

ISSN 2347 – 503X

Research Chronicler

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Vol I Issue II : December 2013

Editor-In-chief

Prof. K. N. Shelke

www.research-chronicler.com

Research Chronicler

A peer-reviewed refereed and indexed international multidisciplinary research journal

Volume I Issue II: December – 2013

CONTENTS

Name of the Author	Title of the Paper	Download
Dr. Archana & Dr. Pooja Singh	Feminine Sensibility Vs. Sexuality: A New Dimension	1201PDF
Dr. Akhilesh Kumar Dwivedi	Interrogating Representations of History: A Study of Mukul Kesavan's <i>Looking Through Glass</i>	1202 PDF
Dr. A.P. Pandey	Problems and Promises in Translating Poetry	1203 PDF
Dr. Ketan K. Gediya	Generation Divide among Diaspora in Jhumpa Lahiri's <i>Unaccustomed Earth</i>	1204 PDF
Dr. Nisha Dahiya	Patriotic Urge in Sarojini Naidu's Poetry	1205 PDF
Md. Irshad	Shashi Deshpande's <i>That Long Silence</i> : A Study of Assertion and Emotional Explosion	1206 PDF
Dr. Shanti Tejwani ICT	: As an Effective Tool for Teacher Trainees	1207 PDF
Dr. Manoj Kumar Jain	Differences in Stock Price Reaction to Bond Rating Changes: With Special Ref from India	1208 PDF
Maushmi Thombare	Bahinabai Chaudhari – A Multidimensional Poet	1209 PDF
Prof. Deepak K. Nagarkar	Death as Redemption in Arthur Miller's <i>Death of a Salesman</i>	1210 PDF
Dr. Vijaykumar A. Patil	Zora Neale Hurston's Theory of Folklore	1211 PDF
Dr. Jaiprakash N. Singh	Dalitonki Vyatha-Katha: Dalitkatha	1212 PDF
Raj Kumar Mishra	Traces of Hindu Eco-Ethics in the Poetry of A.K. Ramanujan	1213 PDF
Dr. Nidhi Srivastava	A Comparative Study of Values and Adjustment of Secondary School Students With and Without Working Mothers	1214 PDF
Sanjeev Kumar Vishwakarma	<i>Pinjar</i> : From Verbal to Audio-visual Transmutation	1215 PDF
Swati Rani Debnath	W.B. Yeats: Transition from Romanticism to	1216 PDF

	Modernism	
Sushil Sarkar	Environment and Woman: Reflections on Exploitation through Eco-Feminism in Mahasweta Devi's <i>Imaginary Maps</i>	1217 PDF
Book Review		
Sangeeta Singh	Goddess in Exile: A Sad Tale of Female Existentialism	1218 PDF
Poetry		
Bhaskar Roy Barman	On The Marge	1219 PDF
Dr Seema P. Salgaonkar	Entrapped	1220 PDF
Jaydeep Sarangi	I Live for My Daughter / Writing Back	1221 PDF
Interview		
Prof. Masood Ahmed	Interview with Poet Arbind Kumar Choudhary	1222 PDF

Environment and Woman: Reflections on Exploitation through Eco-Feminism in Mahasweta Devi's *Imaginary Maps*

Sushil Sarkar

Research Scholar, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, (West Bengal) India

ABSTRACT

The frames of marginalization in respect of 'Environment' and 'Nature' are similar as both of them are exploited in the post globalised period. Mahasweta Devi's novels are the documentary replica where dualism of exploitation on nature, women are reflected as the postcolonial 'Other'. The lower classes or the tribal peoples are like environment, are helpless, somehow or other way oppressed by elite classes and cannot break the traditional silence. Similarly, the environment is exploited perpetually by imperialistic, capitalistic or merchandise activities. Hence this essay will focus upon the oppression and marginalization through the angles of the Ecofeminist

Key Words-Ecofeminist, Exploitation, Violence, Marginalization, Tribal, Commodity

Nature and Woman are interconnected from the pre-civilization period and both of them are intertwined as the two different contradictory entities and considered as the reverse sides of a same coin. If culture develops through the dynamism of nature then generally comes another word 'Woman' which is in every society whether it is civilized or less civilized, privileged or less privileged, functions as the backbone of a nation, race or society. In our country, nature is considered as a mother, goddess or the embodiment of spirituality. It not only nourishes us giving food, shelter and clothes rather it is the source of development for a society as well as for a civilisation. Within the Christian frame, Biblical studies stated

that Adam and Eve also lived in the lap of nature in a blissful seat devoid of any omission and commission, sin or guilt. There God offers the human all the bounty of the forest garden except for the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This Genesis story parallels the way in which ignoring environmental limits leads to destruction, degeneration and irreparable loss. Same kinds of potentiality are given to the women by almighty to orchestrate the universe. The women are also in the same way in the Indian mythology worshiped by the people in Hindu religion as Goddesses like Kali, Durga, Saraswati and many others. All the goddesses are the sources of the power, potentiality and 'Dharma'. As a

consequence we can simply demonstrate that the women are created from the same divine power. Apart from that power, when women become sometimes frailty as Shakespeare calls “Frailty, thy name is woman” (*Hamlet*), then it reverses the natural rules of the universe. So the role of woman in the society proceeds automatically in every moment in the time of construction or destruction. In the story of Genesis, again woman played a pivotal role to bringing back the twist through the eternal damnation. It describes the ways in which the myth of the lost Eden has been emphasizes focusing on the “Forbidden Tree” where the Woman and Nature both missed their inter-related forces by the sinful act of disobedience. Nature lost its emperor and empress such as Adam and Eve and on the contradictory Adam and Eve also lost their shelter, the Blissful Seat, Eden or Paradise.

In the Postmodern period unprecedented industrialization and urbanization leads the society and nature in the verge of ecological devaluation and degradation. In the same period, the women counterpart of the society is considered as the commodity or the second sex, a machine of fertility or production. That’s why the women especially the girls randomly had been trafficking from many poverty stricken areas and transported in the developed countries as sex workers or laborers likely the forest or as the nature had been degrading for better development of modern society which directly result the global warming and many natural disasters. Recent deluge of Uttarakhand is the nature’s fury against the mankind. And the Delhi gang rape case and

many unofficial records which are not available for family prestige fear or threat lowers our heads. Quite frankly nature or environment have been also exploiting by the discriminate attitudes of the modern unscrupulous people. The nature and the women are not able to raise their voices - hence they are muted or dominated or subjugated in one way or the other. It may be clearly stated for that reason that both of them nature or woman are the counterparts of continuous oppression. As a consequence, the deforestation, the primitives are the worst sufferer under the constant plundering of environment and simply under the threat of rootlessness and existential crisis. Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen in a book *India: Development and Participation*, mentioning the pathetic condition of ethnic people of Kalahandi, state:

“In districts such as Kalahandi in Orissa, for instance, the collapse of the environmental base, especially forest has undermined people’s traditional livelihoods and forced a large proportion of the workforce into seasonal or permanent migration. While Kalahandi occasionally makes headlines for extreme cases of starvation (if not feminine), there is a larger story behind the headlines, in which environmental degradation plays a major role as a casual antecedent of chronic hunger and deprivation” (222-23).

Mahasweta Devi is acclaimed by global as well as the local readers, who are acquaintance with her translated

works, consider her as a contemporary outstanding writer who explores something challenging and new concept depicting the tribal as well as the lower strata of the society who are in an Indian term can be called "Dalit". Mahasweta Devi was born in a highly intellectual family in the undivided Bangladesh and completed her education from Shantiniketan and Calcutta University respectively. However her writing generally motivates the social justice and the dynamics of the oppression. Sometimes she depicts the tribal uprisings, sometimes peasants' revolution, sometimes and oppression of the women and sometimes the exploitation of the environment. Almost all the novels of Mahasweta Devi record the struggles of oppressed groups of India. But we cannot call Mahasweta Devi a Dalit writer or a feminist writer or a tribal writer. However, the Dalit perspective or the tribal studies or the subaltern studies is not my subject here rather the emphasis will be given upon the Nature, Woman duality through the angles of the 'Eco-feminism'. Mahasweta Devi's narratives expose the relentless collusion of patriarchal and capitalist ideologies in the exploitation of the underdogs. As a creative as well as the social reformer, she attempts to see the issues of the environmental destruction which has been interconnected by the marginalization of the female counterpart of her novels. Mahasweta Devi shows by pointing her finger that in India protest against environmental destruction and

degradation and struggle for survival in respect of the class, caste or gender are highly interrelated. If nature cries, the female section of the novels also feels the pangs of the crying, if the nature is destroyed, the women are also raped; if the resources of nature are wasted recklessly for development, the women are also bled by the exploitation. Hence comes the theoretical application of the Ecofeminism in her writings. But we cannot say strongly that Mahasweta Devi is a feminist writer. In an interview with Gabrielle Collu, Mahasweta Devi asserts:

"I never consider myself as a women writer, as a feminist. Nothing. I am a writer. I am a writer when I write, I write of such people who live much below the poverty lines. I don't isolate the women. Women have to play a lot. They also have their special problems. They come to my stories naturally, not just to uphold the woman... [A] Woman in the poorer class, she suffers because of her body. That is always there. That also brought out but doesn't mean I am especially gendered-biased."

Eco-feminism as a theory developed in the late 1970 which is the parallel study of Ecology or environment and Feminism, generally sidelines it periphery from Feminism. To give a precise meaning, it is a post-feminist dilution of women's equality concentrating upon the relationship between women, men and environment. The ecofeminist arguments propounded that the prevailing social and economic and political

structures upon which the massive damage of environmental destruction are occurred as like the violence upon woman. An eminent ecofeminist, Kate Soper, *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, states:

“Nature has been represented as a woman in two rather differing senses: ‘She’ is identified with body of laws, principles and processes that is the object of scientific scrutiny and experimentation. But she is also nature conceived as spatial territory, as the land or earth which is tamed and tilled in agriculture (and with this we may associate a tendency to feminize nature viewed simply as landscape, trees, woodland, rivers, streams, etc. are frequently personified as female or figure in similes comparing them to parts of the female body). In both these conceptions nature is allegorized as rather powerful natural force, the womb of all human production or as the site of sexual excitement and ultimate seduction”.(141)

Though the Ecofeminism is a contemporary theory in which the critics elaborate that the all forms of oppression and structure of oppression are directly interconnected and this kind of oppression between nature and women to each other simply a never ending process. In one of the first ecofeminist books named *New Woman / New Earth*, an ecofeminist, Reuther asserts:

“Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose

fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of the domination. They must unlike the demands of the women’s movement within those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socio-economic relation and the underlying values of this [modern industrial] society” (204).

In the *Imaginary Maps*, Mahasweta Devi discloses the violence through its metaphoric representation of imperialism and nationalism as a violation of rape. The first story *The Hunt* tells us about the Marry Oraon who is a child of tribal woman. Mahasweta Writes, “Once upon a time whites had timber plantations in Kuruda. They left gradually after independence .Mary’s mother looked after Dixon’s bungalow and household. Dixons came back in 1954 and sold the house, forest, everything else. He put Marry in Bikinis’ womb before he left” (2). But when Marry grows up and becomes an ideal lady as powerful as like as a man that are culturally considered masculine in respect of works – like pasturing and farming. In this story the Tehsildar Singh who is a wood merchant in the story not only destroys the forests recklessly rather he cheated the common tribal people of the Kuruba forest. Besides, he always pursues Mary to violate her chastity in a crooked way. His main

intention of the story is to gain more and more money by destroying the forests and exploiting the marginalized people. The exploitation not only confined within the monetary purposes only rather the exploitation of subaltern women like Mary. In the postcolonial period it is the elite or local bourgeoisie who continue to act in accordance with the exploitative structures set up by the Colonial power. This can be stated by the character of the Tehsildar who is one hand a rapist in the way he exploits the forests rather in the way he tries to rape or violate Mary's chastity. In the story *The Hunt*, Mary Oraon is doubly marginalized primarily by her own father or her oraon society being an illegitimate child and secondly by the Tehsildar Singh an imperialistic. In the story *The Hunt*, the theme of displacement and the destruction of the Sal forests had been profoundly depicted. This text not only depicts the human marginalization, the forests or the natural resources are also marginalized by the destruction. The case of Mary Oraon is more pathetic as the narrator says in the story that "The Oraon doesn't think of her as their blood and don't place the harsh injuries of their society upon her" (6). So it can be mentioned like that: "Once there were animals in the forest", the narrator writes

"The life was wild, the hunt game had meaning .Now the forest is empty, life was wasted and drained, the hunt game meaningless. Only the day's joy is real" (12).

Like the story *The Hunt*, the Second story of the *Imaginary Maps*, *The Douloti*, *the Bountiful* exposes the graphic picture of a tribal women Douloti who is the victim of the Patriarchal society. The story tells the tale of Douloti, a tribal girl of a bonded tribal father unable to repay his debt sold his daughter just to repay his family loans. But she becomes a prostitute and a victim of circumstances by the so called patriarchal society and its imperialistic violence. At the end of the tale we find this girl in a vulnerable condition "Hollow with tuberculosis, the sores of venereal disease all over her frame, oozing evil-smelling pus" (21). The story of Douloti is the document of the super exploitation of the third world nation states as the way women always exploited by the barbaric act of destroying around the world. The central character of the novel Douloti is sold to pay her father's debt. So far as the woman counterpart of the society Douloti is concerned she is not a woman here rather becomes a commodity whose father send her within an unknown

man. The comment of Rampiyari reveals the parallel exploitation between sexual exploitation and agricultural exploitation. Here in the story we can compare the woman and land in respect of exploitation. The women are made into land and they can be used in any time by any man at any will. This kind of violence, suggested in the story by using the words “plows and plows”, is nothing but the rape of the woman and more precisely the cultivation of the land by dikus. The painful history of exploitation and disenfranchisement of nature has been depicted in this story through the allusion of the raping of Douloti. In the introduction of the *Imaginary Maps*, Mahasweta Devi says about the exploitation of women which in Spaak’s term is super exploitation which has been mentioned below, goes like that:

“In Hyderabad, there is a special area where buyers from Middle East buy women in the name of marriage. Parents flock there because they are poor, they cannot give their daughters food and clothing. The basic reason is poverty....As long as eighty percent of the Indian population lives below the poverty lines, this cannot stop. Decolonization has not reached the poor. This is why these things happen. Women are just merchandise, commodities” (*Imaginary Maps-XX*).

Like the women, the forest and other resources of the forest, the entire environment has been made commodities and continuously had been exploiting. In respect of the Douloti the marginalization is doubled, primarily in her own society where she has been commoditized and secondly in hands of the upper classes like the Brahmins or the person like Rampiyari. Unlike her father who pays always the labour, Douloti pays her body to satiate the hunger of the male who are included in the power structure. This kind of power structure is always in the society sometimes like imperialist, sometimes like colonialist and in the story the upper classes dominating elites or native dominant.

In the last story *Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pritha*, Mahasweta Devi portrays imperialistic violence on the land or on the common people. Sankar in the story *Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha*, in the *Imaginary Maps*, voicing against the agony of the common people in a melancholic strain says:

“[W]e were kings. Became Subjects, were subjects, and became slaves. Owed nothing, they made us debtors. Alas, they enslaved and bound us. They named us, as bond slaves, Horiah, Mahidar, they named us Hali, named us Kamiya, in may tongues. Our land

vanished like dust before storm, our fields, our homes, all disappeared. The one who came were not human beings. Oh, we climb hills and build homes, the road come chasing us .The forest disappears, they make the four corners unclean. Oh, we had our ancestor's graves! They were ground underfoot to build roads, houses, schools, hospitals. We wanted none of this, and anyway they did not do it for us" (119-120).

This kind of development leads the society to the decadence of the modern society. The violence of the women is also linked with the development directly or indirectly in the form of marginalization and exploitation-rape, domestic violence, torture or threat etc. So the statements of Kate Soper, an Ecofeminist, can be applicable in this respect who suggests:

"If women have been devalued and denied cultural participation through their naturalization, the downgrading of nature has equally been perpetuated through its representation as 'Female', looked at from this optic, too, the symbolization testifies to considerable confusion of thought, and it's very complexity indicates some profound ambiguities about man's place within and relation to the natural world" (141).

So it may be concluded that the environment and women are verge of the destruction and degradation or marginalization that in ecofeministic perspectives that can be made a perceivable in the present postmodern society.

Works Cited:

1. Devi, Mahasweta. *Imaginary Maps*. Trans. Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak. New York: Routledge, 1995. Print.
2. Soper, Kate. "Naturalized Women and Feminized Nature". *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*. Ed. Laurence Coupe. London and New York, Rutledge. 139-143. Print.
3. Reuther, Rosemary Radford. *New Woman/ New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*. New York: Seabury, 1975. Print.
4. Dreze, Jean, Amartya Sen. *India: Development and Participation*. New Delhi: Oxford, 2002. Print.
5. Gabrielle, Collu. "Speaking with Mahasweta Devi: Mahasweta Devi Interviewed by Gabrielle Collu". *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. Vol.33.2, 1998.145.
6. Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publishers, 2005. Print.