



Mahasweta Devi (1926–2016)

- ✚ A prominent Bengali writer and social activist
- ✚ One of India's foremost literary figures from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries
- ✚ Mahasweta Devi was born on Jan. 14, 1926, in what is now Bangladesh to Manish Ghatak, a novelist, and Dharitri Devi, a social activist.
- ✚ She chronicled the injustices against India's poor and marginalized
- ✚ Devi had cast off the trappings of the middle class she was born into and chose to live simply
- ✚ Devi wrote over 100 novels and over 20 collections of short stories primarily written in Bengali but often translated to other languages.
- ✚ She wrote of India's tribal communities and Maoist rebels, prostitutes and nomads, beggars and laborers.
- ✚ She wrote her first novel, *The Queen of Jhansi* at 30. It is a fictionalized account of a real-life queen turned warrior who dressed as a man and fought a doomed war against the British in the Indian Rebellion of 1857, which toppled the Mughal Empire.
- ✚ *Mother of 1084* (1974), she wrote of the grief of a bereaved mother fighting for the Maoist rebellion, an insurgency in India's tribal belt that has roiled parts of central and eastern India.
- ✚ In *The Occupation of the Forest* (1977), she drew on accounts of the Indian tribal leader Birsa Munda, who fought the British for possession of forest land at the turn of the 20th century.
- ✚ Devi opposed West Bengal's policies of stripping indigenous people of their land, and established an organization that reported atrocities committed against tribes to India's National Human Rights Commission.
- ✚ Sharp, irreverent tongue tinted with dark humor, which was mixed with an almost childlike idealism.
- ✚ She is honored with various literary awards such as the Sahitya Akademi Award (in Bengali),
- ✚ In 1997 she earned the Ramon Magsaysay Award, which is called the "Asian Nobel Prize," for her writing and activism on behalf of tribal communities.
- ✚ She received the Jnanpith Award, India's highest literary honour, in 1996.
- ✚ She also got India's civilian awards Padma Shri and Padma Vibhushan.