

THE REVOLUTIONARIES FIGHT AGAINST INJUSTICE AND EXPLOITATION TO FREE THE PEOPLE FROM THE CLUTCHES OF CORRUPT AND EXPLOITATIVE SYSTEM IN MAHA SWETA DEVIS SELECTED NOVELS

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Abstract:

Revolt is an expression of protest or defiance against a system in order to bring a change in the political, social and economic conditions of a society. It may sometimes lead to violence. It is the suppressed, subjugated and intolerable human feelings bursting out into violent actions against the oppressor. India has a history of many revolts. Mahaswetha Devi takes up peasants' revolt against the British, Tribals' revolt against the feudal society and naxalite revolt against the corrupt society and presents them in her works. About her documentation of the past incidents of the history, she speaks These works zoom the revolutionaries as altruistic. The revolutionaries struggle and revolt against the odds of the society to bring justice to the people. They become martyrs in their reach of their goal. These works project the exploitation of the high handed, who betray the poor and make benefits for their own welfare. The revolts against them are an urge to end up such practices and a plea to uplift the lives of poor.

Keywords: revolutionary, suppressed, revolt, novels etc

Introduction:

Revolt is an expression of protest or defiance against a system in order to bring a change in the political, social and economic conditions of a society. It may sometimes lead to violence. It is the suppressed, subjugated and intolerable human feelings bursting out into violent actions against the oppressor. India has a history of many revolts. MahaswethaDevi takes up peasants' revolt against the British, Tribals' revolt against the feudal society and naxalite revolt against the corrupt society and presents them in her works. About her documentation of the past incidents of the history, she speaks:

She brings life to the past incidents by presenting them in her works. Her aim is to resurrect and remind us about the relentless war, the people fought against the corrupt practices of the society. She warns us of the dangerous amnesia that threatens to engulf us

and the dire need of retrieving our native memories to know ourselves.

So, she focuses on the older periods to make us aware of the movements the people lead and impinges in us the impulse the revolutionaries carried in them. She presents her works as the histories for all time's. She says, "the history of the past and the history of the present... constitute history. There are some histories that are for all times."² Her works are totally based on revolt against the exploitative mechanism. As history repeats, the revolts against exploitative mechanism repeat. The exploitation and corruption continue unabated as long as the exploitative mechanism is alive. The exploitative mechanism survives until the exploited know about their rights and fight against it. That's why, Mahaswetha Devi writes to bring awareness of exploitation to the people. Thus, her works are marked as histories for all times. Her works Tituir, Chotti Munda and his Arrow, Seeds, Water, Draupadi and Mother of 1084 are histories which deal with revolt against exploitation and oppression.

Titu Mir deals with Sanyasi revolt, revolt against ex-orbitant taxation, revolt against Indigo plantation and Wahabi movement during British regime. The novel revolves around Titu Mir, the protagonist. As a peasant leader, he inspires and leads all the people to revolt against the British exploitation. Their revolt is fuelled by the desperation and hopelessness, which they have carried for years. During the war between the British and Titu Mir's group, Titu Mir loses his life and dies a martyr.

Chotti Munda and his Arrow is a proletariat war against the moneylenders, who make the poor their bonded slaves. The moneylender's oppression and the revolt against it run parallel to each other. The moneylender always tries to keep his slaves under his clutches and the slaves strive to relieve themselves from the bondage. Chotti, the protagonist revolts against the bonded system, by himself not subscribing to it and leads all his people to revolt against it. The war between the moneylender, Tirathnath and Chotti's group goes on till the slaves achieve their ends.

Seeds reveals the tyranny of landlord, Lachman Singh, who exploits the poor by giving them meagre wages. When the exploited revolt against him, he kills them and buries them in Dulan's fields. Dulan, a witness to all this, and a carrier of this secret, does not bear the brutality of the lord. One day he kills Lachman Singh to end up his savagery.

Water speaks of the problem of water. Santosh Pujari, the head of the village is an archetypal exploiter. He embezzles all the relief funds meant for the poor and denies them water. He creates an artificial famine in the village. Unable to tolerate the injustice, the people revolt against him. Taking it as an opportunity, he brands them as 'naxalites' and encounters them with the help of SDO and the police.

Draupadi is the story of a naxalite couple, Dopdi and Dulna. Their activities of

killing grain brokers, landlords, moneylenders, law officers and bureaucrats for the sake of common good, alert and shock the army. The army starts its hunt for these couple. The army gets terrified by their timely acts. At last, they encounter Dulna and capture Dopdi. Dopdi, in the name of interrogation, undergoes torture of a multiple rape. She repulses against their monstrous deed by rejecting her cloths and goes on in stark nakedness. She questions their immorality by her defiance. This causes a shiver of fear and shame down their spine.

* SDO – Sub-divisional officer – Administrative head of a sub division Mother of 1084 deals with naxalite revolution of the urban fringe carried by young men against the odds of the society. It depicts the past incidents that happened in West Bengal during 1970s. These incidents are opened to us by a mother's quest to know about her son who dies in an encounter. She knows him and finds a moral rationale for his revolt. / She finds a fulfillment of life in his death. Later, she carries the revolutionary fervour of her son and dies a martyred death.

Mahaswetha Devi's works on revolution portray all the revolutionaries, devoted to toil for the welfare of the people till their last breathe. They are determined to reach their objective by protesting against injustice and exploitation caused to the people. Their motto is to bring justice and relieve the people from the clutches of exploitative mechanism. They lose their lives in fighting for this cause. Though, all these works differ from each other in treatment and time of action, they have one thing in common, that is, to revolt against exploitation and to free the common man from subjugation.

All the works of Mahaswetha Devi exhibit the revolutionaries as brave men and women. In Titu Mir and Chotti Munda and his Arrow, the revolutionaries, Titu and Chotti Munda are projected as legendary figures. They represent men of potential strength and valour. From childhood they are nurtured by innate bravery. Titu Mir, as a child, fearlessly handles a leopard cub and says to his mother:

Ma, don't you know how handy it is to have a leopard cub.³

He undoubtedly reminds us of Bharatha, the son of Sakuntala and Dushyantha, who demands a lion in order to count its teeth. When elders fear Titu Mir of the ghosts, he asks them to show those invisible ghosts. He develops a distinctive individuality, fearlessness and precocious valour. He naturally grows into a hero. Chotti Munda as a child, under the influence of his master Dhani Munda, takes part in brave activities of hunting wild animals in the forest. He becomes valiant as he grows. Titu Mir and Chotti are recognised by their people as each one succeeds in his art. Titu Mir learns *lathial Art and becomes an efficient lathial, whereas Chotti learns archery and succeeds all the fairs as an efficient archer. Their skill and strength make them heroes of their legends. They are brought up as heroes to face

the world of injustice and exploitation and to fight against it. They fight against injustice caused to any fellow being beside them. Once, Titu Mir sees the police men and the armed guards briskly picking up the choicest wares out of the vendors' baskets-fruits,

*Lathial Art – the Art of using a stick as a weapon

vegetables and fish, without giving them anything in return. A fishmonger throws himself at their feet and cries with tears in his eyes:

Sir, I must sell that fish for an anna. I have to buy oil and rice for my family. Please don't take that one.⁴

Seeing the injustice caused to the fishmonger and monstrous nature of the police, Titu Mir jumps and takes the fish from their hands and puts them back into the fishmonger's basket and questions of their immorality and iniquity. Like Titu Mir, Chotti fights for his people whenever the landlords and moneylenders beguile them by giving meagre wages. He relieves them from their problems by fighting against the injustice caused by the exploiters.

In *Seeds*, the revolutionary, Karan, though born a low caste, with all his intellectual strength influences his people and revolts against the feudal lord, Lachman Singh, for his corrupt practices. Though, he knows that death is the outcome of the revolt, he strives to bring justice for his people. In the protest on Lachman's exploitation, Karan gathers hundred field labourers and sets fire to the ripe wheat of Lachman Singh and goes to jail.

Like Karan, Dhura and Maghai in *Water* are low castes. They too rebel against Santosh Pujari, the feudal lord, who filches in the relief funds meant for the poor and denies them water. Gathering all the villagers Maghai and Dhura, question Santosh of his activities which humiliate them. Though, they know the consequences of revolt and the tyranny of Santosh, they all stand boldly to achieve their motto.

In *Drapadi*, Dopdi and Dulna, the couple are most efficient and daring tribal naxalites. They do not fear for the army. Their timely action and courage threatens the army. They fight against injustice caused to the people. Their acts of "attacking Police stations, stealing guns, killing grain brokers, landlords, moneylenders, law officers and bureaucrats"⁵ for the sake of common good brings a shiver of fear in the hearts of the army. They challenge the army that they too belong to fighters, "for they too kill by means of hatchet and scythe, bow and arrow."⁶

In *Mother of 1084*, Brati the revolutionary of urban fringe, though born in a rich family takes part in the naxalite activities to fight for a good cause and to free the people from the clutches of exploitation. He loses faith in the society ruled by profit mad businessmen and leaders blinded by self-interest and rebels against it. Like Brati, many young men are inspired by the revolution, aim at eradicating the antisocial elements from the society by rebelling against them. About these young men, Mahaswetha Devi states that:

In the seventies, in the naxalite movement, I saw exemplary, integrity, selflessness and the guts to die for a cause.⁷ Thus, Mahaswetha Devi brings out her protagonists as the men of audacity and valiance, who die for a cause.

Most of the revolutionaries in her works get the spark of the revolutionary fervour through the influence and inspiration of the revolutionaries who have already faced the battle with the exploitative mechanism. The revolutionary fervour in Titu Mir germinates and springs out as he is inspired and spurred by Mushirath Shah, a revolutionary of Sanyasi revolt. Once Titu Mir gets confronted with Mushirath Shah who was in hide out to secure his life from the Britishers. Mushirath Shah reveals his Klentity and tells him what he and other Sanyasis are fighting for. He says:

So much pain, so much suffering and torture. All because of the zamindars and the company. That's why we fought.⁸

Titu gets attracted by his saws. Noting his attention and interest, Mushirath Shah enlightens him about their struggle. From then on, Titu's life changes totally.

Titu had never imagined such things. As he listened, a fever seemed to enter his blood, a kind of euphoria. For the rest of his life, he never forgot that encounter. And when Titu the farmer's son became the famous Titu Mir, that night unwittingly played its part in the making of the man.⁹

We find that the brutal massacre of the young revolutionaries is based on Sumanta Banerjee's analysis of politics. It even provides to analyse the threat, the hooligans give to survivors of the dead revolutionaries in this novel. Mahaswetha Devi in Mother of 1084 concentrates more on the quest of the mother, of a dead revolutionary who is given the number '1084' to his corpse. During her quest, slowly things are known to her. After knowing all the reasons for his sudden death, Sujatha, the mother feels that his death has a great reason. She finds a moral rationale for her son's revolt. Brati, her son has great ideals and bares the responsibility to solve the problems of the people. The life he leads is meant for the welfare of the people and the society. He fights against the system which is antisocial. Sujatha says, "he has lost faith in the society ruled by profit-mad-business men and leaders blinded by self interest."⁵¹ Like Brati, many young men become desperate by their corrupt activities. Thus, they revolt against their exploitation and injustice caused to the people.

The reaction for such action of young men, is to kill them in the name of 'encounter' and they are branded as 'naxalites'. This is how the politicians protect themselves by driving the police force on the young men to kill them mercilessly. The politicians and the

police hire the hooligans to put an end to such young men.

Mahaswetha Devi, through Somu's mother, opens up into the encounter. Brati meets Somu, Bijit and Partha in Somu's house. Having got the information about these young revolutionaries, police send hooligans to encounter them. The conversation goes between hooligans and these young men: Nob :Come out, Somu, Or we'll set the house on fire. Come out, Bijit, Come out, Partha. Or we'll burn up the whole lot of you. Somu : (to Brati and the rest). Let me go out first. If they get at me first, you can take a chance and try to run away .

Mob: Come out, come out. Brati : There's no point in your going out alone. There's no chance of escape Let's go out together Bijit : Let's get out fast, Brati. Otherwise they'll set the house on fire. Madan Mukteer has set several on fire already.

Mob: Come out. You claim you're not scared of death.

Then, why do you hide in your hole.

Brati: (move closer to the door, and shouts defiantly).

Don't shout. Wait a bit, we're coming out.⁵²

They all go out and are killed by the hooligans. Their bodies are carried to the Police station.

The play depicts the facts that happened in Barasat and Baranagar on August 1971. These past incidents are the basis for this play. Samik Bandyopadhyay writes: She (Mahaswetha Devi), however has an additional justification inherent in the timing of Sujatha's quest and that of the killing itself, for the reference to Barasat killing in November 1970, when the bodies of eleven young men with their hands tied behind them, were found slaughtered on the road to Barasat, and Baranagar killing on 12 August 1971, when more than hundred naxalites were hounded out from their dens and decapitated in broad daylight, make the killing of Brati and his comrades part of the organized massacre of the naxalites in 1970-71, perpetrated by the police, the party in power, hired goons, and even parties, of the left establishment acting in unholy collusion; a phase of urban naxalites were in utter disarray and retreat, and were entirely at the receiving end.⁵³

Mahaswetha Devi in her play concentrates more on the later incidents than on the killings. "Even while she evokes and recreates the killing of naxalites, she concentrates on the later reactions and lack of reaction - of a cross section of the survivors, both who bear the scars and wounds - both literally and figuratively - of those horrible days and those who had lived through the days of violence in simulated insularity."⁵⁴

This play is a documentation in which Mahaswetha Devi seeks, "roots of the revolutionary fervour of the urban guerillas . . . in their content with system that upheld a corrupt and insensitive establishment."⁵⁵ So, the play supports and sympathizes the young guerillas who revolt against the corrupt and exploitative mechanism. These

young men who strive to eradicate the anti - social elements of the society are victimised in the name of encounter. The people in power, who are anti social and corrupt, for their survival, brand these young men as 'naxalites' and get them killed by the police. The young men's 'death by merciless killing' is the reward they get for the selfless deeds.

Interrogation is another way of victimization we find in Mother of 1084 and Draupadi. In Mother of 1084, Mahaswetha Devi, through Sujatha throws light of the darker areas of life where the persecution of the innocent continues unabated and things go on in secrecy. When Sujatha comes in contact with Nandini, a friend of Brati, for the first time, she is provided with an insight into police action. Nandini reveals her torture, the police give in the name of interrogation. She describes scene of interrogation, in which Saroj Pal adopts cruel techniques to get information from

The people who revolt are either tortured or wiped out in the name of encounter. Nandini further says about the inhumanity and brutal nature of the policy. She says: "Nothing is changed. Thousands of young men rot in the prisons without trial, they're denied the status of politicals, And yet you'd say its all settled down again. Torture continues with greater sophistication and more secrecy."⁵⁷ Nandini sores on her skin and loss of her sight indicate their brutal nature. She loses her sign when they torture her by projecting the thousand watt lamps on her eyes. She lies in great pitiable condition, where she cannot recover either psychologically and physically. The police kill the young men in the name of encounter and give number to their corpses. The number '1084' indicates the number of Brati's corpse. The number tells us the number of people, brutally killed in the suppression earlier.

In **Draupadi**, Mahaswetha Devi reveals how Dopdi is tortured in the name of interrogation. When Dopdi does not speak out for the questions posed by Senanayan he orders his army men to 'make her up'. They tie her legs and hands to the posts and rape her monstrously. By the multiple rape, her vagina bleeds and "her breasts as bitten raw and the nipples torn."⁵⁸ She lies in a pitiable condition when she is thrown on the straw. The narration depicts how crudely the army tortures a captive. Through Mother of 1084, and Draupadi Mahaswetha Devi projects the dark areas of life where the persecution of the innocent continues unabated. She pictures the nature of the police and the army who carry things in a crude manner with great sophistication and secrecy.

Sumanta Banerjee in an article entitled "Sting of Betrayal" rightly states that there are hundreds of victims, "who are not being allowed to lead a normal life. For years the police have been trained to suspect every young man as potential rebel, and they find ready easy preys even among the unfortunate youth who were perhaps once on the fringe of the naxalite movement but have no political connections, what so ever now."⁵⁹ This statement unveils the nature of police in suspecting every young man as a naxalite and making him prey to their suspicion.

Though, revolutionaries aim to crush the exploitative mechanism, they fail in their

expectation. It is because, their plans are already informed to the police before they are in action. It is the "Sting of betrayal" that fails their expectation. In both *Mother of 1084* and *Draupadi*, betrayal plays a major part in victimising the revolutionaries. It is the near ones who betray them. About betrayal, Nandini tells Sujatha:

Why we hadn't provided for the possibility of people joining the party as friends only to betray us ultimately . . . We didn't have a clue to the reality . . . I wonder how we could be unaware that they could betray us to kill us. I wonder how we could be shocked whenever we hear that behind an assassination there was someone closely related to the victim.⁶⁰

Anindya is one who betrays them. He is an agent for the police. He is an associate of Brati and Saroj Pal, "a bloody cur of the police."⁶¹ Anindya carries the messages to the police and is rewarded for that. His messages expose the young men's movements and their hiding places. It is his betrayal that ruins the lives of Brati and his friends. Nandini says that betrayal is the most frightening thing and she portrays it:

Betrayal. The prison walls rise higher, new watch towers shoot up, there are so many young men still in the prisons, and yet a political party will not take a stand until it has been able to determine how it'll serve its own interest and affect its standing with the centre. Betrayal. The worst reactionaries make avowals of their sympathy for us, and in the process they spoil our image in the public eye. Betrayal. We are not allowed the use of the press, paper, type-lead to explain our views. And yet there are all those journals that claim to be sympathetic to our cause. Betrayal. Every supposedly sympathetic piece tries shrewdly and skillfully to prove us adventurist romantics. Betrayal. Even when we were being killed, all the writers and all the periodicals were crying over Bangladesh, they had nothing to say about West Bengal. And the same ones now write lamentations about us. Betrayal. And . . . Within the prisons . . .⁵²

In *Draupadi*, the people whom Dopdi and Dulna trust as their own people, betray them. Shomai and Budhna, craving for the money offered by the army, provide the information about the actions and whereabouts of Dulna and Dopdi. It is their betrayal that takes life of Dulna and wounds Dopdi.

Mahaswetha Devi finds new dimensions to resurrect the revolutionary fervour of the revolutionaries. In *Mother of 1084* and *Seeds*, she resurrects the spirit of revolution in others after the revolutionaries are dead.

In *Mother of 1084*, towards the end of the play, Sujatha's identification with Brati is total, she feels; "I was with Brati the whole day."⁶³ She takes up the fervour and spirit of her son. She changes from the world of innocence to the world of protest and self-assertion against her husband, her family, the police and Saroj Pal, the DCDD (Deputy Commissioner, Detective Department). On the occasion of her daughter Tuli's engagement, when Saroj Pal arrives, Sujatha feels irritated. She is reminded of the incidents that happened before, when she was summoned to the morgue to identify Brati's dead body.

Saroj Pal (voice on tape off) : I've a mother too

. . . No, your son never went to Digha . . . No, we'll leave these in the house . . . What your son did is unforgivable . . . No, you won't get the body . . . No, not the body.⁶⁴

She feels exasperated of his presence. Unable to face her, he leaves the party unattended. She sees Saroj Pal in his uniform. When Bini asks him to come in, he says, "No. I'm on duty. Mass action in Baranagar and Kashipur today."⁶⁵ Sujatha feels annoyed and intolerable when he says so. She is reminded of the police action. She says to the audience:

Still in uniform? Still on duty? Mass action again in Baranagar? Still Black Maria, the revolver in the holster, the helmeted police men within the van? . . . Where will the streets resound to the pounding boots, the threatening van? Where will bullets pierce the wind? ⁶⁶

The play ends with Sujatha's feelings bursting out and asking the people to react and respond to the reality and the cause. With this she carries the duties of her son. She becomes one with him and addresses the audience: Why don't you speak? Speak, for heaven's sake, speak, speak, speak! How long will you endure it in silence? Where is the place where there's no killer, no bullets, no prison, no vans? . . . in Calcutta, in West Bengal, from North to South, from East to West?⁶⁷

She cries and cries till the end and collapses with her appendix burst. Thus, she carries her son's revolutionary fervour and dies a martyr. In *Seeds*, Lachman Singh kills all the revolutionaries and buries them in Dulan's fields. One day Dulan finds many putush and aloe plants in his barren land, where the revolutionaries are buried. He is reminded of BDO's statement that, "During summer they (his workers) would shoot mad dogs and dump them in the hole there. Trees are bound to grow well if they're fertilized by rotting bones and flesh."⁶⁸ He feels that Karan and Bulaki have grown into those putush and aloe plants. He says to them, "You fought for our rights. Why couldn't you turn into corn or wheat?"⁶⁹ instead of putush and aloe plants. After the death of Dhatua, he feels to resurrect the spirit of the dead revolutionaries by giving them life as paddy. He gets seed from BDO and scatters them on his land. He says to the dead revolutionaries, "I won't let you be just aloe and putush. I'll turn you into paddy."⁷⁰ The paddy grows tall, strong and healthy. He feels very happy to see their life flowering and flourishing in the form of paddy. Gazing at them he says:

Karan, Asrafi, Mohar, Bulaki, Mahuban, Paras and Dhatua -What an amazing joy there is in the ripe green paddy nourished on your flesh and bones! Because you will be seed. To be seeds is to stay alive.⁷¹

To resurrect the revolutionary fervour and to impinge their spirit into the people's

blood forever, he asks the people to reap the crop, take it for themselves, eat it and grow it again.

Mahaswetha Devi, through these works on revolution explores to depict the plight of the people in the hands of corrupt and exploitative society and supports all "le revolutionaries who fight against such odds of society and become martyrs.

Titu Mir in Titu Mir, an ordinary person with strong spirit, revolts against the British exploitation of the poor people and the peasants. Heraises a war against exorbitant taxation and indigo plantation. With his intellect, influences the poor, establishes his empire, fights the powerful British Governance and dies a martyr. Chotti Munda in Chotti Munda and his Arrow, fights against the bonded labour. He does not subscribe to bonded labour and fights for the relief of all the bonded slaves. The war goes on between Chotti's group and the moneylenders. Towards the end Chotti and the bonded labourers achieve their end by putting an end to bonded labour system. Seeds aims at the revolt against the tyranny of feudal lord, Lachman Singh, who pays meagre wages to the poor and kills those who rebel against his system. Karan, Bulaki, Asrafi, Dhatua, Mahuban, and Paras revolt against him and are killed. Dulan, the guard for their corpses, one day, unable to bear the savagery of Lachman, kills him by breaking his head with a stone.

Water also portrays the brutality of a feudal exploiter, Santosh Pujari, who embezzles the relief funds meant for the poor and denies them water in the public wells meant for them. Maghai, Dhura and Jiten revolt against his corruption and exploitation. Branding them as naxalites, Santosh, with the help of police and SDO flogs Dhura and Jiten and kills Maghai. Draupadi is a search for the naxalite couple, Dopdi and Dulna, who kill the exploiters including moneylenders, feudal lords and bureaucrats. In their search, the army killsDulna and captures Dopdi. In the name of interrogation, Dopdi is tied to four posts and is raped by all the army men. She bleeds and her breasts are torn. She defies their act by going naked and questions their immorality. Mother of 1084 reflects on mother's quest for her son's sudden death in an encounter. She knows that he fought against the corrupt and exploitative society and has died for a cause and for the welfare of the society. Towards the end, she becomes one with him, carries his revolutionary fervour and dies.

Conclusion:

These works zoom the revolutionaries as altruistic. The revolutionaries struggle and revolt against the odds of the society to bring justice to the people. They become martyrs in their reach of their goal. These works project the exploitation of the high handed, who betray the poor and make benefits for their own welfare. The revolts against them are an urge to end up such practices and a plea to uplift the lives of poor.

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