

The Tribal-Nature Relationship in Mahasweta Devi's Chotti Munda and His Arrow: an Eco-critical Perspective

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Abstract

Mahasweta Devi was the leading force in Indian Writing in English who has raised the tribal issues. Chotti Munda and His Arrow is not only the pathetic predicament of a 'Fourth World' citizens but the exploitation of the entire environment around them. The present work unfolded many Ecocritical elements which have been interwoven in the entire fabric of the story.

Keywords: environment, eco-critical, fourth world, tribal

In the recent time, the study of ecology became one of the most important and valuable streams in the field of literature. Indian Writing in English is always ahead to portray the Indian Flora and Fauna and related issues. Ecology is the scientific study of the environment and its impact on the society. Human being, forest and animals all are interconnected with the ecology. The term ecology is first coined by William Rueckert in his much cited article "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Eco-criticism". Tribal community is one of the important communities in the world, who has the sounder knowledge of the ecology. The present novel Chotti Munda and His Arrow written in 1980, is not only the depiction of the tribal issues but it raises number of environmental problems.

Mahasweta Devi was a prolific writer, social activist, winner of the uncounted prestigious awards and one of the important writers of Indian Writing in English who talks about the marginalized, tribal people of India. Mahasweta Devi has completed her early education from Shantiniketan where students received knowledge in the association of Nature. She was the fearless fighter and true social activist for the freedom, dignity and rights of the poor tribal people, such contribution made her the winner of Raman Magsaysay Award. Mahasweta Devi wrote number of fiction Chotti Munda And His Arrow, Aranyer Adhikar, The Queen of Zhansi, among them Chotti Munda and His Arrow has been translated by Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak into English and thus it became one of the prestigious writings on marginalized community which received international reader and critical attention. The education of Tagore's hermitage school made her a courageous lady who then involved in

social service, which made her a different women writer other than the Indian women writer. In one of her book Imagery Maps she says, "I think a creative writer should have a social conscious. I have a duty towards society" (13). Mahasweta Devi experiences and feels pitiful condition of tribal people with the sense and sensibility of both as an artist and an activist. In the fiction Chotti Munda and His Arrow, Chotti Munda is the protagonist and the central character of the story but when we peep into the novel it discloses that the story does not revolve around Chotti Munda but reveals how the destruction of the environment affects the entire tribal community in India. Mahasweta Devi portrays the growth of India from British Raj to Independence and the awful background and the pathetic story of the 'Fourth World' tribal people who have exploited in the hands of British and then local leaders under the idea of 'National Development'. While describing struggle of the tribal people against the modernization; the novelist has unfolded many eco-critical elements which have been interwoven in the entire fabric of the story. Many of the environmental problems like bioregionalism, environmental justice and ecocide are to be revealed in this fiction.

Mahasweta Devi was always and clearly concerned about the tribal exploitation and the struggle that they have to face. Timothy Clark the greatest critic in his book, The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and Nature said, "Ecological problems are seen to result from structures of hierarchy and elitism in human society, geared to exploit both the people and the natural world as a source of profit" (2). And that's why whatever she wrote about the Kherias or Mundas or Gonds her every works reflects eco-criticism. Through her experiences with tribal she explained that the relationship that the tribal share with nature and animal is never based on the appetite or greed which is dominant force to maintain any relationship in this world.

In the present work she becomes successful in portraying the tribals' love and respect for nature. The novel is written in Bildungsroman form where Chotti Munda, the descendant of Purti Munda is described from his early life as a mere boy to a leader. Purti Munda, father of Chotti his mother and siblings came from Chiabasa to Palamau

in order to find a place that he could build a village. But wherever his father tried to place and settle down some unusual situation took place and he had to leave that place and had to search a new one. In one of the incident she describes that industrialist arrived and suddenly started to dig the earth and immediately claimed that the land is owned by Government. In this way we can see how land is acquired for the different, sometimes inhuman purposes by the government and the industrialist. It is not only diminishing the Mundari's world but it exterminates the environment completely. Mahasweta Devi has pointed out in *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* that "help nature to survive" and "lives in harmony with nature around him" (22). When Purti Munda arrived to Palamau from Chaibasa to live new life; he didn't cut down entire forest but according to his need for the survival and not for any financial gain. Tribal has the genuine and the kind of the blood relationship with Nature. This is the basic culture which found in every tribal community all over the world and that's why they have the sounder knowledge of the ecology. They consider forest as their home and keep it as the home. Purti Munda was the unlucky one because whenever he tried to settle he was evicted from Chottanagpur which is the mineral rich area and by the time the area was completely covered by cement factories which are hazardous for the total environment of the Chottanagpur plateau. In her visit to Singbhum, Mahasweta Devi marked in *Dust on the Road* that "The approach to Chaibasa was marked by a changing landscape. The field lay barren and grey under layers of accumulated cement dust. The tree looked ghostly, the leaves hanging listless, heavy with cement.' And these 'cement dusts accumulated and hardened by night moisture, kill vegetation slowly. Trees wither, paddy, lentil and jowar plants give up and die, unable to survive in soil hardened by cement dust"(58).

Purti Munda was not only disappointed just because of the hassle of resettlement but because of his entire Mundari World was shrinking and thwarted with industrial involvement and destruction of the forest in their habitat. In fact, the true sense of the term 'Home Land' or 'Mother Land' is only understood by these Munda's Community. They are truly respected and dedicated towards the service and the protection of the Nature as their own mother. After the many struggle Purti Munda settle down his little village beside the river Chotti. Tribal is the only habitat on the world which is truly devoted to the Nature as the God. People worship God and his religion by name after the God-Goddess to their child, Munda's also faithful and dedicated towards Nature and so child of Purti was also name after the river Chotti which was the only sustenance to their life. The boy born and brought up at the bank of

river Chotti but due to the extreme poverty of Chotti's Parents, he was sent to his sister's home where his most of the childhood days spent in the direction and guidance of legendary Dhani Munda who was the valiant comrade of Birsa Munda. Dhani Munda was the greatest archer and during his teaching most of the time he talk about Birsa Munda and Ulgunan ,which not only shaped Chotti's skills as an archer but also shaped his mind and personality. Dhani was the real protector of the mother land and so once he says to Chotti,

Our Mother we won't die starving. What isn't there in t' jungle? (14)

They are not just dwelling in the forest but forest is the ultimate and all kind of sources of their life. Every Munda received primary education not to destruct the flora and fauna but to protect it. In the present book *Chotti Munda And His Arrow*, writer clearly portrays the exploitation of the tribal and environment have not end with the end of British rule but it is extended after independence by Dikus. The Mundas tribal community is much respected towards the Nature and understand the importance of the Nature. On the other hand Dikus -the outsider fail to understand the importance of Nature because their mutual relationship with forest is based not on love and respect but only to gain profit. While teaching Chotti Munda, Dhani Munda instructed him, 'T' most important thing in archery is concentration... when ye kill, finish with one arrow. Don't make t' prey suffer for nothing. (14-15)

Though the tribal community is born archer and hunter, they never misuse their skills. When Harmu, Chotti's son killed a female hare, he scolded and rebukes him and made him understood that it is serious offence for a 'T' family to kill a female animal, bird. Through this instruction of Dhani and disapproval of Chotti, we can understand their true sympathy for Nature. The tribal community is the most backward and uncivilized in the world, which take up their arrows in the extreme condition. One of the great things about tribal community is that they make natural harmony not only with Nature and animals but also with the human even intruders. They understand the interconnection between all the living beings, they believe existence of the natural force which binds everything together and they never interrupt that bond for the personal gain. They know Nature has bestowed them everything to survive and it is their duty to preserve them. Thus the extraction of the land, exploitation of the tribal and extermination of the forest brings countless sufferings and miseries to them. In one incident the people of Kurmi village had left their village and then Pahan set fire to village and ran down in the

forest. One could see, it is not just a fire but anguish and protest against the system. Throughout the novel Mahasweta Devi repeated the bonding between tribal, Nature and animals. In this context, when Chotti brings some rice to sowed in Harmu's land, Pahan said, 'Ye don't bring birds and rabbits no more? Where do I get it? They've killed all' (207). The reply of Chotti is very effective and suggestive that with the entrance of Dikus, the jungle, their own community and the animal kingdom is also shrinking. Tribal always play the major role in the protection of the Nature, they are always honest toward Nature. It's the universal law that Nature will fulfill your need but not greed. Once there was a great drought in the land and Lala Tirthmutrhi asked them for help, Chotti and other people helped him, writer Mahasweta Devi sketches in her novel *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, "men dug up the sand, and put in planks with no gap in-between on the walls of the pit. The women threw the sand at a distance, on the bank. Gradually they dug ten pits. The water came up". (128) Chotti had this kind of miraculous talent and every Munda means tribal also. Writer marked that much you are connected with Nature; she reveals the hidden magic lies in her. But it requires platonic love to understand this science which is only exists in the tribal but the misery is that even after Independence of the country, the most honest protector of nature remained marginalized.

The present novel is the masterpiece of Mahasweta Devi, who has meticulously and masterfully portrayed the tribal predicament and extermination of the forest. Through the

study of novel it is concluded that in the name of 'National Development', the tribal who are the most knowledgeable, who have placed true harmony and the soul protector of the forest are always avoided, discriminated and have become an honest labor of the modernization. The world is developing scholarly ideas to save the environment but the environment will automatically safe, if the tribal habitat will save.

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