

# World Of Mahashweta Devi's Stories: Brilliant Mirror Of Trauma And Triumph Of Women Of Different Socio-Economic Strata In India

**Dr. Sreyasi Ghosh**

Assistant Professor of History Dept.,  
Hiralal Mazumdar Memorial College For Women  
Dakshineswar, Kolkata, India

**Abstract:** *Mahashweta Devi (1926-2016), was such an exceptional woman litterateur, who breaking all barriers, tried her level best to spread arena of Bengali creative world enormously in 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She established Bengali literature on formidable ground of harsh reality of endless life-struggles and made her woman characters free from age-old conventional and so-called feminine attributes. Manabendra Mukhopadhyay in his article entitled 'Manabi chetanar pratyay' (Purabaiyan, July 2001) had rightly opined that – 'Meyeder ebang tader sahitya sammandhe etodin je sob dhyan-dharonar protima tairi hoye chhilo, Mahashwetadevi ta bhengechhen nirmam bhabe. Amodini theke Ashapurna porjyonto anekei prothabhangar dale anubratini chhilen obossoi. Kintu Mahashwetar moto emon tej tadero chhilo na sobar'. Mahashweta, both a Feminist and Humanist herself announced that she believed in samaj-shob-byabochhed and discovered ugly cancerous growth after dissection. Widow burning, prostitution, abuse on women within domestic space in day-to-day life, transformation of commonplace woman into Goddess in rural superstitious belief system, flesh-trade network targeting rustic girls, merciless exploitation of tribal women, rape/gangrape by landlords and police force during custodial torture, participation of fallen women in anti-colonial movement of India, brutal treatment of army personnel towards tribal insurgent woman leader, trauma of destitute womenfolk in pavements of Kolkata, devastated conjugal life of educated and working woman after molestation even in upper middle-class household etc. were depicted in this author's stories with perfection and honesty.*

*Mahashweta wrote several short and broad stories besides novels based on ultra-leftist upsurge of 1960s- 1970s but she could not be marked as a Naxalite writer because her fathomless love for the downtrodden masses including wretched women actually surpassed politically coloured identity formation process. She confessed that- 'Amar lekhay chinhito rajniti khonja nirarthak. Shoshito o nirjatito manush, tader proti sanbedi manushi amar lekhar prodhan bhumikay.'*

**Keywords:** *Feminist, Humanist, literature, Social Realism, Subaltern upsurge*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Mahashweta Devi, connected at heart, with the Communist Progressive activities, was in language of Chiraranjan Pal, editor of 'Tebhagar Nari', a dedicated worker of Cultural Squad, outstanding writer and editor of the periodical namely 'Bartika'. Kamallesh Sen in his essay entitled 'Sattarer sanskritik andolan' also acknowledged her deep-rooted knowledge about history of rising and downfall of

the Communist Movement, the Tebhaga Movement, labour unrest etc. She was sympathiser of the rebellious youth force of the 1970s, but was not at all involved with the Naxalite unrest. She expressed complete honesty and transparency in upholding her aims and objectives behind commencement of life as an author and she can be compared with another renowned author Manik Bandyopadhyay. Anil Acharya in his article entitled 'Sattar dashaker chhotogalpo' expressed admiration for large canvas of Mahashweta's stories and

opined that Mahashweta prepared herself from 1940s. She had weapon of historical consciousness and knowledge of economy besides Dialectical Materialism. Draupadi, Jashoda, Jati thakurni, Chandidasi, Gangor etc. were her exceptional creations. Anil Acharyya had rightly stated in the article mentioned above that- *“Sudhu upanyaser khetre noy galper khetreo Sattar dashaker sesh surja jeno Mahashwetakei tar sesh dipti diye gelo. ... Mahashweta bishay nirbachan ebang bibhinno galpe tar charitrer upashapana ebang paribesh shristir dakshata jeno chalachitrer moto ghatte thake. .... Tar galpo pore mone hoy je majhe majhe tini bhabchhen, anek kichhui pore roilo, likhe jete hobe; kenona tini janen saksham ebang antorik lekhaker aj koto abhav.”*

Mahashweta always prioritised her ideology and statement as author over structural beautification of her stories. Mass uprising of tribal population and especially emergence of self-sacrificing tribal rebel women had been one of the significant focal points in her creative literary world. Her dedication towards depiction of Adivasi life had been upheld by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, an exceptional critic of Mahashweta's writings, in the book namely 'A Critique of Postcolonial Reason'. Her social commitment and dedication towards Social Realism could be described through analysis of Anannya Barua, who in the article entitled 'Chetanar gobhir star theke' explained that- *“..... Mahashweta anyanyo lekhak o sahityiker moto shilper dasatto koren na, samajik dayboddhotai tar sahityer mul kotha. .... Samajik byadhi o asangati chetanay jwala dhorechhilo bolei to tini kalam dhorechhilen o khuradhar bakyabye bastab samasyake paryalochana koren tai ..... satya hoye othe samajik kartyabyapalaner taronao.”*

Mahashweta Devi's depiction of women characters of different stratas of Bengal and India was much more enlarged than creations of Jyotirmoyi Devi, Ashapurna Devi, Sabitri Roy, Suchitra Bhattacharyya and several other women litterateurs who were mainly confined within description of domestic sphere coloured by middle class stereotype. While depicting brutality on rebel/ insurgent women and harsh reality of 1970s, Mahashweta could be compared with Jaya Mitra, author of 'Hanyaman' and Meenaxi Sen, author of 'Jeler bhetor jel: Pagalbari parva'.

Trauma of a professional breast-feeder, victim of patriarchal exploitation, and untimely death due to breast cancer; commercialisation of motherhood, forced prostitution prevalent among women of lower classes in rural areas of Bihar due to feudal exploitative social system; murder of a meritorious lower class boy due to wrath of his own biological father, an atrocious landlord, symbol of social conservatism; motherly affection crossing barriers of religion for foster-child belonging to the Muslim community, gangraped tribal rebel woman's protest against aggressive army personnel of Operation Jharkhani Forest with her mangled breast used as a weapon and challenge towards masculinity of those attackers defying her brutal and bloody rape and fear of encounter; lustful policemen making savage treatment towards tribal girl who became a whore; endless struggle and humiliation in life of pavement-dweller, poverty-stricken woman; painful life of socially ostracised woman as a victim of horrible superstition, death out of starvation of a woman, forced by circumstances to

act as thakurni/ God-woman etc. had been described in Mahashweta's stories.

## II. BRIEF, INTROSPECTIVE DEPICTION ABOUT REFLECTION OF WOMEN'S LIVES IN MAHASHWETA DEVI'S STORIES

'Dewana Khaimala o thakurbater kahini' is tale of cruelty of social conservatism and helpless situation of women both during married phase and widowhood in colonial Bengal under supervision of Warren Hastings. Khaimala, a poor but beautiful Brahmin girl was in love with Golok, son of Ishwar Patni, a comparatively solvent person. Her mother, a widow of wretched condition, being forced by cruel guru/ biological father of her mother, made her married with old and greedy, ruthless Nilmoni Ghoshal. Golok's father Ishwar was quite aware of the fact that- *“.... Bamuner meyeke Patni chhele bhalobase e kothati janajani hole kalanker sesh thakbe na.”* Khaimala was mercilessly tortured in her in-laws' house and after her abusive husband's death, she had to leave home for avoiding her inevitable death as sati. Ultimately she and her childhood sweetheart Golok died in Ganga during escaping from superstitious people determined to capture them and make Khaimala burnt alive.

'Romtha' is story of Bengal during rule of king Lashmansena and it depicted tragic love story of chief prostitute of contemporary Gaur entitled Chandrabali with her male escort Sharan. Kaviraj Chandrasen's daughter Subhadra, a young widow, mesmerized by physical beauty of Sharan, helped him to escape when Sharan was captured after murdering Chandrabali and was waiting for horrible death as 'Romtha', being thrown alive in excessive hot oil to make mahamas oil for Kaviraj. Ruthless and lustful Gopal, *pradhan nagarrakshi*, forcefully enjoyed Chandrabali against her consent and always used to torture/sexually exploit prostitutes some of whom died untimely death also. Sharan, her jealous and over-possessive lover, killed her and at last died himself during escaping from capital punishment. Horrible condition of women and social apathy/ ignominy towards women's education had been depicted here.

In 'Talak', women's self-assertion had been depicted through Kulsam, who defied custom defined by Islamic religiosity to marry twice if a married woman after getting talak from the first husband, wanted to be his wife again. She refused to marry Irfan Mondal, after getting talak from her beloved husband Arshad but bravely left village to live together with Arshad not as wife but as a companion in old age.

'Sanjh- sakaler maa' is story of Jateshwari/ Jati Thakurni, forced by circumstances to become God-woman to make a shield before lustful men for saving herself and her son Sadhan Kandori in widowhood. She died out of starvation while arranging for food regularly for her son. Jati, a member of Pakhmara community of Midnapore, was in love with Utsav Kandori and married him escaping the wrath of her own near and dear ones who would not allow love outside their own community. Mahashweta was absolutely right while describing Jati's transformation from a commonplace woman to a Debanshi - *“Thakurni na hole Jati or haba chheleke*

*banchate parto na. Nijeke banchate parto na manusher najar theke."*

'Sindhubala' is story of a poor woman, compelled by circumstances to act as devi to earn her livelihood and to provide for her mother also after being rejected by husband and in-laws, She actually used to lead her life in utter frustration being captivated in concocted image of superhuman power. At last her image was tarnished when ex-husband raised the allegation that Sindhu made his second wife's son die through curse. Then she left her habituated practices as God-woman – *"Manush holeo jolte hoy. Devi holeo jolte hoy. Jivan jakhon ekhabei jay takhon Sindhu michhemichhi devi sajte jabe keno?"*

'Jalsatra' described painful life of a prostitute namely Kusum, who loved a fugitive Naxalite youth, who took shelter in her home after being injured and affected with deadly infection. She was outwitted by police who made her believe that if she could help them to capture the rebel youth, his life would be saved after treatment in hospital. But in reality the insurgent youth had to face death after being captured and Kusum was marked as traitor. Due to excessive guilt, she turned down the offer of getting money as a reward for helping the police and finally found solace after giving jalsatra for human welfare.

In 'Jagannather rath', Punyadasi, an extremely poor and blind woman had to commit suicide before wheels of rath after her and her beggar husband's shelter was snatched by greedy daughter-in-law and insensitive granddaughter during old age.

'Stanadayini' is an excellent story, in which Jashoda was a professional mother making motherhood a commodity for survival. Her husband Kangalicharan, after being injured, was dependent on her and she made her twenty children survive being dudh-maa of a rich and influential landlord family where she had to feed almost thirty children. Here Mahashweta vehemently attacked Indian patriarchal system and announced that Indian male never allowed self-assertive spirit to enter within women within his household. The writer described Jashoda as symbol of conventional chaste Indian womanhood – *"Jashoda ekebare bhartiyo ramani, je – ramanir jukti-buddhi- bicharhin swamibhakti o santanpremer kotha, aswabhabik tyag-titikshar kotha, sati-sabitri-sita theke shuru kore Nirupa Roy o Chand Osmani parjyanto sokol Bhartiyo nari jonomanase jagiye rekhechhen."*

Jashoda, at last, died for breast cancer after being rejected by the landlord family and her husband as well as her own self-centred sons during her old age losing power of commercialisation of motherhood.

'Drapadi' was one of the exceptional assets in Mahashweta's creative world. Its central character namely Dopdi Mejhen, was dweller of Bakrajhar area and continued struggle as a brave tribal insurgent (Naxalite) leader even after killing of her beloved husband Dulan in Operation Jharkhani Forest. She was the most wanted tribal woman leader having main role in murder of notorious landlord Surjya Sau and his son, in capturing of tubewell of upper caste people during drought etc. Her husband Dulan was quite expert in changing hide-outs like her but got killed through army's bullet after being discovered by Dukhiram Gharari, agent of armymen. Later Dopdi became successful in taking revenge by killing

Dukhiram and acted as a courier of fugitive Naxalite insurgents taking name of Upi Mejhen. After being apprehended by the army forces, she tried her level best to send secret message for her beloved comrades for warning them and bravely withstood interrogation in army camp without giving any confession. Then the army leader directed his men to do the needful and they gangraped her violently whole night. Dopdi did not fear encounter and so she could defy her rape and challenged masculinity of such men who could only take pleasure by making a woman naked. Mahashweta Devi expressed the situation with her unparalleled language- *"Chardike cheye Draupadi raktomakha thutu phelte Senanayaker sada bush shartti bechhe ney ebang thutu phele bole, hetha keo purush nai je laj korbo. Kapor more porate dibo na. .... Draupadi dui mordito stane Senanayakke thelte thake ebang ei prothom Senanayak nirosto targeter samne darate bhoy pan, bhishan bhoy."*

'Baen' is tale of traumatic life of Chandidasi, who was socially ostracised after being marked as baen/ evil woman by her husband Molinder. She actually occupied herself in work of her predecessors that was burial of dead children but her husband due to deep-rooted superstition, believed that she was transformed into baen, who had evil power of murdering children. Her son Bhagirath had been snatched from her. She proved that she was not at all an evil woman by sacrificing her life to save villagers who once forcefully made her leave home, son and normal life as a married woman.

In 'Jagmohoner mrityu', feudal exploitation in rural Bihar and sexual harassment of women of lower classes had been described with perfection and honesty. Kundanji, a ferocious landlord of Tahar village, made Jhalo, wife of imprisoned Sukhia Ganju, his female escort and pampered Etoa, his biological son whose official father before society was Sukhia. But Kundan did not hesitate to murder Etoa, who dared to continue his studies in spite of local feudal structure's resentful attitude towards education/advancement of untouchable community. After son's death, Jhalo became furious and publicly alleged Kundan as murderer of his own blood. Power of self-assertion of a poor and helpless woman like Jhalo was upheld by dedicated and committed litterateur Mahashweta- *"Jhalo tar shukno lal chokh, bhishan mukh niye Kundaner barir kachhari ghore dhoke o ek mutho chhai Kundaner mukhe chhure mare. Bale, tor betar chhai.... Ganjur shobdaher chhai diye Brahmaner ghar apabitro kore se honhon kore chole jay o mukh phiriye bole jay, nirbansho hobi. Kushtho hoye pochhe morbi. Nijer chhele kheyte gorokto kheyechhis."*

'Jahnavi maa' is a heart-touching story of Sarabala, who was once abducted by local landlord to live as his mistress, had been later forced by circumstances to emerge as a Goddess/avtar of Gangadevi in superstitious rural atmosphere. During her overaged stage, she was utterly neglected and in reality kept starved and without proper medicine in a dirty place. She actually wanted to distribute her property among masses of the impoverished village after her demise but after her death, her so-called *sevayet* family captured control on everything depriving lower classes and masses. The greedy *sevayet* family dumped her half-naked body in river like a beggar and propagated that her demise was nothing but a supernatural incident.



'Rudali' is an outstanding creation of Mahashweta who depicted here trauma of a poor rural woman of lower class namely Shanichari, who lost her mother-in-law, elder brother-in-law and his wife, husband, son, at last very close friend Bikhni, but with indomitable courage started to earn her livelihood by commercialisation of expressing sorrow after demise of local Rajput landlords as a professional '*ronebali rudali*.' Shanichari collected a large number of prostitutes to conduct her flourishing business of '*rudali kam*'. She was such a woman who could not find a second to cry even after her husband's death because life became so hard that crying was nothing but a luxury and wastage of time. Later she understood that- "*Kanna beche take khete hobe bole chhokher jol tola chhilo.*"

In 'Giribala', the author had shown a brave mother, who revolted against her husband Aaulchand, who for money sold her children to become victim of sex-racket in mask of marriage. Mahashweta exposed social hypocrisy while drawing the scenario of mentality of local people after Giribala left her greedy and immoral husband's house- "*Bela ar Parir ja hoyechhe, se to ekhon ghare ghare hochhe. Ta bole swami chhere chole jay ke? Kon meyechehe?*"

*Sobai nischito holo je Aaulchand noy, Giribala meyeti asole mondo.*"

'Kuronir beta' is a story where merciless torture on Lodhas even causing death was shown and sexual exploitation of tribal woman was an important theme. Kuroni was a beautiful tribal girl whose husband Lochan was beaten to death after false allegation of theft and his murderer upper-class landlord proposed to make Kuroni a *bhatua*, actually his slave and mistress. Kuroni refused but due to extreme poverty, was forced to allow his son Juron to live as a worker in that landlord's house. But after that her son also beaten horribly and she revolted against *babu's* (landlord) authority.

'Tetri kahani' is tale of a bold and rebellious but poor woman of lower class namely Tetri. She was once a widow but later married happily with her beloved husband Bishal who was killed by police during interrogation after allegation of involvement in illegal cholai trade. Actually Tashildar Singh, a local powerful person proposed to Tetri but she humiliated him and married Bishal. So Tashildar for taking revenge, made Bishal killed and raped Tetri during her helpless situation after this horrible incident. Even after molestation, Tetri did not lose her inner strength and Tashildar had to leave the place due to her attack. Mahashweta had shown the fact that such true story could not be depicted with brutal, naked honesty while making commercial film.

'Anno, aranyo, anno, aranyo....' is story of violent protest of an extremely poor girl Annobala, who lost her father, rejected by mother, and kept as a *bhatua* in a wealthy family. The guardianless tribal girl was sexually exploited by lustful son of that family. She out of rage attacked that person's male genital and after that escaped.

'Jannabir mukti' is love story of Jahnavi and Sabuj who had to leave village to translate dream of a successful conjugal life into reality. Jahnavi's marriage failed and her guardians forced her to continue her predecessor's work in temple as a *sevika* distributing *jol, mati* etc. among people, having deep faith in Goddess Bilwabasini. Sabuj's family was angry with her because for attraction towards Jahnavi, their son was

constantly refusing marriage proposals and revolted against his father. Jahnavi was ashamed and tried to commit suicide but was saved by Sabuj and left home with him for a shared happy future far from the superstitious environment.

'Moyna sati athaba ekti aloukik kahini' is such a story where author vehemently criticised and condemned the custom of widow burning through citing example of Roop Kanwar, whose in-laws' family made huge benefit at the cost of her.

'Panchastomo bachhare Badani' is a story about contribution of so-called fallen women in anti-British Rebellion of 1942 (Quit India Movement). Badani was a prostitute who helped revolutionaries but later had to earn her livelihood as beggar and was infected in leprosy being rejected by everyone for her subhuman condition.

'Chiracharito' is a story where Mahashweta did not hesitate to show traumatic condition of an educated and working woman after rape in her husband's family. She had to leave home as she was hated by everyone and took help from a women's organisation for survival. But she dared to declare before leaving her husband that she will live and will not commit suicide.

'Chholi ka pichhe' is a story upholding the harsh truth that subaltern women in rural India are sometimes due to circumstances habituated to be victim of custodial torture, gangrape and racket of flesh trade/prostitution. Upin was a renowned professional photographer who was mesmerised to observe the beauty of large breasts of Gangor, a poor labour class woman. He clicked several photographs of her breasts because actually he had deep-rooted apathy for artificial beauty of his wife Shital. Gangor was excited to see that an elite urban wealthy person like Upin was so much interested in her physical beauty and at last caught evil eye of local policemen in rural Bihar. She was subjected to violent sexual abuse in lock-up and landed finally in life of a professional prostitute. Upin discovered her and after being unable to cope with the naked truth, committed suicide in rail line. Upin's situation had been described by the committed author with extremely sharp language-

*"Cholir pichhone kono non issue noy, pichhone gangrape thake, ..... kono non issue noy, ganodharshan thake, Upin jante chaile jante parto, jante parto.*

*Upin railline dhore dauroy."*

'Jashomati' is story of life of Amodi, who once was *dudhmaa* of a wealthy person, who later became an influential political leader Prankrishna Samaddar. Amodi though living life in extreme poverty had faith in Prankrishna, but he humiliated her in public without any hesitation. Then she realized that she was not his biological mother but only nurtured him in childhood just like Jashomoti, who nurtured Lord Krishna. Jashomoti did not visit Mathura in Krishna's kingdom and so Amodi should not also go to visit the powerful leader, once nurtured through her breast-milk.

'Bishalakshir ghar' is tale of an utterly helpless aged woman, regularly harassed by her husband and spending life as domestic help. She and her son through much endeavour, arranged for own home which was burnt down by her jealous relatives and her son became imprisoned being falsely alleged. She after being turned down by her angry daughter-in-law, finally found shelter in community of beggars. Now she

realized that pavement is true house for poor woman like her and this house could not be snatched.

'Harun Salemer masi' is story of unyielding courage and determination of Gauravi, who was abandoned by her own son Nibaran and daughter-in-law in old age, while the widow was earning her livelihood in abject poverty. Gauravi gave shelter to a motherless orphan Muslim boy Hara, for whom she was rebuked by her son and humiliated in her locality. But she did not comply with her selfish son's demand to abandon Hara who called her 'masi', and finally left her house with foster-son Hara bravely.

'Ajir' is a story of trauma of bonded labour life and forced servitude in rural India. Paton was 'ajir', serving for life in a wealthy family where he got affection and attention of wife of his lord (Matanga Shuri), called as *manib-maa* in the plot. Paton was obedient to her because he thought that the woman would give him enough money, sufficient to buy his freedom from bondage of *ajiripatta* and he could marry as an independent person. But later *manib-maa*, the young and frustrated childless woman, was murdered in hands of Paton, because she tried to escape from her husband's house with Paton but could not provide *ajiripatta* to him. Paton thought that she was a liar and immoral woman but in reality the document regarding his bondage was demolished long ago. It was undoubtedly his lord, who kept him tied as bonded labour keeping the truth of abolition of document buried within himself. Helpless and tragic condition of womenfolk even of wealthy family / higher strata had been shown here.

'Mother India' is tale of life of wife of Shashi Dhara, who once raised arms against attempts of eradication and later even after losing her husband, in-laws and beloved sons, continued struggle of life-journey as a beggar till her death- "*Mother Indiar pa duto khola darjar phake chitiye ache, bina mritachare chhai hobar jonye beoarish mora hoye chole jachhe o. Ar Mother India dekhte pelo na or shoke Kemon bibosh hoye kaekti kangali o ek bahusebika footpathe bose karmabirati o ashaouch palon korchhe.*"

### III. HISTORICAL REFLECTION AND ANALYSIS OF CURSE OF SUPERSTITION AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION THROUGH MAHASHWETA-CREATED WOMAN CHARACTERS

Mahashweta Devi was not a womanist only, but a humanist; so she stated without hesitation that - "*Sadhyomoto manusher kothai likhe gelam, nijer mukhomukhi hote jeno lajja na pai se jonyo. Kenona lekhak jivankalei sesh bichare upanito hon ebang uttar dewar day theke jay.*" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak deeply appreciated Mahashweta's literary works and played a pivotal role in making those outstanding works popular in occidental academic world also. According to Dipendu Chakraborty, the author successfully refused to adhere to the recent trend of gender-centric writing and focussed on exploitation on subaltern population by pillars of the society from the British India upto the Post-Colonial India.

Her 'Deoana Khaimala o thakurbater kahini' (curse of polygamy associated with Kulinism and custom of sati/ widow burning in colonial Bengal), 'Romtha' (trauma of prostitutes and young widows in the rule of king Lakshmansan in

Bengal); 'Sindhubala' (barren life of so-called God-woman worshipped by superstitious people), 'Jalasatra' (sympathy of fallen women towards the Naxalite youth); 'Stanadayini' (commercialisation of motherhood of professional *dudh-ma* in feudal patriarchal social/ family structure); 'Baen' (hellish life of a socially ostracised woman as a result of horrible superstition of rural people including husband and tragic death); 'Jagamohoner mrityu' (sexual exploitation of lower-class women with good physique by feudal lords and denial of any right to their children, born due to extra-marital relationship with those predator landlords, biological fathers of children of underprivileged women); 'Jahnavi maa' (exploitative *sevayat* system using so-called woman avatar of the Goddess Ganga and death of that devanshi woman in starvation and negligence); 'Rudali' (custom of bringing poor women including prostitutes giving food, money, clothing after death of feudal lords in rural Bihar for crying in public praising the landlords as professional *ronebali rudali*); 'Kuronir beta' (torture and attempt of sexual exploitation on women of lodhas by so-called babus); 'Tetri Kahani' (police atrocities and sexual violence/ rape by local influential upper-class people on harijan women); 'Moynasati athaba ekti alaukik kahini' (custom of sati and religious orthodoxy); 'Panchastomo bachhare Badani' (role of fallen women in the Quit India Movement of 1942); 'Draupadi' (horrible physical violence/ rape on tribal Naxalite woman leader in army camp) had been significant assets of expressing trauma and triumph of women's lives.

The Naxalite Movement of 1970s inspired Mahashweta to emerge as an exceptionally conscious author depicting social reality and provided socio-historical backdrop of her several stories besides novels upholding strong woman characters like Dopdi Mejhen, called an exceptional figure in 'Forest Interface: The Naxalites between Vanguard and Subaltern', an article of Ben Conisbee Baer.

Anil Acharyya in his article entitled 'Sattar dashaker chhoto galpo' rightly opined that- "*Sattar dashak madhyasrenike rakter aghate je chintar khorak diyechhe Kakdwip-Telenganao ta pareni. .... Naxalbarir krishak andolan Sattar dashake jadi kono astrer moto sutikhno moshi diye thake, tabe ta Mahashwetar karatalogoto.*"

### IV. COMPARISON WITH SOME OTHER WOMAN LITTERATEURS

For in-depth analysis of Mahashweta's contribution as a renowned woman writer, comparative explanation citing examples of other woman litterateurs namely Jyotirmoyi Devi, Jaya Mitra, Sabitri Roy, Ashapura Devi, and Suchitra Bhattacharyya can be done. Jyotirmoyi was undoubtedly successful in making a vast canvas of her stories through pictures of household of Rajasthan, Baranasi and other towns of Northern/ Western India. She had depicted strong female characters through which she bravely raised a significant question - "*Meyeder dam shudhu take ekjon manusher darkare? Samasto samparko atikrom kore manush hisebe tar mulyo nei? Darkar nei? Prithibir konokhane chirodiner itihase ekdino se manush hisebe porichito holo na keno?*" Her famous collection of short stories entitled 'Sona rupa noy'

upheld women who were determined for their own space and but were not male-haters. Opportunity of education and financial independence of women had been most important themes in this author's thought-process. Her woman characters tried to live in male-dominated world in identity of not a conventional, chaste female only, but as a human being. Her philosophy matched with Mahashweta Devi but the successor's expression and language pattern of writings were much more harsh and symbol of social realism in comparison with Jyotirmoyi. Subaltern insurgent womenfolk took a prominent place in Mahashweta's stories and in this sphere, her creative world was more advanced and not at all similar with Jyotirmoyi Devi.

Ashapura Devi did not cross the barrier of household while depiction of her extraordinary characters namely Satyavati, Subarnalata and Bakul. So she did not have striking similarity with Mahashweta, who used to do extensive field research for successful completion of her writing projects. But Ashapura and Mahashweta were same in a particular sphere which was expressing courageously trauma and triumph of women in patriarchal society.

Jaya Mitra in 'Hanyaman' depicted with exceptional clarity and honesty the deadly torture on woman political prisoners by police forces and in expression pattern of physical torture she was quite similar with Mahashweta Devi who upheld character like Draupadi before her readers.

Suchitra Bhattacharyya was like Ashapura mainly writer of stories and novels based on middle class Bengali urban household. She depicted women with rebel spirit but did not cross class barrier or turn to upholding women of lower depths like Mahashweta Devi. So in discovering cancer in societal body Mahashweta was undoubtedly advanced in comparison.

Sabitri Roy in novels like 'Pakadhaner Gaan' and 'Meghna-Padma' made a perfect combination of history and literature. She always upheld importance of financial independence/empowerment of women and expressed the pain of creative women confined within the domestic space. Women's participation in the revolutionary Swadeshi upsurge, the Progressive cultural movement under umbrella of the leftist forum and the Tebhaga Movement had been highlighted in her writings. But she was mainly dealing with the characters of upper/middle class Bengali *bhadromahila*, not with women belonging to downtrodden masses like Mahashweta Devi. Sometimes women of the poor, rural grassroot level such as Devaki asserted themselves but Mahashweta's characters were much more courageous and self-dependent and so undoubtedly dissimilar.

## V. CONCLUSION

Mahashweta Devi, an outstanding litterateur, always used to believe that each and every human being is like an undiscovered continent and an author has the responsibility of unmasking its various sides with a humble and amazed mindset. In her creative world, several characters are somehow repetitive in spirit and she had deep faith in continuous advancement as well as progression of history. History in its conventional and unconventional models both, folk culture, myth, puranas etc. had been quite common in her

illuminating stories. She launched an indomitable campaign against age-old superstition and gifted readers such a language, which had treasure of both Sanskrit-like and regional colloquial words. Draupadi, Jashoda, Jati thakurni, Sindhubala, Chandi Gangadasi, Jahnavi maa (Sarabala), Shanichori, Giribala, Kuroni, Tetri, Anno, Jahnavi, Gangor were some of Mahashweta- created exemplary woman characters depicted skilfully in short stories. Violence on women in family- space and outer world, in both physical/sexual form and also through psychological exploitation had been meticulously described in this author's stories. Rape/gangrape was an important theme in her literary sphere. Here Susan Brownmiller's opinion can be quoted from V.Geetha's 'Gender' for explanation –

"Susan Brownmiller writes in *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* that men's sexual power over women and the violence with which they sought to exercise it constitute the basis for female subordination. Arguing that throughout history, rape has featured as a mode of controlling women and keeping them in a state of perpetual fear, Brownmiller suggests that rapists are not socially aberrant people but ordinary individuals whose actions express publicly what all men feel and do privately."

Mahashweta Devi's stories must be well- researched again and again because socio-political crisis, political movements, eradication of moral values, tribal uprisings etc. and briefly speaking whole scenario of contemporary period was depicted through her vast creative world . Both Feminist and Humanist Mahashweta always trusted in social responsibility of committed author and the theory of art for art's sake was valueless for her. She upheld harsh truth and reality without idealising day-to-day life of Indian women and so her writings are exceptionally significant in history of Gender.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Ajay Gupta edited – Mahashweta Devi rachanasamagro (Vol. VIII), Dey's Publishing, Kolkata, April 2003.
- [2] Ajay Gupta edited – Mahashweta Devi rachanasamagro (Vol. IX), Dey's Publishing, Kolkata, April 2003.
- [3] Soma Mukhopadhyay edited- Mahashweta Devi's panchashti galpo (Protikshon Publications, Kolkata, May, 2001)
- [4] Purabaiyan- Bishesh Nari- oupanyashik sankhya [Purbani Ghosh and Professor Amitrasudan Bhattacharyya (invited editor) edited]; Vol. VII, No. 1, July 2001.
- [5] Pradip Basu edited- Discourses On Naxalite Movement 1967-2009 (Setu Prakashani, Kolkata, February, 2010)
- [6] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak- A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present (Seagull Books, Calcutta, 1999)
- [7] Minakshi Sen – Jeler bhetor Jel : Pagalbari parva (People's Book Society, Kolkata, January, 2003)
- [8] Chiraranjan Pal edited- Tebhagar Nari (Radical Impression, Kolkata, January 2011)
- [9] Jaya Mitra – Hanyaman (Dey's Publishing, Kolkata, January 2004)

- [10] Amit Bhattacharyya and Bimal Kanti Ghosh edited – Human Rights In India (Setu Prakashani, Kolkata, January 2010)
- [11] Anil Acharyya edited – Sattar Dashak (Vol. II); Anushtup, Kolkata, January 1991
- [12] V. Geetha – Gender ( Bhatkal and Sen, Calcutta, 2002)
- [13] Parthapratim Bandopadhyay and Sadhan Chattopadhyay edited- Protibader Galpo: Naxalbari – 1 (Radical Impression, Kolkata, 1999)
- [14] Nirmal Ghosh- Naxalbadi andolan o Banglasahitya (Karuna Prakashani, Kolkata, 1401)

IJIRAS