**M.Phil in English**

**Semester II**

**Paper: ENG-121; Unit No.: 02**

***Mother of 1084***

**Lecture Notes**

***The formation of the novel:***

* Relevant biographical information focussing on the growth and development of Mahasweta Devi’s social awareness.
* Her concerns, growing out of this awareness.
* Literary output resulting from these concerns and experiences.
* *Mother of 1084* in this context.

***Some issues / points to be remembered:***

* Sujata Chatterjee—Loreto educated, married into an ‘elite’ family [dominating mother-in-law, promiscuous husband, patriarchal domination], taken for granted by her mother-in-law, husband and children except Brati, a banker, but above all these—a seeker. Of her identity as Brati’s mother. The novel is her quest for this identity.
* Sujata is compared and contrasted to Somu’s mother and Nandini—two other women in the novel who have been affected and shattered by the police atrocities extended to suspect Naxalites.
* The socio-economic milieu to which Somu’s widowed mother belongs, living with her young unmarried daughter, portrays her vulnerability to further perpetrations of state-generated terror which is in stark contrast to Sujata’s situation. From her socially secured status, Sujata can afford to reminisce over Brati, and to extend the recollections by paying notable visits to Somu’s mother.
* Nandini is contrasted to Sujata in a different way: she is Brati’s girl-friend and political compatriot. Her excruciating experiences make her a firebrand that is set off against Sujata’s calm reassessment of Brati’s relationship with her as his mother.
* Although dead, Brati is a living factor in the way the threads of the story of the novel are woven to provide coherence to the narrative.
* The other members of Sujata’s family exhibit a very callous attitude towards Brati—to them he is a nightmare that forces its way into their sweet dream of a cosy affluence without the stench of wrong associations with the politically erring sections of Calcutta in the early 1970s.

**Sample Questions:**

**Essay-type Answers:**

1. Make a critical assessment of Brati’s family’s attitude towards him from your reading of *Mother of 1084.*
2. Write a short essay on the significance of the title of *Mother of 1084.*
3. Attempt a feminist critique of any two women characters in Brati’s family in *Mother of 1084.*
4. Critically assess the character of Dibynath as a representative of the class which approved of the state’s ruthlessness towards those like Brati.

**Comments:**

1. Brati’s function in *Mother of 1084.*
2. The character of Nandini.
3. Sujata’s stomach-ache.
4. Somu’s sister.

**Reading List:**

1. *Mother of 1084.* Mahasweta Devi. Translated with an Introduction by Samik Bandyopadhyay. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1997.
2. *Hajar Churashir Maa.* Mahasweta Devi. Calcutta: Karuna Prakashani, 1974. Bengali.
3. “Women and Violence.” Sudeshna Chakravarti. Book Review of *Women Writing Violence: The Novel and Radical Feminist Imaginaries*. *Economic and Political Weekly.* Vol. XLIX No. 3, 18 January 2014.

Other Significant Literary Works in Bengali related to the 1970-1971 Naxalite Movement:-

1. *Kalbela –* Samaresh Mazumdar [a novel—the first part of a trilogy] Bengali.
2. *Shekal Chenra Hather Khonje –*Samaresh Basu [A novel] Bengali.
3. *Tir –*Utpal Dutt [a play] Bengali.

**Learning Material:**

***In the Wake of Naxalbari***

Sumanta Banerjee

[Kolkata: Sahitya Samsad, 2008]

p.38. The spoilt children of yesterday’s colonialism and of today’s national government never had it so good. While about two-thirds of the urban population lived below the average of the urban consumption of Rs. 359.00 per annum, this section—the U-sector—found ever newer avenues of expenditure to feed its voracious appetite for luxury goods. The trend of conspicuous consumption among them set the pattern of production in the country. Production of cement went up too meet the demand for building new residential mansions, five-star hotels and garish theatre and cinema halls, sprawling over acres, while the bottom two-thirds of the urban population continued to crowd dingy and narrow tenements and slums in the murkiest parts of the cities, dragging a monotonous existence in slime and sweat….

While there was a stagnation or a meagre increase in the output of industries catering for the masses, production of consumer goods for the U-sector showed a steady rise.

Thus, by the mid-sixties the economic situation in the cities corresponded in many respects to that prevailing in the villages of India. While a few at the top reaped the fruits of growth, the majority led a hand-to-mouth (p/39) existence. As in the rural areas a handful of big farmers monopolized the ownership of vast areas of cultivable land, in the urban sector too 75 big business houses dominated Indian industry. Like the moneylenders, traders and various types of middlemen, who thrived in the rural feudal structure, a parasitic class of bureaucrats, business executives, contractors and agents developed in the cities, thanks to the expansion of the tertiary sector. As centres of administration and business, the cities offered better scope for graft, bribery, chicanery and other types of corruption.

p/48 …the CPI(M-L) was not wide of the mark, when it described the country’s big industrialists as “comprador bureaucrat capitalist,” [a comprador in the original sense of the word, was the Chinese manager or the senior Chinese employee in a foreign commercial establishment—Mao Tse-tung ‘Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society] the country as “semi-colonial” and the Government as “a lackey of US imperialism and Soviet social-imperialism,” in its political resolution.

p/49 Charu Mazumdar writes: “Since there is no direct imperialist occupation in India, revolution will have to advance only along the path of class conflict, that is through civil war. During this stage of the struggle no section of the rich class will come to us. After the establishment of worker-peasant unity through a civil war, whom we shall call the national bourgeoisis . . . (‘Unite with the Peasants’ Revolutionary Struggle,’ August 5, 1970)

p/49 Later the CPI(M-L) programme incorporated this [united front of the working class and the petty bourgeoise] view when it announced: “The urban petty bourgeoisie and the revolutionary intellectuals of our country are revolutionary forces and will be a reliable ally in the revolution.”

p/55 **The Petty Bourgeoisie**: A very important segment of the urban population are the middle and lower middle classes—teachers, white-collar employees, students, etc. Politically they are the most vociferous and volatile also. . . . They had access to education and employment and could thus afford an intellectual life free from the responsibility of production. They grew into a hybrid class, blending in themselves both modern and medieval characteristics. Some of them, being descendants of old zamindars, or banians (brokers to European business firms—the compradors) who made money through connections with the British traders, inherited the worst features of their predecessors—cold pursuit of self-interest and rank opportunism—and hungered for their lost economic and social status. But at the same time, the intelligentsia of this class was inspired by contemporary European ideas of liberalism and democracy, and often affected by the degrading poverty that surrounded them. This explained their radicalism, which occasionally took the form of furious outbursts at the slightest encroachment on their rights and privileges, and spurts of individualism.

This class played an important role in the political struggles during the British rule and its strength and weakness influenced the course of the national movement. . . . Many of them later turned to Communism. It was no wonder, therefore, that the intelligentsia—teachers, lawyers, journalists, professional politicians and students—came to provide the CPI(M-L) movement with the leadership and became its main ideologues. In spite of occasional betrayal of wrong ideas—again inherited from their class background—they set examples of supreme self-sacrifice.

In marked contrast with the parliamentary Leftist leaders, whose activities were a routine of revolutionary phrase-mongering from a safe distance, followed by ruthless self-seeking through every available avenue in the existing system, the CPI(M-L) leaders of petty bourgeois origin left their homes and gave up their careers in a bid to declass themselves and become professional revolutionaries. Voluntarily sacrificing the (p/56) comforts of their old environment, tossing away the tempting and useful rewards that went with social position in a bourgeois world, rejecting all the benefits that were available to those who conformed to the legal system, they chose to become one with the deprived millions of India and join their struggle to change the system.

But it was not merely their integration with the peasantry, but their belief in the cause, which was firm enough to make them see it through, whatever the danger to their personal well-being, comfort and safety, that set them apart from the other political leaders. They were brave men, ennobled by something greater than themselves. They were the only political leaders in the country who were hounded by a brutal police fore, who remained—and still are—behind bars for years without trial, suffering inhuman sadistic tortures, who were killed in the obscurity of . . . the deserted night streets of Calcutta, or some gloomy police interrogation cell. Their names were banished from newspapers headlines. A conspiracy of silence was built around them. Here was a party which was in the real sense of the term a party of martyrs”.

p/235. **A Review of the Urban Youth Upsurge.**

The young people who took part in the urban actions played a double role. They contributed a valuable energy to the needed task of protest and insurgency. But they also promoted a political moral confusion, sometimes verging on nihilism, which threatened liberal values and helped provoke a backlash.

The main weakness of the youth upsurge lay in its spontaneous origin. The CPI(M-L) leadership applauded at the beginning the unorganized outbursts of the youth in the cities in the same way as they had earlier hailed the spontaneous acts of the peasantry. But the spontaneous destructiveness of the peasant masses and the impulsive incendiarism of the urban middle class youth are not of the same order.

p.236. curiously enough, all through 1970 and 1971—the height of the youth upsurge—not a single of those upper class expensive schools, those phony replicas of the British public school system, that adorned the fashionable lanes behind Park Street, Lower Circular Road or Theatre Road, were attacked. Yet these were the institutions which were the brazen-faced symbols of a semi-colonial education, which taught Indians to “look down upon the masses of workers and peasants, respect everything concerning the imperialist powers and become lackeys or agents of these powers.”

…

One suspects that for the majority of the politically uncommitted youth who flocked to the movement in the urban areas, the aim was limited and immediate. The upsurge provided them with an outlet for their pent up frustration and anger, to be spent against the nearest targets for attack.

This explains also why towards the end of 1971, when along with the severe repression, the Government also began to dole out sops of concession to the youth—temporary jobs in various establishments and provision of numerous avenues for earning money—a large number of erstwhile ‘Naxalites’ were ready to lap them up. … While the landless and the poor peasants were too stubborn in their class hatred, and also too numerous to be bribed and bought over by the state, the urban students were temperamentally malleable and numerically small enough, to be terrorized (p/237) first and last and later won back into the fold of the establishment. Being young, they slipped through ideas, to try them on like a suit of clothing, before purchasing them with the price of personal identity. …

But it was the politically committed core among the urban revolutionaries, the band of dedicated CPI(M-L) activists, who became the source of a stirring Communist legend. It was their bloodshed and heroism in the numerous battles fought in Calcutta and the suburbs in 1970-71 that gave the movement its revolutionary aura. The halo of martyrdom which surrounded them made their names household words in their localities and inspired the next generation of revolutionaries. They were absorbed by the one exclusive interest, the one thought, the one single passion—the revolution, which they seriously believed could be unleashed by paralyzing the administration and terrorizing the rulers through a series of annihilations. They were not common criminals, which the police tried to make them out, but dreamers with a violent mission, characters whom Dostoyevsky would have been proud to have created.

If their activities and utterances sometimes appeared shrill, it was not their fault alone. We all tend to raise our voices when we speak to persons who are getting deaf. Their fulmination was not lost upon those who heard them. For, although they disappeared—wiped out by the enemy—they acted as a catalytic agent, both for their elders and the next generation. Their attacks on the sacred symbols of the past, often jarring, in their excesses, shook out of torpor at least a few sensitive Bengali intellectuals who were inspired to revise their worshipful assessment of the 19th century socio-cultural movement in Bengal….

p/271. But shooting people dead without trial was quite common in West Bengal all through 1971. The Indian state was keeping pace with its Pakistani counterpart in carrying out a massacre. If the Pakistani troops imprisoned the Bengalis of East Bengal and tortured them, the Indian police was one up in straightaway shooting down CPI(M-L) prisoners in the jails of West Bengal. While the Pakistani rulers were busy preparing lists of intellectuals of East Bengal who were to be eliminated, the West Bengal police set the precedent by arresting Saroj Dutta on the midnight of 4/5 August 1971 and killing him the same night in a dark corner of the Calcutta Maidan. To keep up with the genocide in East Bengal, the Indian police carried out a wholesale slaughter of more than 100 young people in a single locality in one sweeping stroke on 12 August 1971. The area was Baranagar, near Calcutta. With the help of hired hoodlums the police rampaged over an area of two square miles, raiding every house, dragging out every young man suspected of CPI(M-L) leanings to be butchered. The escape routes were blocked with the police guarding every lane. The bodies of the slaughtered were later thrown into the nearby canal.