from myths to the grim realities of tribal existence.

Mahasweta Devi's most celebrated novel "The Mother of 1084" stands as an epitome of narration of protest. It gives a strange sense of hustle and bustle in reader's mind. The Mother of a numeral? how? But it reflects how a human is reduced to a number. Its revised and enlarged version in the form of a novel was published in 1974 and was filmed in 1997 by Govind Nihlani. The Naxalites raised their voice against the established order and fought for the upliftment of poor farmer exploited by the landings, police, industrialist and bureaucrats. The serene tranquility of Naxal bari changed into violent revolution tolling more than ten thousand death from 1965 – 1972. It was called "Spring thunder over India" by neighboring countries. A large number of youth sacrificed its promising career for poor peasants' rights. Gayatri Spivak states, "..... her writing and activism reflect one another



reflection in the roots sense ..... Indeed, if one reads carefully, one may be seen as other difference'. (Translator's Preface . Imaginary maps, xxi)

In *Mother of 1084*, Devi presents a narrative blending historical experiences of the contemporary society. It is outcome of Devi's witness of the naxalite movement and its after effects her social inclination makes her feel as if she belongs to a world of suppressed and straight forward people. In an interview in 1998 to "India Together", Mahasweta Devi replied, "Fight for the tribal, downtrodden, underprivileged and write creatively if and when I find the time."

"It's a popular novel which, was translated by Samik Bandyopadhyay and was into a movie in the late 1990 & *Mother of 1084*' is a story of Sujata's multiple oppressions within a stifling, familial, patriarchal and feudal order. The title is *Hajar chaurashir Maa*( means Mother of 1084) in Hindi. It is story of a Mother (Sujata) whose son, Brati, Corpse number 1084 in the morgue was brutally killed by the state. A group of Indian communists supported MAOIST ideology, a few years before the Naxalite movement, which was formed in the 1960s. Naxalites believed that the Indian state needed to be overthrown and were enemies of class system. So she becomes a bridge for negotiations between under pain, aged, backward, unheard, impoverished, uncivilized section of the society and the people in authority. In a superficial view, the novel seems an elaborate story involving confrontation with exotic change of approach in natives, treacherous dangers of the jungle, brutal, and fatal savagery. Psychological working of the protagonist and other characters and the richly coloured spectrum of symbolism is very well shown beneath the surface. It is one of the Bengali literature's most sombre fictions.

Devi is successful in depicting the merciless killing of youth and its impact on their families are vividly portrayed as a useless, brutal and absurd act. Here the necessity for relinquishing pride for one's own spiritual salvation is shown very well. Such philosophical rumination Devi has allowed generations of readers to ... ponder for. The story open with the protagonist Sujata, the Mother of corpse number 1084, who is from upper middle class family. Her husband Divyanath Chatterjee is a Chartered Accountant with weak financial situation. Sujata steps out for job for improving her family condition after improved family condition she decided to continue her job against her husband's will. Sujata gives birth to four children, two sons, Jyoti and Brati and two daughters Nipa and Tuli. Jyoti is married to Bina and Nipa to Amrit. Seemingly all of them are perfectly happy but Sujata discovers that this happiness is fake as her own. She shares a very special relationship with Brati, her younger son. In her thirty – four years of married life she has been living a lie. Her husband has extra marital affair, who always cheated on her with his Mother's approval. She is a stranger in her own household. She feels to be timid, frail and submissive being. She feels at home only in the company of her younger son, Brati chatterjee.

On the death anniversary of Brati, which also happens to be his birthday – Sujata's daughter Tuli is hosting a party for her finance, Tony Kapadia and his family. Everyone else in her family has already moved on, inspite of her. Sujata wanted to have the party on a different day but no one really asked her. Because her family doesn't have much respect for her. The Children tend to side with her husband's even though he's been cheating on his wife



without even trying to hide it. Her close connection with Brati is also one of the reason for the children to go against her. They disliked Brati because of his beliefs and criticized Sujata for not crying at the youngest son's funeral. Brati's father was so ashamed of Brati's involvement with the group that intend of going to the morgue to identify the body, he was more concerned about making sure the newspapers didn't mention his name. As the novel progresses, Sujata realizes that she didn't know her son as well as she thought she had.

The story embodies four chapters, to say- Dusk, Afternoon, Evening and Night. The opening scene fulfils all the requirements that shows a protest. The protagonist Sujata, her husband Dibyantah and her son Brati are introduced here the reader with a curiosity finds himself in a fix and awaits what happens next. Positive and negative aspects of family are shown successfully. When the family receives a phone call from the police to identify corpse number 1084 which is infact Brati, Dibyanath searches ways to hush up the incident. The Following opening dialogue illustrates the fruits of main characters. The scene opens as:

The impersonal voice of an officer (off.) VOICE (off.) 460001?

SUJATA : Yes  
VOICE : Dibyanath Chatterjee's house? .....

SUJATA : Yes who are you?  
VOICE : What's Brati's Chatterjee's relationship with you?  
SUJATA : Son.  
VOICE : Son? Come to Kntakpur .....

DIBYANATH: What's the matter? Who was it? .....

SUJATA : He said, come to Kantakpur ..... to identify? Brati?  
DIBYANATH: Kantakpur?  
SUJATA : Haven't I told you? Jyoti get me the car out.....  
DIBYANATH: My car, at Kantakpur, No. Listen Jyoti .....

Dibyanath is under an obvious pressure of convention and his status must maintain status quo. He is the final authority to uphold the family resolution to keep mysteries and paradoxes secret. Sujata's protest starts as she redeems the Cowardliness in herself by recognizing the evil her husband's treatment and raises a voice:

SUJATA : But why? Why can't the car be there?  
DIBYANATH : I need the car. I'm going to chaudhari, you ring up  
Dutta. Tell him... why don't you go over straight away?.... Jyoti, there may be time still. Isn't there a relation of your Mother-in-law's in the police? ..... Ring him up. Chaudhari must help hush it up . ( 3 – 4 )

She hates the humanity deprived of human instincts where a cold blooded father is reluctant to identify and claim the dead body of his own son. It is reflected in the conversation of her with Tuli:

SUJATA : But that soon? Even before the body's been identified? A father gets the news on telephone & doesn't think of rushing to have a look?  
TULI : That's only natural.  
SUJATA : Brati was dead to all of you long before, isn't that so?



TULI : You have always been too positive about Brati .....

SUJATA : with Brat, they've cast me too in the opposite camp. If Brati had been like Jyoti, or a drunkard like neepa's husband, Amit, or a hardened friend like Tony, or had run after the typists like his father, he'd have belonged to their camp(2)

Sujata here shows mirror to the members of her family as an outcome of suffocation due to patriarchal system. She speaks for the righteous ners of Brati, agitating against her own veil of social respectability and civilsed obligations. The situation in scene five shows it:-

BRATI : (Pulls his eyes down) Mother, you have to bear with a lot for me, eh?

SUJATA : No, Brati, Bear with a lot for you? Oh, no.

BRATI : Don't they bully you a lot for me?

SUJATA : let them

BRATI : (with tenderness and concern) why do you bear, Mother?

SUJATA : It hurt once, doesn't hurt any longer. It doesn't hurt from the time, you came, because you're there. The second chapter 'Afternoon' opens in the sensitive areas of protest. Sujata visits an area of squalor, filth, poverty, mess and degradation. Sujata feels difference of class when she met Sonu's ageing Mother, his disgruntled sister and inhumane condition. She is unaware about her most forwarded child Barti, whose hidden traits she comes to know about from Sonu's Mother, Nandini and many others, Nandini tells her:

NANDIN : Of course. He stayed back home till the sixteenth of January only to honour your sentiments. Otherwise he should have left for the base on the fifteenth.

SUJATA : was it ..... because ..... he stayed back home ..... that day?

NANDINI : He stayed back home for your sake, and he left home after I had rung him up. (21 - 22) Sujata's determination to protest attains its full swing in the third chapter, titled 'Evening'. She visits Brati's beloved and comrade – in – Arms, Nandini, Nandini makes Sujata aware of Brati's involvement in protest, betrayal & murder. She tells about protest, reason for an organized rebellion, sharing her own knowledge of state repression & its multiple failures. Sujata completely bewilders on Knowing all this and conferses to Nandini, "I didn't really know Brati". (P-87) Mahasweta Devi apprecitates the youth and their endeavor to protest for justice. She is of the opinon, "Those who lives are aflame, I have full faith, will never err. They have never erred – neither in Talengana, nor in Naxalbari" (Gram BanglaII)



Mahasweta Devi writes, “with flow of time, the grief and pain settle into layers of sedimentation. Then one day, penetrating these layers, new buds sport forth, sterling out their little fingers. These fingers ache to touch the sky. The buds of hope, sorrow, joy and bliss – the buds with little aching fingers! “(P-81). Layers here symbolize social, historical, economical and cultural compulsion – the root cause of exploitation ‘burst’ is the outlet of suppressed feeling ‘the little fingers’ is the protest against injustice and ‘sky’ is the attainment of liberty and equality.

Nandni ignites Sujata to peep into reality, she knows how brutal and senseless are the killing and torture onto the innocent people that commit or protest not only against a family or a group or a society but also against an individual. The assault on women like Nandini is evident as she confesses to Sujata, “my right eye’s blind from the gleam of the thousand watt lamps. There is a little sight left in the left eye.” (26) . Saroj Pal, the police inspector tortured her. She tells Sujata, “I wont’ be able to tell you all that happened after (pause) the sores on the skin have healed but I’ll never be normal again. (Draws her finger across her face and chest).” (25) Talking about the effects of the Naxalite revolt on the life of the Common man, Sumanta Banerjee in an article entitled, “Sting of Betrayal” rightly states that: “how can there be quiet with the Mother’s hearts burning like bodies on Fire? ..... It’s not easy to ..... feed two souls, Mother and daughter. .... Sonu had to leave us behind, .... You have yet another son.” (10 – 17)

No Mother ever forgets her dead child. This personal loss bears a universal phenomenon . Sujata thinks that the human society is devoid of humanity the noble sacrifice of Brati should not go vain so she

Propounds:

(Pointing to the audience, and the dancers.) corpses, stiffened corpse all of you! (pointing to herself) and I myself? Did Brati die to let you carry on in your existence, enjoying and indulging in all the images of the world .... For ever, till infinity? Never..... Let this no of mine ..... set the past, the present, and the future atremble. Let it tear down the happiness of everyone cooped up in his own happy happiness.” (31)

In the last section of the novel titled ‘Night’ Sujata is independent, confident and politically awakened Mother. She decides to leave the house in which Brati never felt at home. Samik Bandopadhyaya in introduction of the translated version of Mother of 1084 ates “The narratorial voice in Mother of 1084 submits to Sujata emerging voice which in its turn rises above the voices of party. At one level the work is all about a woman forging a voice of her own, distinctive from, all the other voices she has negotiated with, including those of her family, Saroj Pal, Sonu’s Mother, Nandini, Brati when alive, and those at party ..... one has to identify and distinguish the different voices with their class cultural indices being defined in the dialogue units against the narratorial voice to read the drama of internal change) charge and rebellion growing in the process of the final point of eruption/ exploitation expionsin” At last her appendix bursts and she dies. Appendix’s bursting symbolises breaking and spreading the protest for rights and against exploitation Mahasweta Devi got the Jnapith Award in 1996 for this book. She received it from South African freedom fighter and President Nelson Mandela.



### References:

1. Devi, Mahasweta. Imaginary maps, Trans. Gayatri chakranorti Spivak, Routledge, New York, 1995, P. 200
2. Devi, Mahasweta, Mother of 1084, Trans. Gayatri Chakervorty Spivak Calcutta. Seagull. 1997. Print.
3. Devi, Mahasweta, Fire plyas. Trans and into. Samik Bandyopadhyay Calcutta. Segaul. 1997 – Print.
4. Ghatak, Maitreya. Introduction Dust on the Road : The activist writings of Mahaweta ed. Maireya Ghatak. Calcutta Seagull. Press 2000 – Print.
5. Spivak, Gayatri Chakarvorty, “The Author in Conversation” Imaginary maps. New York: Rontleauge Book, 1995. ix – xxiii. Print.