



An eco-feminist reading of Mahasweta Devi :A Review

Deepshikha

Department of English and Cultural Studies,
Panjab University, Chandigarh

Abstract

Dissent is a way of life for a few. Mahasweta, an adorable, hardworking, as well as an energetic enthusiast, academician, reporter and productive author is one among those few who register their dissent at every given opportunity. In our country she becomes famous in the form of literary

ISSN 2454-308X



9 770024 543081

personalities. She becomes a writer who has published more than 100 books. Most of her works have been originally written in Bengali. Later on, her work takes the form of other languages like English. The stark realities and systemic injustice around her paved way to become a writer – activist. Her involvement in the People’s Theatre movement of Bengal, the wake of Naxalite movement of the 1950’s and the first hand experience of the life and struggles of tribals in Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh shaped her life and career. Major part of her journalistic writings describe the “police atrocities, failures in the implementation of government programmes, exploitation of sharecroppers and miners, unemployment and landlessness, environmental degradation, and the need to protect and foster tribal languages and identity”.

Key words: Dissent, life, political, activist, government etc.

Introduction

Ecocriticism is an environmental activism that strives hard for environmental protection in an era of global environmental crisis. The primitive tribes of India including Kol, Munda, Santhale etc tried their level best to protect the environment using their indigenous culture. Yet they were persecuted by the foreign rulers as well as the so-called upper caste Indians who used to exploit their resources out of commercial benefit. Mahasweta Devi was a champion writer who showed her unquestioning affection for the Adivasi people, and is widely known for her famous novel Aranyer Adhikar which deals with the story of the Munda people and their cultural practices to save their environment during the colonial rule of the British. The writer was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1979 for this novel that depicts human-



nature bond of the Munda people. Devi observed that the tribal people have no sense of property. There is communal landholding as they believe that land and water, forest and river belong to everyone as the Native Americans believed. In fact, they understand ecology and environment in a way urban dwellers cannot even imagine.

In the novel, Birsa sees a lot of prospect for food. Yet they hanker after food due to the colonial exploitation of forest resources. The tribal people have enough scope to collect food from the forest land. The words , especially, evaluates the manner in which the legislative measures of national independent jungke influences the tribal socio-cultural way of living . It becomes possible that, biggest structured obstruction related to Mundas location , in comparison to another tribal societies, becomes the working of those people which Ares related to jungle ministry. These ministry done lot of arrangements for the betterment of jungle, but most of these arrangements influences the tribals way of living in an adverse manner. Let us understand this point with the help of example. Due to the large plantation of tree within the jungle, make the natural life of tribals threatening. It happens because teakwood step by step take the place of those trees which are very important for the natural living of tribals people. Out of these replaced trees the most important is sal trees which are very useful in satisfying the routine demand of tribal peiple. In the eyes of tribal people this tree is very valuable because the wood, fruits, and leaves of this tree becomes very useful for them in order to fullfilled their living needs.

“Ecofeminism, is a theory that rests on the basic principle that patriarchal ways are harmful to women, children and other living things”. Both women and nature are getting assaulted and abused by the male dominated society. Their greed and prejudices are converting both women and nature as means of exploitation. The dominance of men over women and nature often subjected to close scrutiny of eco-feminists. `Exploitation of nature and women go hand in hand under the system of patriarchy. Nature is being contaminated and spoiled by business and modern technology. Our country is witnessing large number of protests against gender discrimination and environmental destruction in the last three decades. More and more women are coming to the center stage by actively involving in struggles for survival and subsistence. In most of the issues plaguing the country at present, one can see that the elements of caste, class and gender issues are deeply interlinked with environment. Many women strive for the equality of women as well as the judicious use of natural resources. And



a few of them combine their writings to convey the issues of both women and environment. Mahasweta Devi, the coveted Bengali writer, is prominent among them.

The Jnanpith Awardee's , short story 'Breast-Giver' is the tale of an ordinary woman named Jashoda. Her husband Kangalicharan's untimely accident crippled him and his big family. The extreme poverty forces Jashoda, the protagonist to take up the job of a cook in a lower class, yet a wealthy Haldar household despite her high brahminical origin. But in that house, she is sexually abused and branded as a thief by a male member of this family. Yet, she remains silent for the well being of her poverty- stricken family consisting her crippled husband and young children. The greed and worldly pleasures of the male members of the Haldar family defines her profession as a wet nurse. Jashoda thus becomes a professional mother who breeds yearly in order to keep the milk flowing in her breasts. Thus, she suckles twenty of her own children and thirty children of her employer's family.

When the story opens, Jashoda the protagonist is a mute spectator whose identity is just the wife of Kangalicharan. She is an ordinary woman who cannot see anything beyond her family. Her past is also vague. She lives to satiate her hubby. His sexual desire "drills her body like a geologist in a darkness lit only by an oil lamp". This very description of love making explicitly explains the life lived by her. In the eyes of her husband she become an item of sex. Here, her's body is compared to the Earth, wherein drilling is a painful process with no love or affection involved in it. Though both women and nature are life sustaining and resource giving, their role in the society is neglected and ignored. Both Jashoda and Mother Earth are often being bruised and abused and they are suffering victims of men's continuous lust and greed.

Jashoda endures rape not just because of the extreme poverty in her family but also due to the popular social system, which silently tells women of poor background to obey and surrender to the whims and fancies of even the junior members of their master's family. The author is asserting through the rape incident that such patriarchal notions that a woman is a mere sexual object run strong even in the mind of a young boy. Rape becomes a word which shows the strength and control of male on females. Here, rape is used as a metaphor of abuse towards nature like mining, destruction of hills and mountains, sand mining and varied other activities that destroys the ecological balance. The women which are working in the form of servants in those societies who are completely controlled by men, are always considered an



object of slavery. The plight of Jashoda portrays the misery and predicament of housemaids in our country

Conclusion

The cultural practices of the Mundas have been eco-friendly and they have contributed much to environmental protection. Nature in the novel is not a mere backdrop of human drama but is as much a character as are the tribals. The ecological wisdom upheld by the tribals is highlighted as modal to combat the global environmental crisis. Mahasweta's works foreground the values of tribal culture as an alternative model for the sustainability of our planet which is often ignored under the onslaught of Western models of industrial development. Devi's novel *Aranyer Adhikar* cries against the environmental injustice done by the so-called civilized people who care little about nature.

Reference

- [1] Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experiences: Trauma, Narrative and History*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.
- [2] Chaturvedi, Vinayak. "Vinayak and me: Hinduttva and the Politics of Naming." *The Indian Postcolonial: A Critical Reader*. Eds. Elleke Boehmer and Rosinka Chaudhuri. New York: Routledge, 2011. 138-162.
- [3] Deleuze, Gilles. *The Fold*. Trans. Tom Conley. New York: Continuum, 2003.
- [4] Guattari, Félix. *The Three Ecologies*. Trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton. London: The Athlone Press, 2000.
- [5] Guha, Ramchandra. "Mahatma Gandhi and the Environmental Movement in India". *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, 6.3 (1995): 47-61.
- [6] Jain, Pankaj. *Dharma and Ecology of Hindu Communities: Sustenance and Sustainability*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011.
- [7] Langford, Jean. *Fluent Bodies: Ayurvedic Remedies for Postcolonial Imbalances*. Durham: Duke UP, 2002.
- [8] Tomalin, Emma. *Biodivinity and Biodiversity: The Limits of Religious Environmentalism*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009.
- [9] Yadav, Fulbadan. *Ramdaras Mishra: Vyaktitva and Krititva*. New Delhi: Radha Publication, 1992.