CHAPTER V

Mahashweta Devi’s Novels: Depiction of Peasant-life in the Light of Peasants’ Revolt

Mahashweta Devi, the daughter of a famed story writer Manish Ghatak (Yubanashwa) was born amid an existing literary atmosphere in her maternal uncle’s house, Dhaka in 14 February, 1926. Later on, she associated herself with a wider and greater tradition of literature, art and culture by means of her marriage with Bijan Bhattacharya who happened to be in full manifestation a dramatist, actor and life-throb of the I.P.T.A. This resulted in the development of a strong feeling in her about life. She believes and and thus history becomes a focal point in the world of her creations. But it is needless to say that this history does not represent the customary history chronologically historicized on the pages of books; as she has never been in search of any mechanical history. She has not represented any fact-bound historical description, rather she effortful in exploding the in her novels. Consequently, many novels and anthology of stories, such as Sidhu Kanur Dake, Aranyer Adhikar, Shal Girar Dake, Agnigarbha appeared as yields of her historical awareness. By way of carrying an intensive search of quest for into history, the accounts of the lives of the exploited and deprived aboriginal peasants got the blissful touches of her pen, so also the insurrection of the peasants of Naxalbari was woven together. That is why a critic said: While novelizing the fight and conflicting lives of the oppressed Adivasi peasants, Mahashweta Devi did never paint them with figment of her imagination. She personally stayed amongst the Adivasis and hence she observed their life from close quarters. The people of this Adivasi society have been given a dignified seat as human beings by Mahashweta Devi. The only purpose of Mahashweta’s life is allround development of this subaltern peasantry who have been deprived of all the socio-economic and political advantages. She voiced her loud protest against the exploitations of the downtrodden class by the upper class
of the society and she even did not spare her pen to weld against the administration. She herself said in this regard:

The Santhal-Insurrection has been portrayed in a good number of her novels. The Santhal-Revolt occupies a noteworthy position in the history of peasants’ revolt. The stretch of land, what was then known as Damin-E-Co, lying between Murshidabad of Bengal and Bhagalpur of Bihar, was virtually full of jungles. The Munda, Shabar, Khedia, Santhal and other Adivasis cultivating this vast area made it fit for agricultural purpose, and they tilling the barren land, produce bumper crops. But these Adivasi peasants in the colonial India became the victims of exploitations of the British Government. The zamindars and money-lenders with the expectations of garnering more profits got the jungles cut and cleared by the Adivasi’s in order to make the land fertile, and afterwards this exploiting class evicted those very peasants from the same land after their self-interests being fulfilled. These Adivasi peasants again and again lost their land and identity due to exploitations, deprivations and oppressions by the gentry (Diku) and by the squeezing-attitude of the state-machinery. These Adivasi farmers once became rebellious being unable to bear the crisis of identity and the humiliation of humanity. The two Adivasi brothers namely Sidhu and Kanu of the village Bhagnadihi, Chotanagpur, steered the flag-ship of this revolt; and the particular revolt has been popularly Known as Santhal-Insurrection. Mahashweta Devi has brought out the reality of this Santhal-Revolt in her novel Sidhu Kanur Dake. But the bulldozer of exploitations continued to roll upon the poor and landless farmers even in the post-independence India. Only the British exploiters were replaced by their Indian counterparts. The only change that occurred was that the influential political parties joined the band-wagon of zamindars and merchants for exploitations. And it resulted in the mass uprising of the
farmers in West Bengal in the Seventies. The Naxalbari peasants’ movement started. Mahashweta Devi wrote a good number of stories compiled in her collection *Agnigarbha* and the only novel in the said collection, the novel *Operation? Basai Tudu* basing on this Naxalbari peasants movement. We have taken up the two novels called *Sidhu Kanur Dake* and *Operation? Basai Tudu* of the novelist in this chapter in order to reveal the nature of the peasants’ revolt.

II

Two different stories had been orderly inserted in the novel *Sidhu Kanur Dake*. The first one was without any title, while the second one was entitled as *Ghanta Baje*. The titleless story was first published in the *Saradiya Jugantar* under the title of *Hulmaha* in 1982. Subsequently in 1985 the title of the novel was changed and renamed *Sidhu Kanur Dake*. Though the story *Ghanta Baje* was included in the book, but there existed no connection between the two stories. We have taken up the first story for this discussion.

Sidhu and Kanu, the immortal leaders of the Santhal-Revolt have been given the status of protagonists in the novel. The Santhal-Revolt, in fact was the biggest peasants movement in the pre-independence period. The voice and the struggling spirit of the ancient human society are hidden in the annals of this movement. Yet the history of the life of these marginalised farmers and labour class has already been looked down upon. Mahashweta herself said:

That’s why Mahashweta has documented the history of the movement of these penniless and oppressed peasants. But it is right to note that the novel *Sidhu Kanur Dake* does not contain the extensive description of the pros and cons of the life of the peasants. The novelist virtually has portrayed their exploited and deprived life and their struggle
as well, and in addition to that she has unveiled the nature of the nauseating role of the then upper class people of the society as well as the print media itself.

The novel opens by way of a reference to exploitation. A peasant named Dhanaram Tudu’s debt of rupees three remained unrealized even working without wages for long seven years. Dhanaram fled away to the jungle and where he was found ill by Sidhu Murmu who took him to Bhagnadihi. The nature of the diabolic oppression of the mahajan came to light through the conversations of Sidhu and Ram Lohar:

The history is witness to this that the greedy businessmen and mahajans from Birbhum, Murshidabad, Burdwan and other places came at that time at Damin-E-Co, and these very greedy persons used to deceive the simple minded peasants in various ways. If necessary they lent money to them and made these peasants slave for their whole life. This system of bondage would continue generation after generation. Sir William Hunter wrote in his book *Annals of Rural Bengal* about this system of working without wages:

Mahashweta has focussed the extreme reality of this system of unpaid work at the very outset of the novel. Most of the Santhals belonging to *Damin-E-Co* are actually agricultural labours or poor farmers. So far their assets are concerned, they had nothing but a cow or two or buffaloes. They produced paddy, *kurthi, adahar* working hard
from dawn to dusk. They believed that... has the right of possession over the land. But strongly enough, the people attached to land had no right over the land as well as the produce of the land. They just produced the crops, but the mahajans took them to their barn. Barhait, a great area of Damin-E-Co happened to be the central seat of the mahajans. The mahajans of this locality wandering from village to village in the month of Bhadra, that is, during rainy season, offered loans to the Adivasi peasants according to their requirements. Owing to their fraud in the act of weighing at the time of paying the debt, the total debt got never cleared off. We have noticed this act of deception in the novel Sidhu Kanur Dake:

This ‘...’ remained unpaid for ever. A historian wrote in this connection:

The extortions of those merchants and mahajans had become awful,... They lent a few rupees, some rice or other articles to the Santals during the rainy season and thus became the arbiters of their fate and held in hand their destiny through-out life...

Further the money lenders kept two sets of weighing scales— (1) Kenaram or Bara Bau, the capacity of which was a little more than that of the ordinary measure and which was used by them for weighing the crops that they took from their debtors, and (2) Becharam or Chota Bau, the value of which was below that of the standard measure and which was used for weighing articles lent to the Santals by them.  

This practice of forgery by the mahajans was already there even in the medieval period. We get the description of such act of fraudulence in Mukunda Chakrabarty’s Chandimangal composed in the sixteenth century. This network of exploitations by the mahajans existing regularly age after age was seen everywhere in Damin. The exploitation by the mahajans together with the increased rate of revenue by the British
Government topsy-turvyed the peasants. The statistical data furnished below show how sky-high was the hike annually in the rate of revenues:

The Collection of Revenues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Rs. 6,682.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>1838/39</td>
<td>Rs. 7,798.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>1839/40</td>
<td>Rs. 10,644.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>1840/41</td>
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<td>1854/55</td>
<td>Rs. 58,033.00</td>
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That is, within the span of 18 years, the revenue structure galloped almost by ten times. The Sujowals were entrusted with the duty of collecting revenues who collected different Abwab also along with revenues. A new chapter of oppression was annexed in the role of indigo-planters to the existing ones by the British Government and the mahajans. These peasants were, also, victimized by another kind of exploitation. The number of mahajans coming from outside in Damin increased due to set up to rail-links. The
foreign contractors and railway inspectors who came to Damin for the construction of rail-routes also exploited this easy-going Adivasi society. The zamindars-mahajans-railway contractors—this three-pronged exploitations created by the British Government shattered the peasants. In addition to that, the export of the agricultural produce and sky-kissing price rise of the food grains bewildered them. Sidhu, the lead protagonist of the novel Sidhu Kanur Dake realized that zamindars-mahajans-police-administration—all are nothing but the forces fostered and nurtured by the British Government. Chand Murmu, Sidhu’s brother, declared in the novel:

The looting of paddy started from the godowns of the mahajans after this very speech of Chand Murmu; and thus began the Santhal-Revolt. The poor and lower class commoners of Bengal and Bihar took part in this revolt. This historical fact has been delineated in the novel:

For this a critic said that the Santhal-Revolt was not confined to the Santhals only, rather it widely represented the repressed daily-wagers and the poor peasants. The four brothers of Bhagnadihi namely Sidhu, Kanu, Bhairab and Chand led this revolt. Sidhu realized that the farmer-class right from Sainthia to Kahalgaon, from Barharoya to Deoghar— is now here free. Oppression by Diku and mahajans, exploitations by the indigo-planters seemed to be the life-companions of these Adivasi peasants. This simple, innocent, illiterate peasantry is not destined to avail any poetic-justice either from the zamindars or from the administration itself. Hence, Sidhu, Kanu and others took the responsibility as ordainers of the destiny of the Adivasi peasant-society. Sidhu knew that Santhals are blinded by superstitions and God-fearing persons. So, Sidhu with a view to regenerating the Santhals for people’s war adopted the divine commandment
as his tool. Sidhu transformed himself into Suba Thakur. A critic said:

The houses of zamindars and mahajans at the behest of Sidhu and Kanu were being raided. A historian, who wrote about Indian peasants’ revolt, said of this act of dacoity:

Bir Singha Majhi was penalised for this act of dacoity. But he was thrashed with shoes when he refused to pay the penalty. Mahashweta presented this historical fact with artistic dexterity in the novel. The peasants had been always victimized in this way. But they could never record their protest. But the Santhal-peasants are an exception in this respect. Experiencing the orgy of exploitations unceasingly, they once thundered against it. The mahajans sought the help from administration to beat them back. Sidhu realized that zamindars-mahajans-police-the indigo-planters – none of them were peasants-friendly. Avalanches of sarcasms rolled out through his lips:

The procurement of Gira from Shal trees was made in order to uproot the exploiters completely. The Gira’s (branch) of Shal trees were sent to every village. Thousands of Santhals assembled near an ancient and huge Banyan tree in a field in the south-east direction of Bhagnadihi. The song of the land was on every lip:
Both Sidhu and Kanu shed lights on the tales of their extreme deplorable plight before everybody present in the mammoth public meeting held on Thursday, 30 June, 1855:

The Santhals in a well organized manner shouted out in a rumbling voice in order to firmly establish the *Santhalraj*, that is Then the rebellious peasants marched in a procession towards Kolkata. While their ration ran short on their way to Kolkata, the extensive plundering and the killing of mahajans started. The revolutionaries killed the mahajan Nagin Das and Mahesh Daroga (Police Inspector). The mahajans and tenure-holders started fleeing from *Damin*, and this particular piece of news was published in the *Calcutta Review*. Neither the ruling class nor the Bengali intellectuals of Kolkata did bother about the sufferings and exploitations experienced by this so called uncivilized Santhal peasants. Mahashweta Devi’s sharp and pointed diction is totally sarcastic here:

The comment of the author is quite authentic here. To speak the truth, the English-educated service-men and the middle class people of the city of Kolkata were enlightened with the light of the Renaissance of the nineteenth century. But there existed a big gap
between them and the rural Bengal. The Bengali intellectuals at that time, too, whether having a direct or indirect relationship with the English as well as blessed with official munificence turned away their attention from the Santhal-Revolt or other peasants’ revolt. Not only to speak of India, Rabindranath Tagore wrote observing the neglect to Adivasi community throughout the world:

The Santhal Revolt was mercilessly put down. The game of blood, fire and panic continued. Bhagnadihi was reduced to a graveyard including other places, by the British Government. The periodicals too worked as the mouthpiece of the British Government. A news in front of inevitable infliction of punishment against the Santhals was published in the Calcutta Review. The oppression upon the Santhals continued. Mahashweta delineated the nature of this oppression:

The Santhals did not bow down even in spite of so much cruelty. At last both Sidhu and Kanu were brutally killed. The fight that started on the strength of humanism, religious faith and blunt weapons was heartlessly repressed.

As a matter of fact, the new zamindar class and the middlemen that came into existence after the introduction of Permanent Settlement of Lord Cornwallis became then the root cause of the miserable condition of the peasants. They utterly ruined the peasants of Bengal collecting revenues and evicting the farmers from their land. The peasants of Bengal again and again stood and ravolted against the exploiting policy of these zamindars, mahajans, nayebs, gomastas (revenue-collector), talukders and Santhals’ Revolt is a part of it. This revolt was the first armed rebellion against the spree
of exploitations of the mahajans. Mahashweta let us know in the novel:

It is this very civilization which made the peasants landless again and again, and it is this very exploitation that gave birth to the mass-movement by the Santhals. The history of this struggle has been given an artistic representation by Mahashweta Devi in a captivating way. Years, dates, names of characters, sequence of events—history has been skillfully followed in every department of the novel. The illiterate, rationless, unarmed Santhals encountered the mighty strength of the British just on the strength of their minds. It was the Santhals who first struck at the very base of colonialism. The *Hool* (revolt) was introduced for land and for freedom. The newspapers and journals of Kolkata which held a hostile opinion against this struggle were scathingly castigated by Mahashweta Devi. But it is right to say that the way the oppression by the British completely uprooted a lower class peasantry and also the role played by the upper section of society in this killing spree have been narrated with unvarnished factuality in the novel *Sidhu Kamur Dake*. In this very novel, Mahashweta has given a living representation of exploitations and oppressions of a marginalized peasant community of pre-independence era and along with it the fight for the protection of their rights in a consolidated manner.

III

The tradition of exploitations and deprivations over the lives of the peasants of Bengal remained as before even in the post-independence era. The exploiters remained just facially different—the foreign exploiters were replaced by the native ones and...
politicians. So, again the fire of revolt rose in full flame. The peasant-folks became conscious being victimized for age-old exploitations. And, so, as a result of that, they wanted to snatch away their charter of rights. Hence, again a sanguinary peasants’ revolt was hatched out in Bengal in the ’70s. Mahashweta took up her pen keeping the responsibility of giving expression to history intact, and there came out from her pen of novel like Operation ? Basai Tudu.

The novel Operation ? Basai Tudu was first published in Poush-Magh issue of Krittibas in 1977. The Naxal Movement that occurred in Bengal in the ’70s happened to be the main backscreen of the novel. Here one thing is worthy to be mentioned, the anthology Agnigarbha written by Mahashweta consists of four stories and out of which the first one is Operation ? Basai Tudu. But Operation ? Basai Tudu can not be placed under story-genre in its proper sense. This in nothing but a novel. Though Mahashweta Devi, herself called it a story but many critics in Bengali literature called it a novel. We also consider it, a novel. We have taken up the said novel is an effort to make an important chapter of the life of the peasants as the subject of our discussion.

The chief element of the novel Operation ? Basai Tudu is the agricultural labourers-movement. The naked image of the half-feudalistic society prevailing in rural India has been unveiled by way of this. Mahashweta believes that revolt does never seem to have an end. She has written the novel Operation ? Basai Tudu with this belief in her heart. We have seen from first to last in the novel how leaders of the Kishan Sabha in the rural areas betrayed the poor and destitute agricultural labourers for the protection of the interests of the tenure-holders. The novel begins in the month of July, 1977. Mahashweta Devi has performed an in-depth study related to the political agitation by the agricultural labourers led by the CPI(M) and the activities by the local party leaderships. She has tried to establish the truth through analysis and dissection of the burning period of the ’70s. Basai, the protagonist of the novel, is an agricultural labourer of 51. Basai and Kali Santra are the active hands of the Left-wing politics. Basai has deserted the Party losing his confidence in the Left-ideology. Since the farmers are
attacked with different land-related problems even in free India, and when the political parties, too, do not even offer their least help to the ordinary and poor farmers, Basai being compelled under such circumstances has to launch a new party defecting from the earlier one. He has to be active in achieving their rights as well as in suppresing the exploiters. Basai is a leader by instinct. A myth of rebirth is built up in the novel centering Basai. He led the people’s movement against the tenure-holders. Actually the history of deprivations and exploitations of the peasants was behind the protest and agitation led by Basai. It was expected that independent India would see a changed face of the scenarios related to the problems and oppressions of the farmers that continued in the then colonial India, but the actual picture informs something otherwise despite having promises from the political parties:

Even if we keep aside the statistical data, the problems of the agricultural labourers and farmers, a point of discussion in the novel, are not reduced, not even to a little extent. Not only to speak of the agricultural labourers, each and every peasant of West Bengal has been deceived in someway or other. The condition of the peasants remains unchanged even after the attainment of independence. The abolition of zamindari and middlemanship, demarcation of highest holding of land, fixation of revenue, distribution of surplus land amongst the landless and poor farmers, reformation in the structure of agricultural loan and many such legal measures have failed to bring about any tangible development in the field of agriculture. Moreover, the capitalist state machinery is itself a stumbling block on the path of agricultural development. According to a statistical figure placed by a critic, 16,300,000 number of agricultural labourers, based on the census report of 1961, out of the total number of population connected with agricultural works in India depended upon daily wages. The rate of daily wage in 1950 was, Rs.1.09 and 0.96 paisa in 1956. The rate of daily wages of women and minors was comparatively low.
The annual income according to statistical report, of these agricultural labourers was in 1950-51 just Rs. 447.00. Despite the price-hike of the foodgrains in 1956-57, the annual income came down to Rs. 447.00. Despite the price hike of the food-grains in 1956-57, the annual income came down to Rs. 437.00. Under such circumstances, an Act pertaining to the minimum rate of wages of the agricultural labourers was passed, but since they were ignorant about the application of such laws, so practically there was no let-up in their condition. Besides this, the problems of the peasants continued to be compounded under the system of Adhiyar (half-half share). In addition to that, oppressions by the proprietors of tea gardens reached the last degree and this resulted in beginning the Naxalbari Peasants movement in the ’70s. Mahashweta like a responsible writer truly reflected history at this critical juncture of history itself. The picture of deprivation has been apparent through the conversation between Basai and Kali Santra, who was his colleague once upon a time, in the novel Operation? Basai Tudu. Basai informs:

 Basai Tude has been associated with the Kishan Sabha from ’43; and the Kishan Shabha never gave the Santhal Basai his due respect. The agricultural labourers were not considered as farmers either. Basai, from his low caste platform observed the naked middleclass-centric attitude of the Congress and the Communist Parties. The political parties have no time to think about the agricultural labourers. Basai has also marked that they are not paid even minimum wages after reaping the crops of fields belonging to
the tenure-holders, mahajans and zamindars. The Kishan Sabha, of which Basai Tudu
was a pugnacious worker, always protected the interests of the tenure-holders. Kali Santra was unable to answer this question
of Basai. Mahashweta citing the history of Kishan Sabha and the adoption of resolutions
in different conferences has shown through the utterances of Basai, that none of the
resolutions was materialized. So, here comes the insinuating remark from Basai:

Mahashweta has shown how the Communist Party in the rural areas of West Bengal
has disregarded the interests of the agricultural labourers for the sake of their vote-
based politics. Mahashweta has also unmasked the middleclass leadership of the Left-
wing politics. The vast difference with the Party’s mindset has made Basai a revolutionary.
It is notable here that when in the 70s, the United Front Government of the Left-minded
parties was formed in West Bengal, their real political character got exposed. The poet
Biren Chattopadhyay wrote about the character and nature of the leaders of the then
Parliamentary politics:

Once the young but protesting workers started deserting the party due to ideological
differences. In this context, a critic remarked:

While Basai was inside the Party, he felt that there existed no basic distinction between
the leadership-character of the Communist Party and the tenure-holders. Basai told
Kali out of extreme anger that the Canal Tax Movement, Hut Tola Movement, the Hazong-Revolt—the role that Kishan Sabha played had become a thing of the past and that in the post independence era the very same Sabha has turned a deaf ear to the interests of the peasants. Kali Santra knew that the injustice meted out to the agricultural labourers happened to be the reason of mental collapse of Basai. Kali was an honest, educated and devoted worker of the Party. But Kali also realized that no trace of development was visible even after Communist Movement for long sixty years in this country. Yet he could not have been warlike after the footprints of Basai. Two different streams are flowing in the novel. One, accounts of Kali Santra’s movement for meeting Basai, and two, the storehouse of memories of his last meeting with Basai which is alive in his mind. Though Kali, himself being a faithful worker of the Party; was unable to join that of Basai, yet he considered the movement by Basai as his own. Kali realized staying inside the periphery of the Party, that although the Communist Party talks of the classlessness, the leaders in reality are obsessed with their class-interests. Kali, too, like Basai, is not now mesmerized with the policy of the Party as well as the role played by the leaders. So, when Basai says:  

So, it was important that Basai should remain alive. Kali wanted to keep the agitation by Basai alive through the sentence ‘Basai Tudu is in action again’. Walking down the memory lane, Kali went back to the village Paltakuri of 1970, where Basai made him
walk down to the waters of Canal:

This very little incident is quite suggestive. A critic said about this incident:

Mahashweta has given a thorough description of Basai’s action and the description covers the matters like minimum wages and the use of Canal-water. Mahashweta describing the hollowness and callousness of the administration and official laws in the rural areas with utmost sarcastic and insinuating tone, switched over to reasonableness and legitimacy of Basai’s action. The first action of Basai took place in Banari in 1970. The agricultural labourers in a body launched a movement against the injustice of the tenure-holder Pratap Goldar, and it was led by Basai himself. The conflict erupted with the mahajans when the peasants demanded the justified rate of wages. Pratap Goldar was killed in the clash. Basai also died. Kali Santra was brought in to identify the deadbody of Basai. It was exactly after a fortnight Basai again came back in action. Mahashweta kept us intimated that prior to this the Borahnagar genocide already occured and the Congress was in power in 1972. The tenure-holders became more powerful in the ministry of Siddhartha Shankar Ray. The second action of Basai recorded as Operation Jagula, started against the influential Congress tenure-holder Rameshwar Bhuiyan. Mahashweta presented the unfabricated picture of the rural areas of ’72. The novelist drew a multifarious picture of the profligacy of the tenure-holders and their highhandedness over the police administration, and the activities of the Congress-led central government. The share-croppers and the agricultural labourers being severely oppressed by the tenure-holder Rameshwar started the large scale killings of the tenure-
holders under the leadership of Basai. Basai announced in a blazing voice that harvesting would not be allowed if the wages for 10 days were not paid. After a long course of war of words, the situation ultimately went out of control. The revolutionary Basai attacked and killed Rameshwar. Even the several parts of Basai’s body were also wounded with bullets and bayonets of the police. Kali identified his body as earlier. It is quite notable here that after the formation of the West Bengal United Front Government in 1967, the revolutionary leaders and workers of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) who later on joined the CPI(ML), called an anti-feudalism movement using the new government as the tool for class-struggle in the interest of the poor and landless farmers of the villages. The movement reached its peak with the issue of wage-hike at the centre. A historian wrote in this respect:

The novelist has drawn a glowing picture of this very piece of history in her novel, and then followed the portraits of Basai’s third operation and the murder of the tenure-holder Surya Saau. It was 1973, the Naxalbari Movement was on the wane to a greater extent. The tenure-holders were in a state of unworriedness for the protection of their regime. When cracks started developing on the land due to terrible drought, tenure-holder Surya Saau refrained from paying the tax so that the peasants might not get water of Canal. This irritated the peasants extremely. The feudalistic mindset of Surya Saau in respect of Canal is detected from the words of the B.D. Officer:
So naturally Basai, fastening Surya Saau, took him near the Canal and murdered him there. The administration stopped the supply of water from the Canal. When the agricultural labourers came to take water under the cover of darkness of night, Basai was killed in police firing. Again it was Kali Santra who identified the dead body. Here Mahashweta has given the detailed description of the brutal and inhumane incident of killing in the rural areas under military operations. Afterwards, Mahashweta has carried forward the story to the eventful years of '74, '75, '76. An amendment was made in the Act in '74 related to the wages of the agricultural labourers. Mahashweta’s sarcastic comment deserves to be mentioned here in this respect:

The minimum rate of wages was amended twice in '76. Though wages were fixed as per official rule, but practically the labourers were deprived of their legitimate wages, and under such circumstances, Basai appeared for the fourth time. This time the place of his appearance was the village of Kadam Khunya. When the two tenure-holders of Amtor namely Habib Khan and Irfan Mollah declared to offer MW of ’76, the villeins of the dangerous tenure-holder Jagattaran of Kadam Khunya crossed over to Amtor. As a result of that Jagattaran set their hearths and homes ablaze. Basai attacks in order to put a full stop to this oppression. Basai was again killed in his fourth encounter with Jagattaran and police force. The fourth death-record was kept on the file, and Kali was
not even informed of it. Mahashweta has presented a particular problem called *Beth Begari* before the reading class in connection with this fourth action, moreover, she clearly revealed the past, present and future of this system. Through the deliberation of S.I. and Kali Santra, she has skillfully narrated the chronological events of history in respect of the position of zamindar in the post Permanent Settlement system, the upgradation of the middlemen as a new class of zamindars, and at last the abolition of the zamindari system:

Thus passes away the year '76 in the story. The government discontinued the MW following and injunction order of the Hon’ble High Court related to the wrong numbering in the revision of MW, 1974. On the basis of the appeal by Haridhan Sardar of the village of Piyasol in '77. The Congress-led government could have got the injunction order lifted through the correction of misnumbering; but the government did not have any noble intention of eradicating the problems of the agricultural labourers. That very truth came to light in the novel through the conversation between Kali and Samanta. The novelist in this regard came down heavily upon the Left Front Government with sharp sarcasm:

The last clash of Basai broke out with Haridhan Sardar, the man behind the discontinuation of the MW by the government. We came to know the information of Basai’s fifth fight
from his female associate Droupadi. The novel opens with the information of Basai’s being seriously wounded in this fight, and then the story was developed in a series of flashbacks. Coming to know of the dying state of Basai, Kali Santra from one place while the S.I from another set out for the Charsha Jungle. The character of Basai bloomed to its full shape through the mental tapestry of thoughts of S.I. Basai and the likes chose the path of movement, when paddy, the chief resource of the peasants, goes under the control of the tenure-holders, and when the farmers working from dawn to dusk in somebody’s land fail to get even the minimum wages. Mahashweta painted this paddy red as if it were a case of homicide in the thought of S.I. So, the sight of paddy fields seemed to be innumerable images of Basai for the S.I of the police station. Both paddy and Basai appears to be synonymous. When Kali Santra reached the dense forest of Charsha, Basai was already dead and buried. The feelings of the aggrieved Kali Santra resonate in the novel:

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Mahashweta Devi has extracted out the truth in the novel *Operation ? Basai Tudu* that the movement does not come to a halt even with the deaths of rebels like Basai. As the socio-economic development remains a far cry for the farmers, so also their agitation goes on endlessly. Therefore the repeated deaths and re-appearances of Basai in the novel do not seem to be a fantasy. It is worthy of note here that the pictures of the crisis of honour and dignity and shallow decadence have been delineated as a complimentary to the multifarious course of life of 70s-80s in the story. The novelist portrayed the unfabricated pictures of the problems pertaining to the scheduled cast, *Beth Begari* system, irrigation and the minimum wages of the agricultural labourers. The novelist has also displayed how the village mahajans and the political leaders by means of their evil designs sabotaged the movements of the agricultural labourers. Basai in the novel gave full vent to his anger before Kali Santra, as because Basai knew that Kali was an ideal Communist worker and who never utilized the power of the party for
the fulfilment of his personal gains and interests. Basai revolted and launched armed movement finding the changes that occurred in the Party and in the lives of the leaders like Samanta Babu and Lakshman Babu and that’s why he was branded as a Naxal on the party records. But Basai himself admitted that he was not a Naxal, but a follower of different path. Basai died again and again in his fight with the administration and every event in the novel has been depicted with year and date. Basai happens to be in the centre of that movement of agricultural labourers which works as a focal point in the story. The inner significance of Basai’s death and his coming back to life has been discovered in the end of the novel when Kali realized that Basai would again rise with pulsating senses

As a matter of fact, Basai’s fight was against all sorts of dreariness, so to say administrative, social and political, so, the flame of this fight goes blazing for ever. A comment by a critic is mentionable in this respect:  

So, Basai, even after being an individual became representative of the exploited class. The leadership of the successive movements, which were kept alive through repeated struggles and deaths of Basai was branded Basai as a whole. The number of agricultural labourers increased in India from 1950, for whose protection of rights Basai fought and the right upon land was confined to a few families. Hence, consequently the small farmers became landless agricultural labourers. Basai rightly said:  

We get a support to this utterance of Basai from the comment of a critic:  

142
A particular government goes out of power with the ticking away of time, but the nature and character of the leaders remain untouched and unaffected. Basai marked that peasants or the medial farmers are solvent. They themselves engaged agricultural labourers in the cultivation works. Basai could not accept this middleclass as comrades. He had no expectations from any party – whether Congress or Communist. Kali, once a colleague of Basai and loyal to his Party, now in tatters by the stings of his conscience, even being aware by the double-standard policy of the Party, was unable to tell Basai:

Basai was compelled to be a rebel. But, to follow the tradition of guerilla warfare, formation of liberated territory, people’s war, and the capture of administrative power like the Naxals – all this paths were Greek to Basai. In reality, the face of Naxalism got a different hue and shape in the world of consciousness of Basai. He, with a protesting frame of mind, and having strong determination in establishing his rights, was, no doubt, a pugnacious personality. His struggle, in the real sense of the term, has been permanently for the sake of the exploited souls. So the leaders like Basai, figuratively speaking,
never dies. A critic said:

Mahashweta did not actually like to draw the pictures of the success or failure of the Naxalbari Movement, and movement of agricultural labourers. She had been in quest of finding out the roots of peasants’ deprivations and deceptions and attached importance to their demands and rights. Mahashweta personally does not have faith in party-based politics. She wrote in the introduction of the novel:

When Mahashweta observed that even after the passing of many years since independence, the marginalized peasants, destitute of food, could not get rid of paucity of subsistence and Beth Begari, then she took up her pen against that very social system and political drollery. She kept us informed in her introduction that it was which inspired her to unveil the real disposition of the invincible protests by the deprived persons. A critic rightly said:

Analyzing the novels of Mahashweta Devi, entitled Sidhu Kanur Dake and Operation ? Basai Tudu we found that Mahashweta’s created gallery consisting of Basai, Sidhu, Kanu and many others attained immortality even after their death. Mahashweta wanted to show that neither flow of life nor that of revolt comes to a standstill with the death of any leader. The wheels of exploitations, right from the pre-independence era, were set in motion over the peasants and labourers as well as lower class of Bengal with the steering in the clutches of the zamindars, tenure-holders,
mahajans, including the upper class of the society and that practice has been in vogue even in free India. The agricultural labourers in independent India, too, have been oppressed by multidimensional cankers of problems and exploitations. The peasantry revolted of all times against all these injustices and oppressions. Numberless peasant-leaders sacrificed their lives, yet the race of revolt was not put into a closed-bracket. Mahashweta proudly declared in one of her finest novels *Aranyer Adhikar* that and that very truth has been unveiled in her novels *Sidhu Kanur Dake* and *Operation ? Basai Tudu*.
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