Chapter II

Social Activism: The Voices of Protest
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Mahasweta is known for her social activism across the country as well as transnationally. She fills her characters with the voices of protest against the exploitative system they are subjected to. To analyse her social activism and the voices of protest, the titles, Chotti Munda and His Arrow, Mother of 1084, and Bashai Tudu have been selected in the chapter.

The Wikipedia defines activism as under:

Activism consists of efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, or environmental change. Activism can take a wide range of forms from writing letters to newspapers or politicians, political campaigning, economic activism such as boycotts or preferentially patronizing businesses, rallies, street marches, strikes, sit-ins, and hunger strikes. (Web 16.10.12)

The very first statement from the given definition brings about the central thread of interpretation of activism. Mahasweta Devi is a writer-and-activist familiar to the world. Her activism assumes a multifaceted form— social, political and economic. She wants an absolute change from the vantage
point of deliverance of justice for the oppressed and exploited sections of Indian society. Her *Dust on the Road* is the paragon of mirroring multidimensional activism. It gives the exact and drastic picture of severe marginalization of the tribals and untouchables in the regions of the north, east and central India. The activist writings of Mahasweta Devi have been published in journals, newspapers and chronicles, mainly through *Economic and Political Weekly, Business Standard, Sunday* and *Frontier*.

Mahasweta has explored the following issues on a radical scale: depravation and degradation of life and environment; exploitation and struggles of the labouring poor, the underprivileged, the landless, small peasants, share croppers, bonded labourers and miners in West Bengal and Bihar. These people basically hail from the tribal and untouchable communities. Fiction, for her, was not likely going to be an adequate medium for voicing the above sections, therefore she had recourse to newspapers and journals in which she opened a wide range of topics—police atrocities, official crimes of omission and commission, literacy, education, irrigation, etc.

While expressing her concern over the bonded labourers, Mahasweta gives a statistics, referring to the estimate made by National Labour Institute, that the states of Andhra, Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka, MP, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh form the ratio of the bonded
labourers as 18% from the Scheduled Tribes and 66% from the Scheduled Castes groups respectively. Further, she goes on relating the heart-rending accounts of the bands noted above, she being an eyewitness to the events. The succeeding examples would make the point clear:

1. **Raghunandan Hajam** had 12 acres of good, cultivated land.
   
   Rameshwar Pandey somehow implicated him in a legal matter and took away the land. A civil case was started. Aliyar, Kismat and Chaori were three militant sons of Raghunandan who did not allow Pande’s men near the land. Then the three died, under mysterious circumstances, after a puja at the Brahman’s house, vomiting blood, all on the same day. The Brahmins being so cruel that they finished off the Hajam family. (Back to Bondage?)

2. Another bonded labour, **Mangru Mian**, when refused to be bonded, he was tied up and cruelly beaten. He vomited blood and prayed for water. Ayodhya Pande’s son urinated on his face.

3. There was **Sitaram**, 18, still under bondage of Rs. 500 borrowed by his father 38 years ago.

4. **Tetri Bhuyin**, a woman from Pathalgarhwa, borrowed Rs 12/- from Chamru Sahu and had been working for him for 10 years. (The Slaves of Palamu)
5. Mohammed Kasim’s father borrowed 10 to 15 rupees. Gave 45 years of bondage; Kasim spent 32 years of bonded labour which made a total of 77 years of slavery; he was still bonded under Taramoni Singh and his son, Jagga Singh.

6. Gora Miyan’s father borrowed 18 kg. of rice and worked for 21 years as a bonded labour, and Gora (after his father) 27 years under the ownership of Taramani Singh.

Mahasweta Devi tells the reasons behind such a debt. They are: starvation, death in the family, hunger, sickness, daughter’s marriage, etc. She is so much upset with the stance, and asserts that administration and political parties are not interested to wipe the zamindari system. She openly challenges those that believe the system is uprooted:

Anyone who thinks that the zamindari system has been abolished should visit Palamau. (Dust on the Road 22)

Mahasweta’s tirade gets launched against the political commune. She spares none from that perspective—

[...] the bonded labourers are kept in darkness so that they can slave for the feudal landowners, who can flourish and prove themselves pillars of strength for the ruling powers. (27)

In her Report from Palamu (Jharkhand), Mahasweta brings to the fore the causes of poverty of the tribals and untouchables. In her opinion, low development of agriculture, lack of intensive cultivation, lack of irrigation,
money-lending system, lacking employment opportunities other than agricultural, lack of marketing facilities, the forest policy of eucalyptus, etc. inflict penury upon the subalterns (41). She also brings it to the notice of her readers that the reservation-quota policy never works in favour of the subalterns so far as concerns the employment likelihood:

**There is great resentment against SC and ST quotas. Non-tribals and non-SCs manage the caste/tribe certificates and get employed. SCs and STs are deliberately deprived of the quota-reserved jobs in many cases.** (The Call Never Comes, Dust... 48)

Having made many considerations on the plight of the dwellers of Palamu, Mahasweta calls the location as ‘a vast crematorium’.

*Dust on the Road* is a groundbreaking meditation and germinal piece of activism effected by Mahasweta Devi. Her criticism has one think gravely over the world of pathos, the world that has remained for long a neglect entity. Over and above, *Chotti Munda and His Arrow, Mother of 1084*, and *Bashai Tudu* are the creative texts in which social activism of Mahasweta, in case of the subalterns, is all-pervasive.

*Chotti Munda and His Arrow* is a text that contains the seeds of Naxalism. Wikipedia comments on derivation of the term:

The term 'Naxal' derives from the name of the village Naxalbari in the state of West Bengal, India, where the movement had its origin. The
Naxals are considered far-left radical communists, supportive of Maoist political sentiment and ideology. Their origin can be traced to the split in 1967 of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), leading to the formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist). Initially the movement had its centre in West Bengal. In later years, it spread into less developed areas of rural central and eastern India, such as Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh through the activities of underground groups like the Communist Party of India (Maoist). For the past 10 years, it has grown mostly from displaced tribals and natives who are fighting against exploitation from major Indian corporations and local officials whom they believe to be corrupt. (Web 19.10.12)

The reasons that are evinced for poverty by Mahasweta are also insinuated for evolution of Naxalism. Sumanta Banarjee (2004) also implies that when during the World War Calcutta became the headquarters of the South East Asia Command, there was the devastating famine of 1943 that forced starving families to come to Calcutta (Dust on the Road ix). This, in turn, gave rise to the rampant crimes, Naxalism being one of them. Bhuyan and Singh (2010) say that ‘[c]urrently Naxalism has been branded as India’s biggest internal security problem. [...] in the beginning Naxal movement was launched to safeguard interests of innocent and poor people but later on it has diverted from its original aim. Indeed, today Naxalism is another
name of terrorism for hampering peace and destroying law and order of the country [n. p.]’.

*Chotti Munda and His Arrow* is translated by Gayatri Spivak with a foreword introduced by her and she has appended an interview with Mahasweta at the end of the novel. Although celebrated as a translator of international repute, Spivak has been termed as an abusive translator by Minoli *Salgado* (2008), a Professor from the School of Humanities in the University of Sussex, UK:

> Spivak, as will be seen, is fundamentally an abusive translator, one who fulfils Bassnett and Lefevere’s claim that translation should “maintain the strangeness of a text”. (159)

Apart from what Salgado says, Spivak lays a claim to her own expertise of translation:

> **IT HAS BEEN MY PRACTICE** to underline the words in English in the original. It makes the text awkward to view. I do this because I prepare a scholarly translation in the hope that teacher/scholar will get a sense of English lexicalized into Bengali on various levels as a mark of the very history that is one of the animators of the text. (Chotti Munda vi)
In her foreword to the novel, Spivak states ‘This is the first novel where Mahasweta articulates tribal history with colonial and postcolonial history. Much of her earlier work was concerned with colonial history and pre-colonial history. After ‘Chotti’, the text of tribality frees itself from the burden of a merely ‘Indian’ history’ (vi). Mahasweta, in an interview with Spivak, says ‘What “Chotti” Munda or my other stories and books depict is a continuing struggle’ (ix). To her, Chotti is a symbol or representation of tribal aspiration (xii). Mahasweta has kept the novel open-ended both ways.

To bring under light social activism and voices of protest, it seems peremptory to discuss, at certain length, the story of the texts each chosen for the chapter. To start with Chotti Munda and His Arrow: the novel deals with the customs, traditions and bravery of the aboriginals. The name, Chotti is derived from that of a river named the same. Generally, the tribals name their villages and children after the rivers of their matrix. Since the river, Chotti, has flooded greatly at the time of his birth, Chotti is baptized so. It is Purti Munda, great grandfather of Chotti, who suggests the name for the foetus. As explained by Spivak, the novel takes place during the colonial times with Chotti as its pivotal locale. Thus Chotti is born in 1900. Parmi is his sister and Koel his brother while Dhani Munda is the father-in-law of Parmi. The adivasi women are molested by the upper-caste Hindus when dancing for hours at a festival called Chotti Fair. The novel
fundamentally represents problems of the bonded labourers. The tribal males are always suspected of a spell-bound arrow, therefore, vetoed by the police to touch any bow, there being no question of using it. Dhani Munda has anticipated the mastery of archery. He trains Chotti in the art of archery and Chotti masters it so dexterously that his name as an archer turns a legend and myth and is extensively spoken of in reverential tones. Quite at the age of eighteen, he is revered as a perfect user of bow. For the fear of being dumped by the police, Dhani shuns training Chotti at the inception but initiates him later, on Chotti’s earnest appeal. Actually, Dhani has already participated in various revolts like The Kherwar Revolt, The Mulkoi Revolt, Birsa’s Revolt, etc. On that account he is banished from a market place called Chaibasha.

There are certain rumours about Dhani’s disappearance that he must be keeping something afoot against the exploiters. There are many legends about bravery of the tribals yet no stone mansion is there for them to reside in. Food makes the biggest dearth for them. Dhani meets his piteous death at the hands of Muneshwarsingh, a feudalist who shoots him in the head. Thus the epoch of Dhani Munda comes to a close. Consequently, the onus of sustaining legacy of archery falls upon shoulders of Chotti. Thus Chotti wins the competition of shooting arrows at Chotti Fair which causes a great sense of elation among the fellow brothers of Chotti. Chotti is a man
charged with revolutionary ideas. His goal is to eliminate the system of bonded labour that brings in the physical and psychological trauma.

Lala Baijinath tries to wage a quarrel with Birsa, Chott’s father, calling him a moneylender. Birsa takes this for a great insult; he could not bear it and talks back:

*Munda borrow but doesn’ lend. Doesn’t suck his brother’s blood by money lenderin’.* (Chotti Munda and His Arrow 32)

Lala tries to pressurise Birsa but the latter is well supported by Pahan and other Mundas. Pahan has to intervene:

*Pahan said, Lord! We never understood yer words and don, now. Ye said to’m, gett’n to be moneylender. That’s an insult in Mundari. Ye aren’t guilty. He said, ye’re Munda. ’Twas an insult, and fault too, on Birsa’s part. For us there’s no one but us to call our own. All hurt if one’s hit. Today we too feel this hurt for all but we don’ know if ’twill go on ’twill go on ’til our kinds’ time.* (13)

This shows a natural unity among the Mundas. Chotti does not endure the incident of beating given to Birsa by Mahavir Sahay and the police-in-charge, for his not working as a bonded labourer for Lala Baijnath. For a while, the matter goes worse and Lala has to retreat but Birsa is taken to police station. Although acquitted, Birsa engages himself in the thought of
having been insulted hence commits suicide. The police-in-charge and Baijnath are both scared of Chotti’s spell therefore they try to bribe Chotti and Pahan with some money lest Chotti kill them with his arrow.

There is an Englishman, Ronaldson, who is crazy yet, taken for the government in himself who is impressed in excess by Chotti’s skill of archery.

Chotti turns father in 1921 and names his son Harmu, the name derived from a river. Baijnath dies at Benaras fearing the ghost of Birsa whereas Mahavir Sahay feels periodical fever. This means that the two thorns in the path of Chotti are cleared automatically. Chotti’s mother also dies of snakebite on the way home from market. This is a big loss to his family. Chotti wants to protest the bonded labour therefore leads his group to the police inspector’s office. There is great scarcity of food across Chotti as a consequence of which the village is fed for ten days by some Jain group and Baptist Mission. Tirath is the leading villain of the novel. He crushes the soul of the labourers bound under thumbprint by him. He plays the biggest challenge for Chotti till the last part of the novel. At the outset, Chotti leads a march against Tirath as Sana Munda’s aunt, a bonded labourer, has died of gastric pain and vomiting, this having happened due to eating bark of tree for want of food. At once Tirath is defeated. Soon there appear Dukhiya, Sukha and Bhika from Kurmi village, each with his own
tragedy. Moreover, Dukhiya’s tragedy moves Chotti to a greater deal; it haunts his mind with Dhani’s remembrance. Dukhiya is trained for archery skill and wins the competition at Deo village, a transformation corollary of Chotti’s effort. However, this does not last long, for Dukhiya beheads his manager for great persecution meted out to him by the manager and is hanged for the act. Mahasweta uses terror, violence, suspense, thrill and tremor to give effect to the novel.

Chotti is friendly, amicable and just to his wife and has a high opinion of the female on generic ground. Mahasweta has hit hard at the contemporary politics with Congress Party being her prime target. The Mundas are beset by endless suffering, and starvation turns the byword of their life. To keep sustenance of life, they must fight against the odds. Therefore, Chotti gets in touch with the Police Inspector of his area who also takes the matter seriously for the fear of getting fired from his services by the politicians that have had a very close eye on the tribal vote bank across Chotti area. Thus the first constructive subaltern protest takes place. Moreover, Tirath is not to succumb easily, hence hires ten men to pose against Harmu and Somchar, the sons of Chotti. The sons are well supported by Budhana and Chhagan’s men. There is a scuffle in which Mathurasingh, Tirath’s guard, hits a bullet that runs through the arm of a constable. Chotti, the inspector and an officer rush to the spot and bear a
witness to the scene each. Chotti is proud of his son, Harmu, for having been sentenced for two years of imprisonment in relation to a just protest. The politicians want to capitalize on the situation; they demand that either Tirath pay them fifty thousand rupees or he save them 3000 votes of the Mundas. Finally, they— the Congressis, so narrates Mahasweta, rob him of the aforementioned amount of money with his property already destroyed. Tirath blames it all on Chotti believing that the latter’s leaving him has caused him the irreparable loss. As a consequence, Tirath goes schizophrenic fearing every individual around him. Actually, Tirath has forgotten that he has already been conferred on the title of Raisaheb for having fed the tribals and untouchables during famine, though the food he offered them has been of malnutrition type. In fact, the hooligans are consistently used against the people; and the tribals and untouchables are prevented from voting while their votes are cast in their absence by the hoodlums by capturing the voting booths. Under such circumstances Chotti remains a meek character, a mere onlooker. These practices are carried out, claims Mahasweta, by the ruling party, i.e. Congress.

Whenever Chotti speaks, he always makes the signs of respect but without any sense of timidity. There is a person called Harbans Chadha, a Punjabi who seems to play a well-wisher of Chotti and his people. To him, money-lending or making the bonded labour best suits the philistine yet the
contradiction is that he is like a neocolonialist\(^2\), in the words of Sartre (2006), i.e. an exploiter with honey tongue. For instance, he pays his labour not more than 12 annas and 4 annas during the times of famine making them work harder.

Pahan is the man revered by all the Mundas and untouchables. He objects to the fetes of Mundas and wants them to save money and keep from drinking. He exemplifies the legendary Birsa Munda who did not respect either Haramdeo Mahasweta Devi or Pahan but kept himself a teetotaler. Pahan is asked to teach the Adivasi boys and girls as they are chased off at the government school by the master who wants them to perform menial work. There is an incident which marks the lack of medical resources among the tribals. Koel has had a severe headache. Chotti and his people do their level best to subside his pain yet all fail. Chotti takes him to a local physician but the physician suggests to him to move Koel to a big city hospital. Chotti moves his brother accordingly and the diagnosis reveals that Koel has caught meningitis, the epidemic, and losing his conscience, he dies all of a sudden. This leaves all the Mundas extremely sorrowful and Chotti is drowned into a pathetic mentation. He is in his seventies and seems to be losing conscience as he takes a dog for Koel and cries a lot when recalling Koel’s words that Chotti replaced his father when
the father actually died. This all happens owing to penury. Pahan passively describes the stance of the tribals and untouchables as:

Ye’ii gie bonded labour for a thumbprint, f’r a bit of rice-wheat to eat, I’ll not say ‘yeah’ to that. This bonded labour won’t be quit in ten generations. Everyone falls into its trap. See all t’ Ganjus; Dusads, Chamars, Dhopas— all the oppressed, tribals and outcastes- tied up in bonded labour. I won’ say ‘yeah’ to no one. But thing is, can’t say ‘no’ neither. Why not? Then ye’d say, if we put thumbprint on paper at least we’d eat. (48-9)

Harmu has already learnt in jail that there are many Mundas around, each having a pitiable story and there is none coming to their rescue, from outside. After some days Chotti makes arrangements for Etwa, Koel’s son and asks Mungri, Etwa’s mother, to stay with her parents but she is reluctant to do so since she considers Chotti as her guardian.

When lying about the grave of Koel for a while, Chotti happens to see a bespectacled boy there. Chotti takes him his home and enquires after his details and is taken aback to learn, for the first time, that a Diku boy is fighting for the cause of the tribals, the subalterns. Chotti arranges for his fleeing. The boy is a naxal and tells Chotti that he could have earned a lot of money by handing him over to the police but Chotti replies him forthwith that he spits on such money. This displays representatively that
the subalterns are hardly vulnerable in case of any bait. The incident initiates the coverage of Naxalism in the novel. Soon the police spread around the area and fetch the same boy into the village and persecute him to death before the very eyes of Chotti which pains him to a great extent. The event also starts the note of protest against the established system.

There enters the phase of general elections afterwards. Chotti and Chhagan come together and decide that the untouchable candidate who built up a primary health centre and a well should be voted for and the groups of both agree upon what is determined. However, the situation takes an astounding turn. The chosen candidate, though a good Samaritan, is blasted off by his opponent, from the same party, at the railway station. The murderer claims that the dead was a naxalite, therefore was killed by his enemy and soon poses himself as a candidate for the assembly elections. Introducing such an occasion, Mahasweta has unveiled the game of contemporary Indian politics that is denuded of its virtue, to use Ambedkar’s (BAWS 69) words. Motia, an untouchable woman, has been an eyewitness to the murder and is kept tightlipped by the Daroga and Chotti who warn her of the likely danger that would take place after her disclosure. The candidate uses a gang of vandals to keep the tribals and untouchables from casting their votes and to capture voting booths. Tirath is robbed of fifty thousand rupees and Harbans of ten thousand with a
promise of prosperity though. Although Chotti appears as a brave persona elsewhere in the novel, he turns a mere onlooker under the electoral circumstance. The uncivil dominate the scenes of Indian politics is what Mahasweta Devi seems to imply this way. She strongly criticizes the ruling party, that is, Congress. Given the overall political critique of Mahasweta, it seems as if she has had an anti-Congress agendum. She uses the acronym, NCDC to refer to an organisation which, in her opinion, ‘manipulates power to mutilate the masses’. Mahasweta mocks at the slogans like ‘eliminate poverty’. The police system also strongly supports the hooliganism.

Mahasweta Devi uses irony to describe the position of the secretary of the party. The secretary delivers a long admonishment to the newly elected MLA in which he warns the member to not disturb the vote bank of the tribals and untouchables by carrying out trouble to them. He relates to him the story of his golden past when he needed no violence to accomplish all his ill-works but repents that now he has to resort to violence. Mahasweta goes further to narrate the black humour on part of the member. When advised by the secretary to read some books, to elevate his patience, the MLA gets furious after reading one on history of the Buddha as the book states that the Buddha died of eating pork at an untouchable’s home. He makes his way into the historian’s house and hits him hard explaining
that such a book would affect his vote bank from the untouchable radius. Consequently the news appears in *Adivasi Samachar* and the member becomes a crestfallen villain scolded hard by the secretary and other members of the party for his feat.

Absolutely troubled by consistent thuggery, the tribals and untouchables think of changing their faith to Christianity in the hope of finding economic and psychological comfort. However, Chotti is strongly opposed to the act of proselytization. He says—

*I’ve forgotten all that. An arrer [arrow] sticks in me heart when I think of leavin’ faith. Blood spills. T’ joy of t’ hol days.* (87)

While Sharankumar Limbale (2010) vindicates conversion to Christianity, Mahasweta gets a critical view of it.

As the novel progresses further, Mahasweta Devi looks like oriented towards existing politics. There are the characters of Romeo, Pahalwan and Dildar that appear on the scene and dominate the novel till the final part of it. They hail from Bihar and form terror across the Chotti area and there is none that could deter them since they are sponsored by the ruling party. The life runs on an even keel in Chotti till the time Romeo and his cohorts are off. The times especially augur well for Harbans for he is likely to get a contract of providing cement supply to a factory in the vicinity and his
business of brick-kiln and bus service runs smoothly for a while. Despite this Harbans is under the cloud of worry of the hoodlums. Mahasweta Devi has penned a special chapter on the character of Romeo and, by portraying it, she appears to have given full vent to her anger against the system that has produced such bullies that harass but the commoners. Basically named Shabankumar, he calls himself Romeo who initially lives in Patna harassing and molesting women. Since a valuable member of Youth League, he behaves in a rowdy fashion. Once he asks a girl to dance in her birthday suit but the girl slaps him, as he is drunk, inattentive of the consequence. She is forcefully taken to a forest and killed after being raped there. Her father does not find justice even at the law court but her brother, a serviceman by profession, gives him such a hard beating that Romeo turns a eunuch out of it and leaves Patna for ever under shame of being one. He wants to recover his potency yet fails at gaining it; he also tries to have erection through a prostitute but finding that she has failed, he cuts her throat and thereafter becomes a fulltime murderer.

Entering the Chotti premises Romeo sets ablaze the houses of the untouchables which also becomes his usual sport. He wants the untouchables ‘to suffer for another five thousand years’. He staunchly supports the landlords and moneylenders being guilty of holding bonded labour. Romeo finds his support in the ministers, state ministers and the
central government, to everybody’s shock and surprise. The police keep quiet when Romeo and his group perform their cruel show. He meets Harbans and assures him of leaving the untouchables and bonded labour scourged. He also asks Harbans to break off the unity between the untouchables and tribals by giving the tribals greater wages because he wants that the subalterns kept under his feet—

Plain words. Keep the untouchable and tribal under your shoes. They live well that way. Everyone gets cheap labour. Sowing and reaping go well. And the biggest thing. The glory of the castes remains high. You too will understand this in time. Whatever, Pahlwan will come to take the weekly cut. (262)

Harbans apprises Chotti of all this and Chotti tells him in response that none of his men would give any cut to Romeo and his collective, no matter whatever the consequence. He assumes the ‘voice of protest’ now:

If you take bullyin’ once, t’ bullyin’ gets bigger. Do whatever you think is t’ right way for you. We won’t give cuts. If you wish, let us go. We’ll know our starvin’ days are comin’ again. But we’ll die fightin’! They want truly to kill us. (264)
The novelist has delineated the facts of Indian political system that have probably been left out elsewhere. One could easily surmise her concern over the suffering of subalterns.

Although rebellious in tone, Chotti is absented on the occasions when Romeo and his people are around to persecute the locals. The Inspector General of the area has some preventive measures against the perpetrators of the crime but the government always connives at the crime and has no respect for the IG. Chadha gives the cuts to the gang from his own pocket, for his own convenience, yet Romeo does not like the move and puts his gun on the table from where the labourers collect their wages. This all happens in the absence of Chotti, to the surprise of the readers. Romeo and his associates set fire to the untouchable habitation and shoot Pahan and his wife dead; Motia also dies in the fire, Chotti absenting the scene, again. As expected, nothing like punishing the criminals happens there from the government’s end. Mahasweta says that the regime has released hollow slogans to champion the case of untouchables yet the persecution of the untouchables finds no end. She also chronicles an incident held in 1969 at Surmahi and describes the atrocities of then government and police against the untouchables:

The current regime beats many a drumroll about harijans in the outside world, but everyone knows the real order—no one cares if all
the harijans and untouchable die. Just in 1969 the police, to save a landed farmer’s face, arrested four hundred people bodies in public view, burned a few villages, killed people. (272)

This shows the natural concern of Mahasweta Devi over the subalterns. Chotti also expresses the anguished life of the untouchables and tribals the following way:

No use thinkin’ on it. Feel dizzy to think on’ it. How much money in t’ world! Chadha’s made so much money selln’ these hollow bricks, that he now says he’ll buy two or three coal quarries. Here the coal is above ground. Givin’ us twelve annas. Lala’s made so much money farmin’, wit’ loan interest, that there was t’ robbery, and he gave Congress fifty thousand rupees, and he didn’t feel a scrath. He’s givin’ yer t’ dust from his shoes. T’ tishan master is takin’ ten thousand rupees to dig this pond. And he’ll giv’ us twelve annas. So look, they won’ giv’ us a cut on t’ ten or fifty thousand. Let’s take what we get. (192-93)

As Wellek and Warren (1970) say that the author puts his/her own words into the mouth of the character and the character takes a shape, the same could be related to Mahasweta here. Moreover, one fact that comes forth out of the quote above is that the speaker has harboured a defeatist mentality.

Reminding himself the killing of Pahan, Pahani and Motia, Chotti seethes with anger and holds Tirath accountable for this. He asks his people
to not work on the fields of Tirath, a directive exactly followed by his people and that of Chhagan. Tirath is left helpless and wants to set up his records of bonded labour again. His concubine, Rakhani, a washerwoman also leaves him with his bastard son born to her but this does not affect him much as he does not keep anything above his land and interest on money. Romeo impresses upon him that he should not let the untouchables raise their heads. Tirath tells Romeo that his means of bond labour, loan and interest has always helped him keep the untouchables and tribals quiet and his violence is useless to him. The Prime Minister of India visits the area as a political strategy and declares the emergency across the nation; Mahasweta Devi calls it the worst period of life and elaborates on it.

Nothing seems to be working in favour of the subalterns of Chotti area. There is a well-wisher of them called Anand Mahato who tries to bail them out but is murdered by Romeo and his group for his keeping sympathy with the subalterns. A point that comes prominently out of Mahasweta’s writing is her ‘recourse to violence’. There is many a text by her that comprises the element of violence. Mahasweta gives way to irony upon the decisions of the government. As an example of it, she introduces a character in the name of Amlesh Khurana who is a doctor ageing thirty six and is appointed by the government to assess what is necessary for the economic development of West Bengal. It amazes the reader for sure to think as how a young physician could assess the case that is dead different
to his own profession. It adds to surprise when learnt that Amlesh believes in ‘theory and statistics, not in the reality of situation’. Amlesh wants, for his experiments, a few Munda villages, a few Oraon villages, some mixed Munda Oraon, some Dusad and Dhobi and Ganju villages, some villages with mixed Rajput and Brahman population and some leper-majority villages. He does not like the untouchables and tribals to live together:

Strange, strange! Why don’t the lower-caste live separately, why do the Mundas respond to their invitation! It’s painful ever to think about this. India Bharat is too complex for me. (298)

The scientific methods are more important for him than are the actual experiences.

When working for Rajbans Chadha, Harbans’ cousin, the people of Chotti and Chhagan suffer the pestilence of Romeo and the group. Pahalwan and Dildar particularly eye a beautiful woman, Basmati. Anyhow, they want to ravish her but Chotti is all prepared to defend her dignity therefore he trusses the three of them to a pole with the help of the guard of Rajbans. The trio urinate and defecate on the spot for fear of life. Moreover, Amlesh enters the scene and settles the matter. Chotti tells the youth League leader and Daroga that the tribals kill their daughter if she is dishonoured by somebody. Amlesh supports the view of Chotti whereas the secretary of the local MLA leaves the place in an absolutely revengeful
mood. Mahasweta Devi lashes out at the state politics in the following terms—

The local member understands nothing but his ‘cut’, his whore, and his debauchery. These are not faults that can be ignored. For it is on their basis that most members of Legislative Assembly receive their nomination. Even today. In backward areas. (285-6)

The ministers, A and B, tell Amlesh, who is inclined to better the condition of subalterns, that it is not possible to forestall the atrocities on the tribals and untouchables for they are carried out by their own pillars—landlords, moneylenders and landed farmers—that give the campaign funds and control votes. As soon as Amlesh leaves the area after a debacle in his research, Romeo and his men unleash their crime.

A naxalite, Swaroop Prasad, happens to be in Chotti with the purpose of liberating the bonded labour. Chotti supports him and also seeks his support indirectly in return. Chotti realizes that all the suffering of him and his people is for want of education and gives an utterance to the prevalent reality:

Upon what day, how many years back someone took five Kilos of paddy, ten kilos of maize, three rupee coins. And t’ price, hoo lord! More’n gold. To repay that debt ye gie labour from father to son on and on, belley-debt stays unrepaid. Gie’s int’rest, goes on givin’, t’ principal’s not repaid. Debt upon debt, to keep food in yer belly. (302)
He gets prepared for a battle. A detective is left in the area; he is Shankar from the Special Task Force. Romeo and his convoy are all set to wipe the tribals and untouchables out, surreptitiously supported by Tirath. In fact, Tirath is a Jain and must not support violence and inequality but in practice he is no more than a leech, in Mahasweta’s word. The group of Romeo invades the village of Chotti and clashes against the tribals and untouchables, with guns and pistols. The tribals use their bows and shoot the poison-tipped arrows at their enemies, the arrows moving faster than the bullet’s speed. The incident creates bloodshed and some people on each side lose their life. Dukha, a tribal youth, injured heavily, wants to drink some water but instead receives urine purposely secreted on his face by Dildar. While Dildar is killed in the incident, Swaroop Prasad is shot dead by Shankar. An investigation is held into the event and the readers get shocked at finding that the families of Dildar and the youth, on his side, killed are entitled to receive a hundred thousand rupees and petrol pump each in recompense whereas Dukha’s family receives a fifty-rupee note as a compensation for his loss. However, this does not console Romeo and Pahalwan who have lost their right hand each. Therefore, they demand that the Paramvir Chakra be posthumously conferred on Dildar and the youth. It would suit the occasion to quote a livid Mahasweta Devi:

If Romeo and Pahlwan had killed every adivasi in the area, no one would have found it ‘unexpected’. There are adivasis, there are
subcastes, the Romeos kill them, it happens like this. But if one or a few adivasis kill the Romeos it is an unexpected event. The Romeos kill, they’re not killed. This is the rule under all regimes. (358)

Romeo and his company change their political loyalty in that the prevenient political party has run out of power. It does not matter, however, who replaces whom as the government; the adivasis would remain the suffering adivasis only and the untouchables as the unchanged untouchables. The Congress government is substituted with Janta Party to no avail of the subalterns, asserts Mahasweta. Romeo declares that he, with support of the Youth Wing of the ruling party and of Harbans and Tirath—should skin the tribals and untouchables for shoe leather. As their activities rob the subalterns of their psychological comfort, Somchar and his friends join the naxalite groups and attempt to rid their own people of the invariable troubles and injustice.

Once Romeo, Pahalwan and four other young men survey the forest; are all heavily drunk. On a night, Somchar, Disha, Upa and Lal kill them without anybody’s notice. The SDO of the area is directed by the government to find the culprits and sentence them. He launches a comb operation to search out the murderers but in vain. Chotti reaches the conclusion that it must be Somchar and his friends behind the scene, so he gets a confession from Somchar, his son, of the massacre. Fearing his son’s earlier demise Chotti plans it to take it on his head. The SDO sends a
drummer around Chotti, Narsingarh, Dhai, etc. to ask the people to gather at the festivity of Bijoya Dashami, his intention being that of trapping the criminal behind the mass murder. Accordingly the people come together at the scheduled place. Everyone there is asked to shoot an arrow into the dart under surveillance of Chotti, now seventy eight, as the judge. Nobody comes forth and the SDO threatens the people to confess the crime. Chotti tries to console him but the officer is in no mood of making allowance. Chotti says,

Shush lord! Standin’ here today, ever’thin’ comes to mind. Me father died by reason of that Lala’s dad. I ne’er did a betrayal, and still he sent me son to je-hell, and I saved him from t’ wheels of a movin’ train! Munda-Oraon-Dusad-Dhobi have never broken trust! And what did we get for that Lord? What did you give to us? You’ll raise terror over us ta try their murder, but they did not raise terror? They went to take t’ honour of our daughters, all the daughters of t’ families of t’ Pahan, his wife, of Motia, of t’ railway porter, of Dukha, Jugal, Chhagan- they died, and then there were no polis lord? Did you not work this way? (362)

Foreseeing the impending danger to the innocent people around, Chotti stands up and tells the officer that he has murdered. The SDO stands up to break some spell but a thousand adivasis upraise their bows in space crying unanimously: ‘no’. It is to infer if Chotti dies or is killed. But
Mahasweta is hopeful of a new government—all socialist—and says at the end:

**And a warning announced in many upraised hands. (364)**

Mahasweta Devi has tried by way of this novel to bring to light the harsh realities of life of the subalterns that have still not reached a position of making both ends meet. Their suffering, omnipresent as it is with Mahasweta, finds some sound voice in the novel. Racy language, use of slang and English words, underlined by Spivak, voiced against the established system, evidence Mahasweta’s utmost concern towards the pathos undergone by the subalterns. Her personae are exploited on the economic, psychological, physical and cultural grounds. Through Chotti she has built up a brave, rebellious, unselfish and compassionate, yet timid and fugitive to a little degree, leader that presents a representative *voice of protest* against injustice; it is the very example of her *social activism*.

**Mother of 1084** is a novel by Mahasweta Devi that is exemplary from the viewpoint of protest against the odd elements of life, whether at home, in the social network or the legal and political mould. The story has had a wide recognition for two reasons: first, G C Spivak put it on a large academic scale; second, the exhibit was presented via film.

The story opens with the third person narrative of Mahasweta Devi. The novel is about the naxalite activities in the urban locale that are the upshot of the political criminal world. The activities have been undertaken
not only by the subalterns but also by the youngsters that belong to the elite economic and social background, called Bhadralok otherwise. Moreover, such an act on their part compels them to be treated as subalterns by their own family and the outside people as well. Mahasweta harshly critiques the political and police systems that play hand in glove to serve each other’s purpose. Samik Bandyopadhyay (2008) describes the systems as:

It is an illegitimacy that Mahasweta locates spread throughout society, in the administration in the cultural-intellectual establishment, in politics, in the existence of a whole antisocial fringe of killers prepared to serve the interests of any organized political force anywhere between the extremes of the Right and those of the Left. (Mother of 1084 viii)

Sujata, the central protagonist of the novel, gets up one morning having dreamt of the time twenty two years ago. She often recollects the very morning because Brati, her most darling child, was born to her on it. Brati is the hero of the novel and the youngest child in the Chatterjee family with Jyoti, Neepa and Tuli being elder than he is. Dibyanath, Sujata’s husband, is the only son to his mother who is a widow. The widow always shares an attitude of hatred with Sujata. Sujata is a forlorn character throughout the text, at least till the last chapter of the text; she has been lonely since the time she was left so at the time of Brati’s birth—the time she was left to the mercy of destiny. There was nobody, except the nurses,
to ameliorate her throes. Dibyanath never shares her grief and agony, whether mental or physical:

Dibyanath had not allowed Sujata to take his car. It would not be the right thing to keep his car waiting before Kantapukur. Anybody could identify the car. That day, with Brati’s death, Brati’s father had also died for Sujata. The way he had behaved that day, that moment, had shattered numberless illusions for her. It had burst upon her with explosive force. Like one of these massive meteors crashing upon the ancient world billions of years ago. (7-8)

Brati has been born on 17 January 1948 and is given to revolutionary ideas at home as well as in the whole outside gamut. Jyoti is his eldest brother and Binny his sister-in-law. Sujata is an employee at a bank and Dibyanath has his own chartered accountant’s firm. Neepa’s husband is an important officer in the customs and Tuli’s fiancé, Tony Kapadia has his own agency of exporting Indian silk, batik, carpets, brass Natrajas and bankura terracotta horses. Jyoti’s father-in-law lives in Britain. This is the overall make-up of Sujata’s family.

Jyoti makes the loyal and obedient son to his father whereas Brati is good-for-nothing to Dibyanath. Mostly Brati is taken for an eyesore by the in-house members and so by the outside ones as well. Dibyanath plans to send him for further studies but his plan does not materialize as Brati is a boy given to a different propensity. The novel is presented in the style of
flashback technique; every experience forms a novel sense for Sujata and for the readers simultaneously. The novel carries a special quality that it holds its auditors under curiosity till its close. The reader experiences a thrill most of the time.

On a night Sujata is asleep, so are the rest of the members of her family. There is an untimely call from the police station delivering the news to Sujata that her son is shot dead. Actually instead of his name, the number 1084 is pronounced for the number is meant to represent a convict under it. Listening to this, Sujata knows no bounds to her sorrow but there is none around to share her affliction, she is simply left to herself. Dibyanath does not permit her to use his car to see the corpse of Brati for the fear that people would identify the car. He has a heart of stone and cares more for his prestige than reading emotions of his wife. His demeanour this way deeply shocks Sujata and she feels that her husband has also died for her at this juncture of time. Reaching the police station at Kantapukur, she finds that the soma of her son bears three holes: one in the throat, the other in the abdomen and the third in the chest. It pains her more to see that the face of Brati is battered with a blunt weapon. The body has been so battered, smashed and scalded that Sujata cannot touch it. She clasps Tuli, her daughter, to herself and weeps incessantly with sobs. Dibyanath asks his daughter-in-law to remove the picture of Brati from the living room and shift it to the second floor. This adds fuel to fire already going on inside
Sujata but she has no option save putting up with it. Now she takes a tour to past to unearth, out of her dialogue with him, as why Brati little liked his father:

But why, Brati?

The individual who goes by the name of Dibyanath Chatterjee is not my enemy.

Then?

All the things and values he holds on to. There are many others who swear by the same things and values. The class that nurtures these values, we consider it our enemy. He belongs to that class. (16)

The quote above denotes that if Dibyanath did not like Brati, Brati had no affinity with his father either. Dibyanath claims that Sujata was responsible to have made Brati act inimically towards him.

Brati actively participates in the ‘Decade for Liberation’ movement. He sits together with his friends and share discussions in relation to reforming the existing system. They prepare slogans on the paper against the system and distribute them and finally write them on the walls in the dead of night. They have lost faith in the social system completely. Brati believes that the real freedom could not result out of means adopted by the society and the state. As they hold on to such an ideology of protest, they are branded as the antisocial by the local governance. Their intention is to burn the rich and even the police headquarters. Mahasweta Devi mordantly
attacks the existent social and political organisations dominated by the spineless gangs and politicians:

Even as they cried for the dead Brati, Jyoti and Dibyanath make her see that the killers in society, those who adulterated food, drugs and baby food, had every right to live. The leaders who led the people to face the guns of the police and found for themselves the safest shelters under police protection, had every right to live. But Brati was a worse criminal than them. Because he had lost faith in this society ruled by profit-mad businessmen and leaders blinded by self-interest. Once this loss of faith assailed a boy, an adolescent, or a youth, it does not matter whether he is twelve, sixteen or twenty two, death was his portion. (19)

Brati is not the only rebel shot dead but Somu, Bijit, Laltu and Kalu are the others, his companions, killed at the same instant. Sujata has caught appendicitis and also suffers from anaemia. Tuli’s engagement is held on the day of Brati’s birth, much to the dissent and shock of Sujata and without her being consulted. Mrs Kapadia, Tony’s mother, has the date fixed as per the calendar of Swami, her guru from the US. Tuli and Dibyanath do not bother about Sujata in this respect. Saroj Pal who has organised the army against liberation is invited to the party and looking his face up Sujata feels sheer disgusted. She recalls the decimation of Brati and
his companions conducted by Saroj. Tuli is, however, upset with her mother for her being in dismay. She scolds Sujata hard for this—

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

Sujata’s family is degenerate; for instance, Jyoti is a drunkard so is Neepa’s husband, Dibyanath is a flirt, Tony a master swindler, and Neepa keeps with her husband’s cousin, in Brati’s word, she is a nympho. Brati is totally different from these and has been scared of none since his childhood. He has never entertained false bogeys in his life and has always listened to his own reason. A stubborn, sensitive and imaginative boy, Brati only confides in his mother and has never feared his grandmother as did his brethren. Sujata always supports and defends him with no objection to his naxalite pursuit. The bond between the mother and the son is never undulating. That he is unlike his father, brother and sisters, Brati is strongly disliked by them. Mahasweta Devi narrates:

**If Brati drank like Jyoti, if he could go about drunk like Neepa’s husband, if he could flirt with the slip of a typist the way Brati’s father did, if he could be a master swindler like Tony Kapadia, if he**
Brati does not talk to anyone, never smiles therein nor does he demand anything from anyone. On the contrary, he lives in the locality where Somu, his comrade, belongs. He feels at home when with Somu and his family. There he smiles, laughs, talks and shares word with his friends and Somu’s mother. Once when Sujata meets with Somu’s mother, she comes to know all this and is immensely surprised as it is all incredible for her. She repents as to why she has not learnt already. Somu’s sister does not talk to her and gives her an indignant glance for she thinks that she has lost her brother because of Sujata’s son. This shows a radical difference between her and Brati’s sisters. Somu’s mother also tells Sujata that Brati ran his protest from her house wherein he and his friends used to discuss a lot over their protest and sleep there. Actually Brati has been educated at college level with a meritorious record: prizes, gold medals, mementoes, etc. being his academic achievements. Moreover, he joins the ‘Decade of Liberation’ movement shows his fascination towards formation of values of equality, even though his path, of violence, could not fall within moral justification.

Brati and his comrades keep on working for their mission. They believe that everyone is committed to the mission and influenced by the same goal. Notwithstanding the fact remains that there are some traitors from within that take to treachery yet remain undiscovered till the doom of
Brati and his fellow activists. The betrayal has been acutely described by Mahasweta as:

That was how they died. By trusting too many people. Brati and his fellow workers never realized that those they trusted could be tempted with offers, jobs for some, security for others, a happy life still for others. They never realized that there were many who had joined them only with the aim of betraying them. [...] They had not realized that the system against which they fought had the capacity to contaminate even the child in the womb. (40)

Dibyanath is a dissolute person whose debauchery is overlooked by his old mother and children except for Brati and Sujata. That is why he hates both. It is noteworthy, moreover, that Dibyanath’s mother, other son and his daughters interpret his carnal desires as the sign of his virility which, especially Tuli thinks, Sujata could not allay. Dibyanath has used Sujata as a mere object of somatic gratification and also feels it his prerogative to be a philanderer. This hurts Brati deeply which is why he openly opposes his father at home. Sujata has been a passive entity at her home that remains quiet, taciturn and old-fashioned in her standard of living virtually all the time and appears to lack the courage of Ibsen’s (1992) Nora or that of Shaw’s (2004) Candida. Aside from this, she has her firm say in two respects: she refuses to bear a child for the fifth time; and she does not accommodate the idea of leaving her job. Brati and Hem, the servant of the
house, form the only emotional and psychological comfort for Sujata. While Sujata is all engaged with eliciting Brati’s details, in specific his protest and outside life, Dibyanath is as given to pandering to his sexual appetite.

The novel presents the story in an episodic manner. There are certain fragments that intercede with other descriptions. Mahasweta gives a graphic picture of Kolkata of the seventies. She says that the city is a great danger to the youngsters below the age of forty. There are the pieces of the news on the merciless killing of the youngsters that make Sujata uneasy and intimidate her as well. The areas of Bhowanipur to South Jadhavpur and Barsat happen to be in the news for there are eight youth massacred—the cruelty beyond words. The poets, artists, writers and intellectuals do not pay any heed to this (brutality of the police and politicians) which angers Mahasweta seamlessly:

All this [cruelty of the police] surely could not have smacked of barbarity, of bestiality. If it had, then the poets and writers of Calcutta would have spoken of the barbarities on this side of the border along with those on that side of the border [Bangladesh]. Since they didn’t, since they could ignore the daily orgy of blood that stained Calcutta and concentrate on the brutal ceremony of death beyond the border, their vision must have been flawless. Sujata’s vision was surely wrong. Surely. The poets, writers, intellectuals and
artists are honoured members of society recognized spokesmen for the country at large. (51)

The creative artists and the intellectuals are very much interested in campaigning for Bangladesh but are little concerned about the bloodshed in their own land. In reality, poverty and unemployment are the main cause behind naxalite activities, Mahasweta Devi seems to indicate. A boy like Brati, on the other hand, is influenced by the labour of love as he belongs to a fair economic and social backdrop. He plans his activities dexterously but is unaware of the perfidy inside his consortium. He wants to go to Digha but changes his course out of the blue. The police and the army representatives launch a search operation through the buses and trains en route to Digha; they inspect every face carefully. Brati foresees that something terrible has happened. The comrade asked to carry the message to Somu and his companions does not meet them but goes to the police. This act brings the end of the rebels closer.

It has been midnight. Brati, Somu, Bijit and Partha are at Somu’s house. The house has been besieged by the gang of killers that abuse and shout at Brati and his friends asking them to come outside. The gang threatens the rebels to set the house on fire. Brati and Somu are armless while Bijit and Parth carry a flick knife each. They try to attack the gangsters but are counterattacked ruthlessly. Somu’s father rushes to the police station and informs the police inspector about the incident but the
inspector detours so that the criminals finish their job and leave the place comfortably. Somu receives twenty three wounds on his body and Bijit sixteen; Laltu’s entrails have been pulled out and wrapped around his body while Brati’s face has been mutilated. Thus the protest of the rebels is crushed down by the political organisation with the help of the police and the thugs.

As Sujata moves into the house of Somu to get more details about Brati, she finds that the family is caught in a double jeopardy, i.e. excessive economic hardship and public ignominy incurred by the activism of Somu. The additional trauma has been that the family is exposed to the threats and taunts of the malefactors around its shabby abode. Somu’s mother tells Sujata that her two other daughters have already been sent to her cousin due to burden of their maintenance and the one that lives with her has had to leave her schooling and conducts tuition classes to earn a square meal which, despite it, is a rarity. She adds further:

> You’ve felt the pain, and that’s why you have come. As for me, Didi, I have eyes, yet I’m blind. I have legs yet I’m lame. Didi, my daughter tells me she’ll never get a job because she is Somu’s sister. Can it be true Didi? (59)

The mother tells Sujata that she could not help prevent Somu’s name from appearing in the newspapers—she could not hush up the things as did
Sujata’s husband in case of Brati. When Sujata attempts to console Somu’s mother, she reacts:

**Don’t compare yourself and my daughter, Didi. With all the contacts you have! Didn’t you notice how all their names appeared in the papers, but Brati’s name never appeared? Didi, I have no contacts, I don’t have the money to hush things up or get things done.** (61)

Somu’s family has to keep at receiving end as suggest the quotes above.

The killers are not punished and change the party affiliation. The revolutionaries fail at their move of liberation for two reasons— they already harboured unawares their enemies inside and their fight did not follow a constructive ground. Mahasweta Devi has very closely accounted for the subalterns’ plight corollary of the different economic grounds and also for the repercussions that are consequent of the offensive undertaken by them against the corrupt system.

Having left Somu’s house, Sujata rendezvous with Nandini at a place where she is home interned. Nandini tells Sujata that it was Anindya who betrayed the group sullying all their plans. He was not Brati’s recruit but of Nitu, a boy with many an alias later on taken to his own colony by a policeman and beaten to death. Nandini explains to Sujata the tortures that are meted out to the prisoners at the police station. She says that there has been a thousand-watt volt bulb glared at the naked eyes of the person put into the custody room, similar to the dungeon Orpheus (08-06-2013) was
thrown into. The person in charge of the case sits in the dark and, whether a
smoker or not, he holds a cigarette between his fingers and clamps it to the
skin of face of the captive. Nandini, a personal sufferer of this, tells Sujata
that the light flash, set for forty eight to seventy hours at a stretch, has
blinded her in the right eye. She is not psychologically stable and wants to
take revenge on her enemy. Sujata shudders at hearing all this. Anindya has
left for another state. Sujata is taken aback to realize that Nandini has a
whole knowledge of her family ambience. Nandini states:

   Brati’s brother and sisters admired their father, Brati used to say that
they were not human. His eldest sister [Neepa] was a nympho, the
other sister a bundle of complexes, impossible to understand, his
brother a pimp. That was how he described them. Only you he loved
you. That is why he hadn’t left home. (81-82)

Sujata tries to gather as why Brati always haunted her dreams; her curiosity
grows on and on when she traces out that Brati loved her so much and was
living in the house just for her sake. It is even surprising for her to reckon
that he loved a dark-skinned young girl. It reminds Sujata of why Brati used
to talk to her in a fanciful way:

   Ma, I’m going to put you inside a glass house once I grow up. A house
built of magic glass, Ma, where you can see everyone but no one can
see you. (98)
Nandini is upset over the stagnation that has taken place after the end of her group. To her, the peace pervading around the city and attitude of its dwellers suffocate her to a dislike. She boils with anger, is disturbed yet confused to think that there are thousands of young men still languishing in the prison without trial and finally is ambitious to be a revolutionary. Thus ends the episode of the last protester. Mahasweta Devi has brought forth the hypocrisy of citizens and barbarity of the police bureaucrats. The novel leaves a degree of latitude for a psychoanalytic approach to it.

Sujata returns her home with ambivalent experiences that make the world dysphoric to her. Having been home Sujata shares a bitter verbal clash with Dibyanath and openly tells him that she detests him for his being a regular fornicator, specifically for his criminal conversation with his typist and cousin’s wife. She expressly tells him that she is especially unhappy with him for his lack of affinity with and listlessness towards Brati who merited greatest share of love and respect from the family. For that reason Sujata asks Dibyanath to instantly get out of her room which hits him like a whiplash.

The engagement programme of Tuli is arranged. Tuli, a lookalike of her grandmother, is the most beloved child for Dibyanath as she reflects his mother’s face and manners. Also, she shares certain secrets with her father which makes another reason for his liking of her. Tuli is arrogant and spares none coming her way. At times she unnecessarily wages a quarrel
with Hem who is the alter ego of Sujata. Sujata gives her a hard scold over this emphatically warning her, under consciousness, that her father does not pay Hem for her services but she herself does that is why Hem should never be subject to anybody’s dissatisfaction. Now Sujata develops into a full-fledged complex that defies whoever tries to hurt her self-respect. Once a meek figure, now Sujata has turned into a conscious feminist and reaches no comprise when her self-respect matters. Hem signifies to her the most reliable person since she had looked after Brati when he was just seven days and Brati had also had deep affection for her.

As the movement of Brati and his group has come to a finish, the novel reaches its final part that centres on the hypocrisy and immorality of the elites. Mahasweta Devi is bold enough and caustic at focalising both the factors. Sujata is thoroughly plaintive to be part of the engagement party of Tuli and Tony for it overlaps Brati’s birthday. After all, she has to participate into it. Dibyanath is a big financial and emotional fraud. Even at the funeral of Brati, he tried to pose Sujata, before his offspring, as an ‘unnatural woman with dry eyes’. Mahasweta Devi hits hard at upper class Indians that are the NRIs and that are highly superstitious, in spite of their living in the US, yet the hypocrites in their devotion, seek excuses. This gives rise to black humour as well. For instance, Mrs Kapadia has a bottle of scotch in her hand and generously speaks, with pride, of her guru called Swami who lives in the US. She describes the halo behind the Swami’s
head like a lamp burning, the burning that equals the brightness of a thousand suns:

When I saw the swami, my dear, you won’t believe it but something in me caught fire. Then I saw the halo behind the Swami’s head. Like a lamp burning. The light grew brighter and brighter and burned like a thousand suns. (108)

What Mahasweta Devi states in response to this is quite interesting—

They had taken Kush to the rubber-tubed room, strapped and immobile. Two thousand lamps blazed right into his face, burned and burned. All the nails from his fingers had been plucked out. Then they pierced each nerve centre of the body with needles. At a stretch for forty-eight hours, then for seventy-two hours, then they had said, You are free. He was taken out and brought home. Then they flung him down in front of his house. And shot him. His eyeballs had melted with the heat. But Mrs. Kapadia’s vision had not been damaged in the light of a thousand suns. (108) [Italics mine]

The author has not only pointed out the superficiality of the NRIs but has also held her reader to determine whether to laugh or be serious over the event. Mrs Kapadia goes on narrating the miracles of the swami tirelessly. She narrates another miracle of the Swami. Once, the Swami was flying his own plane. He just looked at her and asked her to come to him at Miami. She was surprised to learn how the Swami could guess that she was going to Miami. The Swami also said that she was the girl in the book she was
carrying, the book being ‘Black Girl in Search of God’. She thought that she was black having found her God in Swami. The Swami appreciates, she says, the people possessing diamonds as the diamond, to him, symbolizes the soul. Here Mahasweta Devi is highly critical of not only the hypocrites but their object of faith.

The novelist also exemplifies the affair between Neepa with her husband’s cousin. The cousin chases her with a piece of meat on the fork in his hand in an attempt to put it into her mouth. This all happens before the very eyes of Sujata who is fully engrossed with the thoughts of Brati and his protest that has resulted into his death. She is helpless, moreover, left to herself. When asked by Mrs Kapadia if she has ever had any guru, Sujata strongly declines forthwith the idea of having any. She relates to her that there was one of her mother-in-law’s who had studied the horoscope of Brati and predicted that he would live long, not be killed and catch no disease or any injury. As a matter of fact, Sujata had torn off the horoscope. Mahasweta Devi, through such examples, has uncovered the face of those that make fools out of the people, in the name of astrology. While all the enjoyment at the party goes on in a shameless manner, there enters Saroj Pal, the Deputy Commissioner, who has put an end to lives of Brati and his consortium. Sujata looks at him, recalls Brati’s fate and finally collapses down in woes. Dibyannath calls it a case of ‘appendix burst’. The novel ends mysteriously.
Mahasweta Devi has unmasked the evil politics, social system and corruption of the seventies and has strongly voiced the victimization of the innocent youth via the novel, *Mother of 1084*. She has given the causes behind naxalite activities. And the way she has brought to the fore the grass-roots level reality constructs her social activism. The novel focuses more on the pathetic mental condition of a mother than the protest itself. It makes an interesting feminist reading. *Rananayar* (23-10-2009) calls the novel ‘a narrative of healing’. However, the statement leaves some scope for doubt to consider if the novel could really be a *narrative of healing*. The film, based on the novel and, directed by Govind Nihlani (1998) gives a precise account of the text. It holds the audience till the close. The clear-cum-faithful presentation of the novel is the real aesthetic of the film. It would be appropriate to quote *Bandyopadhyay*’s (2002) remark in relation to the novel:

In *Hajar churashir ma* (Mother of 1084), published in 1973, Mahasweta Devi (b. 14 January 1926) for the first time turned to the Naxalite movement in west Bengal. In this departure from her earlier modes of historical and domestic fiction, she sought the roots of the revolutionary fervour of the urban guerrillas of the seventies in their discontent with a system that upheld a corrupt and insensitive establishment, both in the family and in the state. (vii)
Bashai Tudu is a text, a novelette that perfectly fits within the frame of ‘social activism and protest’. The main theme of the novelette is the rights of the labourers and tribals. The issue forms the economic, communal and social grounds. It carries the naxalite fabric through and through. It emits out the wrath of the mind of Mahasweta Devi against the then political, social and cultural milieux. She says:

While nobody cares to pay heed to their claims to the right to survive, the hired writers pandering to the middle and upper classes content themselves with weaving narcissistic fantasies in the name of literature. When Rome burnt, Nero fiddled, for that was how he thought he could shut his eyes to the logic of the conflagration. But he had to pay for it by being wiped away. (Bashai Tudu xvii)

To Mahasweta Devi, rural India has the appearance of an enormous graveyard (xvi). The lower middle classes are on the verge of extinction (xvii). ‘Hence’ she adds ‘I have to go on writing to the best of my ability in defence of the dispossessed and the disinherited, so that I may never have reason to feel ashamed to face myself. For all writers are accountable to their own generation and have to answer for themselves’ (xxi). The author is very clear about her purpose as a responsible user of art. The novelette unfolds as under:

The news of killing of Bashai Tudu reaches the police station, a young man— Mato Dome, being the harbinger of it. He is a villager from
Charsha. The sub-Inspector of the police station is not so much impressed but his clerk, Deoki Missir, the crafty old bird—so calls him Mahasweta Devi—a Brahmin, catches on importance of the news. The clerk says that Ratan Dome, Mato’s father is a wild person who cannot be put behind the bars for his having a thousand votes under his control.

The sub-Inspector learns it that not Ratan but his wife, Mato’s mother, has given the news of Bashai’s death. Mahasweta Devi introduces Kali Santra, a journalist— as dead as dodos (xx) who runs a weekly called ‘Jilla Barta’. He is a man who has missed the bus even after having worked for the party for as long as his being 61. He has once worked with Bashai hence invited four times to identify the dead body of Bashai. In fact the author has made use of suspense and mystery of Bashai’s dying time and again and resurrecting in so a way.

Mato is a youngster who has his wishes like watching cinemas, gadding about well-dressed, etc. unfulfilled. He wants a job but Missir, the Brahmin, always hinders his way. The Brahmin often looks down upon him. Kali Santra is hurt at looking the domes not being allowed to draw water from the public well yet he bears it all like a picaro of the likes of Joseph Andrews of Henry Fielding (2012) or his Tom Jones (1999). Charsha is the village left uncared-for by the government even during the drought and famine times. The reason is that the village has supported the
cause of 1970-71. Casteism and untouchability are the problems troubling Kali Santra’s sight but he is weak and alone—

When he found the domes not being allowed to draw water from the well dug by the Block Development authorities for the whole community, or Nityajiban Dolui losing his job at the village school for having married his colleague, a Brahman widow, Kali Santra could see how sadly the struggle for the basic rights had failed and how the word ‘Revolution’ was only one of those many words bandied about, as expendable as the tinsel wrap around a paan. (4)

Jagula is a town small yet sharing direct telecommunication links with Calcutta for Charsha; at the heart of a network of asphalted roads. When Bashai and his company set the subdivision on fire in 1970-71, the prostitutes, Rabati and Bedana and their likes could not relieve the jawaans (the soldiers). The sub-Inspector and Deoki Missir, his clerk, have been the two Brahmins, Deoki being ill-wisher of the sub-Inspector. The elder daughter of the sub-Inspector has married a cobbler, an IAS officer which is the capital of Missir to control his officer. Loss of Bashai can easily screw up service record of the sub-Inspector. Bashai wants to finish off the jotedars, the people holding land, for their exploiting the tribals and the liminal. He is 51 with a height of five-foot and seven inches and has a scar on the forehead. However, the dilemma before the sub-Inspector has been that he has not seen Bashai and Bashai’s physical features could be shared
by many. Rupees 600,000/- is the money budgeted for ‘Operation Bashai Tudu’.

Bashai is a Santal, a keen archer. He is the protagonist of the text, a character larger than life. When he has turned a naxalite he has become a leader having formed his own army of the landless tribal agricultural labourers and the migrant labourers (10). He is fully determined to stand to the exploiters:

We’ll reap the paddy and carry it to our granaries. Sarju Sau, the jotedar refused us the minimum wages fixed by the government. Now we’ll feed the vultures with his carrion. (9)

Mahasweta Devi uses irony to describe the personal life of the sub-Inspector. She says that his wife offers her prayers to Santoshi mother owing to whose blessing the daughter of the officer, having married the cobbler officer, does not bear any child, a great consolation for the sub-Inspector and his wife:

From the time his wife had begun offering prayers to Santoshi Mother, fortune had been kind to the SI. The doctor had said that his elder daughter would never bear a child. That was the best relief for the shame of the brahman’s daughter marrying one who was a cobbler by caste. For that meant that the scandal would at least bear no fruit. It was the benevolence of the Great Mother […]. (11)
The irony continues when Mahasweta Devi refers to Deoki Missir’s acts. She says that his strategy of encounter has been so useful that it helps him eliminate ninety per cent of Bashai’s people. And his leaving out ten per cent of them alive, to be running for life, is a matter of sympathy. Deoki has had his brokers in every regime therefore never gets transferred away from Jagula police station.

Kali Santra has distributed his inheritance of ten acres of land to his farmhands. This he has done for two reasons: showing public his adherence to the communist ideology and the revolution was imminent. His younger brother, having taken him for an ideal person while at school— is strongly critical of him over the issue of denial of private property. His son, Anirban, and wife Ginimala also dislike him strongly. His son threatens him that he would prove him insane in case Kali complained against the rice he gets:

*If you hate to, you needn’t eat the rice from our land. You can buy your own rice to be cooked separately for you. But if you raise a row over this land, I’ll go to court and prove you insane.* (15)

Kali goes to Betul, a man whose son cultivates Ginimala’s land. Betul’s another son has been a Naxalite. Kali is taken to the forest where Bashai, hit with a bullet in the leg, is supposed to be discovered. Betul tells Kali that Bashai is not a man for a man cannot die four times and come alive. Bashai is reported to be injured when fighting somewhere over *minimum*
wages for the agriculturalists. Kali is systematically taken to another shore of the river by fording on the back of a buffalo.

At once Kali Santra visits Bashai in the village Paltakudi. In the village, at Mushai Tudu’s residence, Bashai has been much honoured. This impresses Kali a lot. He sits with Bashai and they both chat together for a long time. It hurts Bashai being called a naxalite. He tells Kali that in the party he was always insulted by the party men for being a Santal. He says that he has been an agricultural labourer as born one, and that too, despite being educated at a mission school. Bashai strongly criticizes Kisan Sabha that does not work in favour of the agricultural labourers.

When referring to the untouchables, the so-called word, ‘harijan’ never slips from Mahasweta’s pen— the very word Dr Ambedkar always despised and his associate, Dadasaheb Gaikwad, more so in particular (Keer 333-5). A further contradiction one comes across in Mahasweta Devi is that she staunchly advocates for Gandhism on the one hand and equally dismisses Congress, a long-time political organization under Gandhian control, on the other and also seems to be advocating for Naxalism.

Bashai tells Kali that he had neither of the parents when a child and was left naked when lost his aunt at six. Despite this, he could find educational shelter at the Mission, through Gokul-babu. He turns touchy when it comes to his originary grounds. He says that although Gokul-babu
did him a favour, he still called him one of ‘those Santals, those that go about in loin-cloths, eat the field-mice and all’ (24). Bashai believes that the ‘beliefs that stick in the blood, they are hard to get rid of’ (24) as says Kali Santra. Bashai is strongly opposed to the class of babus for their being ‘caste people’. He is a proud Santal undivided into castes. Sometimes, Mahasweta Devi uses the terms like ‘naked beggars’, starving bastards’ to refer to the tribals (24) which deprives the reader of understanding whether she really means it. Bashai says that if the Brahmins were the agricultural labourers, even the labourers would be split into castes:

Kali- babu, a Brahman or a Kayastha would never be an agricultural labourer. If there had been a few of them, upper caste agricultural labourers, then the agricultural labourers too would have split apart into castes. (24)

Occasionally, it is difficult to grasp the temperament of the author when she represents the Brahmins on two scales: ideal and worse.

Bashai severely criticizes the party policy of discrimination. He says that Kali has failed at seeing real India. Therefore, a Santal cannot forget that he is one. Once when Samanta caught cholera, Bashai carried him over his back with his shirt smeared with Samanta’s excreta. Still he is not taken any note of. All his revolutionary ideas happen to be the outcome of his ‘Santal strategy and Santal wisdom’ (P.26). He, however, terms Kali as honest and not betraying or stabbing someone in the back. This
compliment gives Kali the ultimate solace. He criticizes that the communist party has been turned into a jotedari deal. He cannot bear the idea of ‘die-the-lot-of-you-and-let-us-thrive’ (P.30). Everything he says to Kali appeals to the latter. Bashai cannot stand it that there should be no rung for the depressed on the ladder the middle and upper classes sit on. He calls Kisan Sabha worse than the police, more demonic than Congress:

[…] but when we found the Kisan Sabha disowning the agricultural labourers like a mother abandoning an illegitimate child, when the Kisan sabha refused to raise a little finger for the cause of the agricultural labourers, then we had to start thinking for ourselves.

(13)

Mahasweta Devi describes Kali as a five-century-ago Vaishnava, full of love, humility and tolerance. She never detaches the influence of Vaishnavism.

Bashai wants the ‘minimum wages’ for the agricultural labourers implemented but neither the party nor administration entertains his demand which is why he steps out from the party. He believes that the jotedars keep every government under their control. When the yield goes low, the sharecropper’s share also goes low whereas the agricultural labourers go naked and consequently they become bonded to the jotedars. The jotedars being the upper castes hold all the power. The MW (minimum wages) Act was formed in 1953, revised in 1959 and 1968 respectively and Bashai
belongs to 1970 when the revised rates of 1968 remain still valid. The
Communist Kisan Sabha is not concerned about it. The lower yield always
makes the plight of the sharecroppers and agricultural labourers sadder.
Mahasweta Devi says (48) that the tribals have had expectations from the
Communists, never from the Congress. She argues that (49) India was on
good terms with the USSR and the US therefore could have improved the
conditions of herself but it did not do it. Consequently Bashai has been the
effect of it in a representative form. Here she sees to vindicate the cause of
Naxalism.

Bashasi Tudu does not get married for two reasons: first, he thinks
that wife and children at home have been bothersome; and the woman he
fell for, Draupadi, has got married with Dulna Majhi. Paltakudi is a typical
Santal village. It functions like a den for the Santals. Bashai plays the
mainstay for the tribals. If he dies, says Betul, ‘the tribals would die too’.
For Bashai saves them every trouble, trouble of the money-lenders in
particular. Bashai has no specific home of his own. Born in Bakuli, he is
brought up in the village Bhelo and educated at Ramta Mission. There is
none related to him by blood. He gives way to his mental agony as:

You know my history, Didn’t have a father, didn’t have a mother, and
was left naked and alone when I lost my aunt at six. It was Gokul-
babu who persuaded the sahib at the Mission to take me on. That was
a good thing he did. But whether it’s the congress, or the party, they stuck to untouchability. (23-4)

Kali is a man left uncared-for by his own family and others. Physically, he is all subject to hernia, pleurisy (inflammation of lungs) and ischaemia of heart (inadequate blood supply). He is sixty. His wife Ginimala and son Anirban leave him no care. The party he works for has been dominated by Samanta Babu. Kali leaves for Banari, a village filled with a few Santals, Keots and Chamars, all of them the agricultural labourers. Pratap Goldar is the uncrowned king there. Pratap removes a Chamar teacher from the village of Ukhal, an instance that confirms insecurity of the subalterns. He is prejudiced communally and the sole money-lender to twenty five villages. He never pays the minimum wages.

The author describes Pratap Goldar’s character as:

In his house at Banari he [Pratap Goldar] had his own dynamo to generate electricity, a large tank, and six pucca wells. All these reservoirs of water had been paid for by the government in the form of funds for relief. The administration was naïve enough to see the naked and the hungry trek a mile and a half to the river Charsha to dig into the sand with their bare nails in search of water, and still hand over the funds for relief to Pratap year after year and see to it that the government contractors dug the tank and the wells in Pratap’s land lest he should suffer any inconvenience. (62)
Mahasweta Devi introduces an agricultural Labour Commissioner, a Brahmin, who is the only committed official in the area. Soon his interference with Pratap gets him transferred. His person seems to give an impression that the Brahmins make the best of officials. Madhab Tura and Gopi Majhi want to terrorize Pratap Goldar and go to Bashai at Paltakudi. The police officer in charge also takes up a strict measure against Pratap. Pratap Goldar is a womanizer. Golapi, Shital Kaora’s wife, has been his kept woman. There is hardly any text by Mahasweta Devi that is without ravishing of tribal or untouchable women. One could not get to fathom if it is a reality or Mahasweta Devi’s invention yet through her experiences, appear as they in her activist writings, one has to make out that the texts probably speak reality. Finally Pratap Goldar is killed and cremated on the bank of Charsha. The seething anger of the tribals comes out as follows:

For a single name that reaches the puleoce, there’ll be two dead in this house. There’ll be no Goldar any more. Nobody will be spared. Not even Children. A serpent’s own flesh and blood will be serpents, nothing but serpents. (78)

The death of Pratap Goldar shakes the administration to its core. The novelette shifts to the village of Kankdasole after this event. The place is six miles from Jagula. Rameshwar Bhuinya is a scion of the great Bhuinya dynasty that holds five thousand acres of illegal land under false names. He has been an influential figure in the local Congress. He hates the lower
castes naturally. The same antipathy he teaches his son. If the labourers resent the act of his paying lower wages, Rameshwar brings in the migrant labourers. The sub-Inspector there has been eccentric and suffers from indigestion. When recalling the fate of other sub-Inspectors at the hands of Bashai, he senses horripilation, sinking into despair.

Bashai wants to teach Rameshwar a lesson since the latter does not ready himself to follow the Minimum Wages Act. The Santals stand in legion under Bashai’s lead with their primitive weapons—bows and arrows, sickles, hatchets, pole axes, short spears, throwing spears, multi-headed fish-killing spears and long spears. The sub-Inspector interferes in their action and Bashai stands up before him. He puts his demands to the sub-Inspector in no uncertain terms (92). Rameshwar is not ready to surrender to the demand. Bashai, despite the presence of the sub-Inspector and DSP, gives his war cry ‘Maaaa…. hoooo…’ and pierces his spear into the larynx of Rameshwar. There is a burst of gunfire and the arrows in the paddy field. The sub-Inspector also gets hit in his throat with a sickle and dies. Bashai is hit with a bullet in his leg and the DSP also has his stomach pierced with a spear. There appear on the scene the Congress leaders under Ramavtar, the sergeant. Mahasweta Devi produces a highly violent scene and also produces a severe critique upon Congress Party (94). The sub-Inspector is awarded a Veercharkra posthumously while his widow is offered a cold drinks kiosk at a busy junction on the highway. The DSP
and Rameshwar survive on account of high-level care but Bashai is declared dead. Mahasweta Devi criticizes the media (99) that does not care for the plight of the tribals but makes an interesting episode on the sari of the sub-Inspector’s widow under the title: ‘That Sari Worn at Last’. The death of Bashai disturbs Kali Santra in the extreme. He seems to lose his cool. His health seems to have gone down.

The physician asks Kali to keep his cholesterol level under control. He seems to be dying day by day. The times grow worse as the price of potatoes and the tempo of load-shedding suddenly reaches an unprecedented high. Kali Babu receives a call from the Superintendent of Police, the purpose being to re-identify the dead body of Bashai. Kali is astounded at this. This time the issue of Bashai has been water crisis. There is the drought blazing all around. The locale is Bakuli in which there is a jotedar called Surja Sau owning five hundred acres of land. Sau does not fear the law since the political system comes under his belt. There is a Magistrate from the Scheduled Castes that asks for a report on the denial of water to the lower castes and the Santals by Surja Sau. However, it makes no effect on Sau who says:

I don’t care a fig for your laws. Your government’s not going to get the better of me. Are the rates and terms of interest ever recorded? Does anybody remember them? The government plays it both sides
anyway. Isn’t there the court to decide finally on what I give them and what they can claim? (106)

The disagreement between Sau and Bashai and his men finally reaches its climax and Surja Sau is killed mercilessly. As a result of this, there is firing between the Santals and police. Bashai is killed in the event. Mahasweta Devi focuses on the torture that takes place at the jail. She points out:

The victim may have his bones all broken, may have been dragged down tied to the wheels of the van, may have his nails and eyes uprooted, his genitals torn away, an iron rod thrust into his anus, all his ribs cracked to pieces; but they’ll all have a common factor, they’ll all have a load of bullets pumped into their bodies; and all the deaths will be ascribed to ‘formal encounters’. (P.109)

There are forty one corpses at the count yet there are two missing from them— Dopadi and Dulna Majhi. Thus Bashai is killed for a third time.

As soon as the Sau episode is over, Kali Santra is left to care for himself alone. Kali had had an impressive image in Jagula yet has been termed by Deoki Missir, the evil mind, as a ‘disguised naxalite’ or a ‘sleeping naxalite’ or a ‘naxalite sympathizer’, in the police record. This he comes to learn through Deoki himself when the latter finds his own son-in-law saved by Kali from cholera. Kali is a defeated phenomenon— defeated at home, defeated in party and defeated everywhere else. He is a caste
Hindu, therefore, cannot share the sense of imposed deprivation which the tribals undergo:

For he [Kali] was no tribal. No upper caste Hindu can ever share the sense of deprivation that dates far back. The dark tribal was the first child of a dark India. The rest merely followed. (P.118)

Mahasweta Devi especially focuses on the aboriginal existence of the Indian tribes. She further claims that no authority till the Mughals had taken any note of the tribal plight, the same continues even today. Injustice is inherent with the tribals.

Kali happens to meet Betul whose son Uddhab has been branded ‘naxalite’ by the police and has a strong verbal clash with the people of his party like Gora Das. This is for the first time that he exerts all his resistance and aggression which leads his party-mates to plan his killing. Having fallen ill, Kali is looked after by his daughter-in-law and greatly derided by his own wife simultaneously. He is taken away by the sub-Inspector to identify Bashai again and asks Bashai to surrender. Mahasweta Devi adds an episode of Patitpaban, the MLA, and his father who is a great moneylender. They are the Loharis who exploit the people beyond the pale. However, their power being limitless, no law of the government applies to them— the law is ass for them. It takes at least seven generations to liquidate the debt for the tribes under them.
The sub-Inspector believes that Bashai has been impersonated by someone, therefore, dies time and again. Kali is sick of the Bashai business but is helpless. ‘Wringing the neck of wind’ is the only byword of Bashai’s identity. He dies a gangrenous death for the fourth time, after listening to the fact that Jagattaran, the MLA’s father, has died releasing his labourers from forced labourship. Finally Draupadi is found missing.

To solve the problem of Minimum Wages the government recruits 245 inspectors with only a few of them being from the depressed classes, which ultimately means that it adds further to the existing suffering of the depressed. Finally, as there has been a plan against Kali Santra, he seeks shelter in the forest waiting for the fifth and sixth deaths of Bashai.

Initially, Bashai’s character has been a concrete one but as the novelette proceeds, the character becomes symbolic and an un-ending sign of the fight against injustice and exploitation. Basically, the text lays all its focus on Kali rather than on Bashai as happens to be the case of ‘The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh’, another piece of fiction by Mahasweta Devi. When it means social activism and the voice of protest, Bashai’s character stands next to Birsa’s all through the oeuvre of Mahasweta Devi. The text not only deals with the stance and protest of the subalterns, it also brings out Mahasweta Devi’s actual commitment towards them.

Notes
1. In the tribal community Pahan is a person holding the status of priest and revered a lot.

2. Neocolonialism is a term basically coined by Nkrumah.

3. The tribals call the privileged Hindus as Diku people.

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