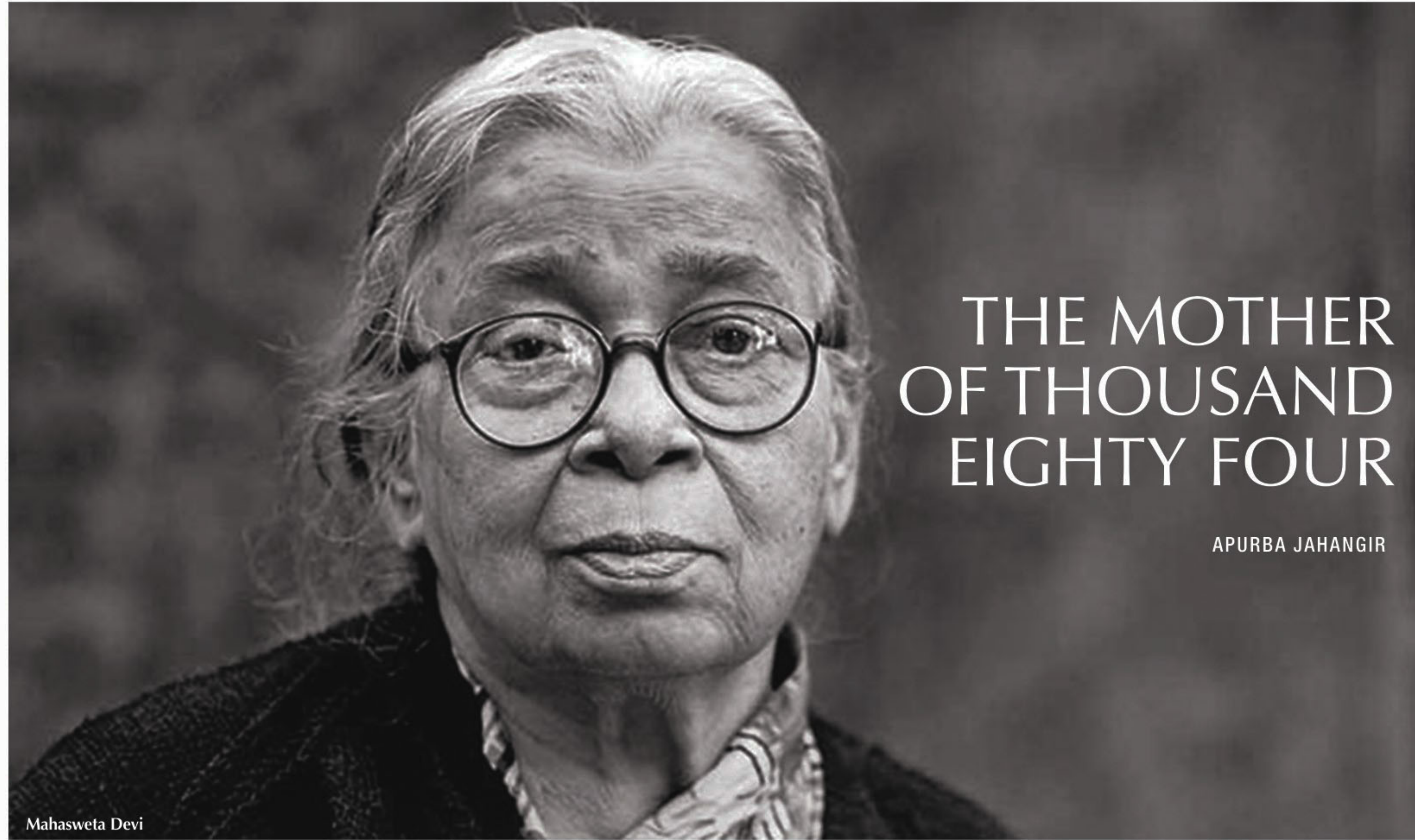


On July 28, 2016, we lost a mother – a mother who taught us to dream, who coached us to speak for the rights of others and passionately fought for women's rights. She never had a large media presence, never wanted to be a celebrity. What she wanted was to raise her pen for the discriminated and neglected mass. Most of her life, she fought for oppressed indigenous people. Her fiction based on India's Shabar tribe gave her the title, 'Marang-Dai,' meaning 'the mother'. For ninety years, Mahasweta Devi walked on to listen to the mass'

One of her most distinguished novels is *Hajar Churashir Ma*, a book that is praised by every Bangla literature enthusiasts. The story of a mother (Shujata) who's son (Broti) was brutally killed by the state because of his leftist ideology. It was written in 1974 on the backdrop of the Naxalite revolution in the seventies. The book showcases Mahasweta Devi's stand on the so called democratic authority and offers a magnificent narration of how wealth and power demolished the revolutionaries in such way that it was almost evil. In an interview where

Mahasweta Devi was asked where she got the influence for the character Broti, she replied that it was the direct impact of her own son Nabarun Bhattacharya— famous Indian Bengali writer who was committed to revolution and radical writing aesthetics. A question might arise regarding why this book was received so well by the readers. The subject of this book is very complicated, as it glorifies the leftist movement and shouts hatred towards the capitalist mentality. So, was it Mahasweta Devi's amazing writing skills for which the book did so well? Or was it

the fact that the mass still unconsciously hopes for an equal life, which capitalism fails to provide? This depends solely on the readers interpretation, nonetheless the novel is one of the best works of modern literature. Mahasweta Devi's personality as an activist always overthrows her identity as a writer. She herself turned the world's attention from her literature to her social and political life, allowing herself to be called "the mother of the Shabars". To compensate for both, she put the two identities together, creating outstanding



Mahasweta Devi
PHOTO: INTERNET

THE MOTHER OF THOUSAND EIGHTY FOUR

APURBA JAHANGIR

concern, which she amplified through her novels and brought them to the consideration of the mainstream. It is of great sorrow that her path has come to an end. Born on 14 January; 1928, Mahasweta Devi came from a family of litterateurs. Her introduction to literature started from an early age, as her father was Manish Ghatak, a well known poet and novelist of the Kallol movement (The first conscious literary movement to embrace modernism in Bangla literature). She was also the niece of renowned film maker and activist Ritwik Ghatak. Though she was brought up in a middle class family, Mahasweta Devi had cast off the privileges she was born into, and chose to live simply. In more than 100 novels and short stories, she wrote of India's tribal communities and Maoist rebels, prostitutes and nomads, beggars and labourers. Her first novel titled *Jhansir Rani*, based on a biography of the queen of Jhansi, was published in 1956.



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works such as 'The Hunt,' a short story. Though she is widely known for being an activist and a writer, lets look at the lesser known Mahasweta— a children's writer. In the 1960s, for nearly a decade, she wrote for *Mouchak*, a Bangali children's magazine. Mahasweta also wrote for *Sandesh*, another famous children's magazine, at the invitation of its editor, Satyajit Ray. Along with hilarious tales for *Sandesh*, she was writing the stories that would make up *Agnigarbha* (Womb of Fire). "The right to dream should be the first fundamental right," Mahasweta devi once said at the Jaipur Literally Festival in 2013. Was she at all wrong? It was her dreams that came out through her novels-- dreams of equality, dreams of civil rights, and dreams of revolution. Mahasweta Devi may have physically left the world, but she left the '1084' (*Hajar Churashir*) children who will forever be in debt to her, as she showed them their right to dream. ■

REMEMBRANCE

INSPIRATION



DA DACHING – KHAGRACHORI'S FOOTBALL AND WRESTLING QUEEN

ZAIAN FATEMA CHOWDHURY and SARAH-JANE SALTMARSH

PHOTO COURTESY: BRAC

Ching is the bossiest player on the pitch and the strongest on the mat. That's what she says anyway, striding out the door of her home in Ramgor, Khagrachari, a small remote town on the border of Bangladesh and India. Her friends, a mismatched team of boys of all ages, follow her. Today she is practicing her first passion; football. She places the ball in the middle of the field, takes a few steps back and runs towards it, strong and confident, with her jersey flying. All the kids are beaming, their full concentration on Ching. She kicks the ball and it flies into the air - and lands on her neighbour's vegetable patch. The team explodes into laughter and scramble over the fence to get it back. She is determined to be a professional

football player. To get there, Ching is using her second passion; wrestling. Bangladesh Ansar, the country's paramilitary force, is paying her BDT 5,000 per month to train for the Bangladesh Olympics Association wrestling title next year. Ching Shanu Marma got involved in BRAC's Adolescent Development Programme (ADP) at the age of 12, and discovered her natural talent for sports. Most afternoons at ADP, clubs include outdoor game sessions. She's a local superstar now at 17, unapologetically sporting shorts and short hair. Ching does not mess around. After the ball is retrieved from the vegetable patch, the game starts again. She is not only playing, but also refereeing and mentoring, yelling tips out to the younger

players as they run around the field. After the game finishes, Ching takes a break to cool down. She toys with the football between her feet, sitting on the edge of a wide lake, looking across the hills of India. Her sister looks on with a pride that cannot be described. The neighbours used to gossip about Ching playing with the boys, and dressing like a boy. No one cares about that anymore. Ching teaches football to the girls at her school and everyone loves her. You don't hear a lot about girls like Ching, but her story is actually not uncommon. Bangladesh's ADP clubs are home to what must be one of the biggest girls' football teams in the world, comprising of over 1000 girls. With support from other girls and peer mentors,

the girls are kicking goals and making names for themselves all across the country. There are 9,000 ADP clubs across Bangladesh, providing safe spaces where almost 300,000 young women are learning life skills, social confidence and entrepreneurship. They share experiences, receive training and build networks. Research has shown that clubs help girls to stay in school, become more financially literate and communicate more confidently. Similar clubs have also been started by BRAC in five other countries; Uganda, Tanzania, South Sudan, Sierra Leone and Tanzania. This story is the first in a series about the girls in BRAC's ADP clubs. The writers are working in Communications department, BRAC.



PHOTO: AFP

7

NUMBERS

The number of athletes who are representing Bangladesh in the Rio Olympics in Brazil this year. Bangladesh had made its debut in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games, and this year we are making our ninth consecutive appearance with seven participants in five different sports— golfer Siddikur Rahman, sprinters Mezbah Ahmed and Shirin Akter, archer Syamoli Roy, shooter Abdullahel Baki, and swimmers Mahfizur Rahman Sagar and Sonia Akter Tuma.