



## Research article

# Indigenous Ecologies in Mahasweta Devi's *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*

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## Abstract

Designating the connection between literature and environment this paper highlights Mahasweta Devi's *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* from the standpoint of postcolonial ecocriticism where it highlights how the survival of the tribal is ecologically related and how much they are concerned about their own ecology. As a mother of a sustainable society, Mahasweta Devi shows her anxiety for the tribals. She binds their history and their closeness and bonding with nature in such a way that it may explore their involvement in constructing a sustainable environment as she believes that an author must have a social responsibility. Postcolonial ecocriticism not only just echoes history rather it has also brought changes in the physical environment they belong to. Here Mahasweta Devi focuses on how on one hand, the exploitation of the tribals at the hands of the landowners brings ecological degradation physically, socially, and psychologically and on the other hand she explores how that degradation is alleviated through the tribals' sense of responsibility and their ecological wisdom and the empowerment they achieve through the culture of archery.

**Keywords:** Mahasweta Devi, ecocriticism, tribals, ecologies, sustainable environment, ecological degradation.



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## Introduction

For Cheryll Glotfelty, ecological criticism or ecocriticism is the study of the connection between literature and nature which is mainly based on an earth-centred approach. Despite its wider possibility of analysis and distinct kinds of sophistication, all ecocritical approaches admit that it is the human culture that is not only attached to the physical world but it participates also in affecting nature and being affected by it. In this way, ecocriticism establishes the relationship between nature and culture, especially the cultural analysis of language and literature. "As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates

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between the human and the nonhuman" (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996, p. xix). Usually, most literary theories evaluate the concept of "the world" as the society but ecocriticism considers the notion of "the world" as the entire ecology. Glen A. Love, an ecocritic and a Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Oregon thinks that literary studies have no concern for the ecological crisis due to inadequate humanistic perspective as well as narrow anthropocentric view. So he opines that through nature-oriented literature human beings can convert their "ego-consciousness to eco-consciousness" (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996, p. xxx). The term ecocriticism was coined by William Rueckert in 1978 in his essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" where he defined ecocriticism as the presentation of ecology and ecological views to the study of literature. Donald Worster states that the ethical system of human beings is more responsible than the ecosystem. So, it is essential to understand precisely the effects of the destructive actions of human beings, as the realization of the cause of the crisis will lead us to reformation which is not possible by historians, literary scholars, anthropologists and philosophers. They can only assist with the realization (Worster, 1993, p. 27) and for this assistance ecocriticism should be understood through the various connections so that the study may reveal whether the connections are nurturing or oppressing. Ecocriticism of the 1960s-90s recovers nature as the ultimate significance for the humanities. These ecocritics are involved in analysing romantic writers and their attachment to nature in various ways. But their tendency prevails over the otherness of nature adoring nature's pristine and pure form of wilderness.

The ecocritics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, amplifying a more complex understanding of nature through interdisciplinary studies, foregrounds postcolonial approaches that concern migration, hybridity, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitanism (Heise, 2014, p. 18). The Australian ecofeminist Val Plumwood defines Crosby's *ecological imperialism* through the articulation of three forms of domination which are associated with a masculinist attitude of the European dominance towards indigenous people, their land and animals treating them as other. Another form Plumwood validates with *ecological imperialism* is *biocolonialisation* because of various technological experiments by which "indigenous natural-cultural property and embodied knowledge" (Huggan and Tiffin, 2015, p. 4) are invaded. The third form of *ecological imperialism* is *environmental racism* as race and environment are connected to each other and domination of one brings oppression of the other. Actually, environmental racism can be best understood from the social phenomenon where marginalised communities, economically disadvantaged people, or people who have been immigrated to a new land suffer from the problems of otherness. Thus postcolonial ecocriticism, the intersecting form of postcolonial studies and ecocritical studies, reveals that colonisation is not a mere history rather it has brought with it a change of the physical environment in terms of various domination. The dualistic notion like nature/culture, reason/emotion, primitive/civilised becomes the chief viewpoint to examine inherent hierarchies. Therefore, a postcolonial ecocriticism must be more than a simple development of postcolonial methodologies into the field of the human world in which both history and nature have the same contribution.

## Theoretical Framework

What this paper intends to do here, is to analyze Mahasweta Devi's *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* from the viewpoint of postcolonial ecocriticism. Elizabeth Deloughrey and Handley state that

"...the ecocritical interrogation of anthropocentrism offers the persistent reminder that human political and social inequalities cannot be successfully and sustainably resolved without some engagement with the more-than-human world and with deep time" (DeLoughrey and Handley, 2011, p. 25). Taking Martin Carter's poem "Listening to the Land" DeLoughrey exemplifies how this poem emphasizes the significance of listening to the colonial violence engrafted in the land and the poet is not able to listen to the voice of the land and what he listens is "tongueless whispering" (DeLoughrey and Handley, 2011, p. 5). With this respect, Adrian Ivakhiv's biocentric theory of ecocriticism is also vital for the conversion from humancentric to biocentric. It is an ecophilosophy that cultivates philosophy reconceiving the ecological relations of human beings with the moving images he displays in his work *Ecologies of the Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, Nature*. In this work, he explores the intersection of film, affect theory and ecological perspectives, offering his biocentric approach to ecocriticism. It encourages a deeper understanding of nature beyond human-centered considerations, nurturing a more wide-ranging and ecologically responsive literary and cultural analysis. Dipesh Chakrabarty states,

The globe, I argue, is a humanocentric construction; the planet, or the Earth system, decenters the human. The doubled figure of the human now requires us to think about how various forms of life, our own and others', may be caught up in historical processes that bring together the globe and the planet both as projected entities and as theoretical categories and thus mix the limited timescale over which modern humans and humanist historians contemplate history with the inhumanly vast timescales of deep history (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 4).

Historicization is a fundamental device of postcolonial studies to unfold the historical replica of ecology as well as colonial histories, associated with "forced migration, suffering and human violence" (DeLoughrey and Handley, 2011, p. 4). Val Plumwood's 'hegemonic centrism', inherent in racism, sexism, and colonialism is historically registered for the exploitation of nature, while non-human claims are overlooked. She opines that the dilemma of non-human species is hidden in the failure of placing dominant structures of human society ecologically and the failure of locating non-humans justly. In this way, 'hegemonic centrism' including both environmental racism as well as speciesism, keeps on constant dominance under rational human culture. Hence there is no difference between anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism in the prevailing idea of colonialism. The very nature of Eurocentrism lies in the action of anthropocentrism which rationalizes those practices of European colonialism that evaluates indigenous cultures as primitive, less rational and is closely associated with children, animals and nature (Huggan and Tiffin, 2015, p. 5). Val Plumwood declares,

The overall effect of hegemonic centric structure at the level of ideas is not only to justify oppression by making it seem natural but also to make it invisible, by creating a false universalism in culture in which the experiences of the dominant 'centre' are represented as universal, and the experiences of those subordinated in the structure are rendered as secondary or 'irrational' (2002b, p. 99).

Illustrating the Earth Day issue published by the American Time magazine which focuses "the millennial rallying cry to save the planet" (Huggan and Tiffin, 2015, p. 1). Huggan shows his awareness of the late-capitalist contemporary world which is aggressively led 'to reinvent the

imperial tradition for the twenty-first century”(Lazarus,2006,p.20).In the context of postcolonial survival, ecological issues have been represented differently by Graham Huggan, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, and Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee. Huggan brings postcolonial and ecological issues together “...as a means of challenging continuing imperialist modes of social and environmental dominance” (Huggan and Tiffin, 2015, p.2). DeLoughrey put together these two issues concerning ecocritical future through the dominant discourse of postcolonialists, ecofeminists and environmental activists as such “a challenge to find a way to speak in ethical terms about the global and the local without reducing difference and without instituting old structural hierarchies” (DeLoughrey and Handley,2011,p.25). Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee interlinks postcolonial and environment drawing out how the postcolonial environment is being regulated through the new form of colonialism which he calls neo-colonialism, emerged in the 1950s. As the proper subject of postcolonialism is colonialism and as it is human-centred, it overlooks the longstanding issue of ecological degradation in postcolonial studies. Vandana Shiva thinks that colonialism which is created by the British Empire not only transports changes in political relations, economics, ethnicities, and social relations but it also brings changes in nature creating new ideologies between human and nonhuman relationships.

### Synopsis of the Novel

Mahasweta Devi's *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* is published in 1980 in Bengali where it is known as *Chotti Munda Ebong Tar Tir*. In 2002, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak translated it into English. She also takes the interview of Mahasweta Devi regarding the story and plight of the Munda tribals and includes it in her translated work *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*. In this work of fiction, Mahasweta Devi deals with tribal history in the colonial and postcolonial context. She believes that Birsa's uprising does not die with Birsa Munda rather it remains alive with the magic arrow of Chhoti Munda, the protagonist of the novel that opens with Chotti's forefather Purti Munda who is repeatedly evicted from his land by the whites, Bengalis and Biharis because of the repeated emergence of valuable materials. At the age of fourteen, Chotti is sent to Dhani Munda, a companion of Birsa Munda, to learn the skill of archery. Chotti comes to know from Dhani Munda about the perpetual bondage of the Munda communities at the hands of the landowners and the moneylenders. Dhani Munda always tries to infuse the spirit of Birsa Munda into Chotti by telling him the story of Birsa's struggle and the Ulgulan movement. Even, he teaches Chotti about ecological sustainability. Chotti's father Bisra Munda hangs himself for Lala Baijnath, one of the landowners, who humiliates him by addressing the Mundas' moneylender. Tirathnath, the son of Lala Bajinath, saved several villagers at the time of natural disaster to be rewarded with the title Raisaheb.

After the establishment of the Brick Kiln and the arrival of the contractors, Mundas are treated as daily wage labourers. This time, Narsingarh's king becomes the forest king and his agent Tasildar Singh controls the bonded labour and later, he dies with a poisonous arrow piercing his back. Romeo, the gangster of the Youth League Party, with a dozen of his soldiers from the Youth League, come to this place and the Mundas and the untouchables are exploited by this Party in a new way, but this time the Mundas do not tolerate them and they thoughtfully murder all the members of the youth league party.

## History of the Mundas' Survival

Mahasweta Devi believed that an author must have a social responsibility. During her interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Mahasweta Devi tells the cause of her writing about the tribals:

...I have to write about the tribals, I have to, because these things will vanish, there will be more industries...I have to document it...And thus came *Chotti Munda*. In it, so many experiences, I had stored them so lovingly...I had such a great *asthirata* in me, such a restlessness; an *udbeg*, this anxiety: I have to write, somehow I have to document this period which I have experienced because it is going away, it is vanishing...these people had no resistance against the cultural invasion that took place. It is cultural, it is economic, it is connected with the land, with everything, they want to rob the tribal of everything (Devi,1980/2002,p. xii).

In *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* Mahasweta Devi explores how the tribals sometimes become ill-treated by the colonial masters and sometimes by the elite class of their own country. This novel actually raises a voice against tribal oppression and is vibrated with the power of developing a new kind of obligation for the society which is going to be dehumanized. But no other writers become so conscious of the tribal subjects like Mahasweta Devi who records the unwritten histories of the tribal communities and their exploitation by visiting laboriously in the tribal villages. Her fiction always unfolds a solid sense of commitment to the oppressed classes, concerned mainly with tribal issues which include both tribal history and their survival for existence. By and large 'Arrow' is the means to communicate the history, ideas and dreams of the Mundas. While on the one hand, 'Arrow' is associated with the culture of the Mundas, on the other hand, it offers protest and protection for their survival. Thus arrow becomes the amulet of their sustenance. Hence her stories are connected to ecological degradation, deforestation, loss of tribal culture and domination over tribal communities. The impact of ecological disturbances does not depend only on the physical ecology, rather it also includes the human ecology as well as the social ecology. Mahasweta Devi focuses on the turmoil in the lives of the Munda communities who are closer to nature. But their closeness to nature is devalued by the landowners and it is epitomized through the uncertainty Purti Munda faces in his own land and is compelled to be displaced. The cause of Purti Munda's jail is his belonging to the subaltern class. On one hand, the novel depicts the tyrannical supremacy of the landowners, moneylenders and contractors who benefit from the support of the government and clutch the Mundas and the untouchables through everlasting bondage, on the other hand, it represents the inequality, poverty, deprivation, and humiliation of the tribal communities. After the colonial period, the harmonious nature of the entire ecology changed gradually due to the ecological disturbances, shaped by the logic of domination in all spheres of life. Purti Munda becomes victimized by the yielded resources in his homeland, sometimes by coal and mica, sometimes by gold dust and sometimes by the stolen plate of the landowner. These possess economic as well as archaeological value to the White Gorman, the ruling kings and the Diku, the landowners of Bihar and Bengal. Before the eyes of Purti Munda the greedy nature of the White men and the Dikus becomes clear:

He remembers how White men and Biharis jumped at the sight of coal and mica, how instantly they disfigured adivasis areas with slums of tile-roofed dwellings. Who knows what such people will do if they see gold? (Devi,1980/2002,p. 2)

Devi demonstrates how the Mundas are being deprived at every step. In time of famine, Dhani Munda's brother takes ten seers rice which comes less and the Mundas are forced to provide free labour for that bond. Dhani thinks while all the Mundas work on bond, one Munda's only negation from bonded labour cannot bring any change. In every sphere of domination over the Mundas Dhani Munda belongs to a unique place where his power of resistance speaks of Dhani who smiles like "the invincible soul of the forest" (Devi, 1980/2002, p.10). Dhani Munda expresses the regret to Chotti that in his time there was neither Ulgulan, nor any Lord with fire in his heart to change the lives of the Munda from the hands of Moneylenders or police, rather they become excited to win at the Chotti fair. Thus Munda tribe is babysat by the Gormen. Everyone knows the truth of all kinds of wrong deeds but is not able to protest against that. Parmi's father-in-law says that the land belongs to Lalas, traders and the land given to them does not produce good crop.

Soon's they know pepper, they'll take away. We too know pepper grows there. Knowin' we can do nothin'. It's enough that t'rice grows...All th' arable land belongs to t'Mundas and th'Oraons... All t'land is Diku land---Hindu Land---since long ago. (Devi, 1980/2002, p.10).

Ania Loomba rightly says about postcolonialism that it implies "a technical transfer of governance" (Loomba, 1998, p.10).

Thus Loomba thinks that modern colonialism not only means the removal of homage, commodities and riches from the colonized countries but the rebuilding of the financial system of the colonized country as well as making complexities among the colonized people to bring a surge of humans and natural resources between colonized and colonial countries (Loomba, 1998, p.9). This surge acted along both tracks – "slave and indentured labour as well as raw materials were transported to manufacture goods in metropolis, or in other locations for metropolitan consumption, but the colonies also provided captive markets for European goods" (Loomba, 1998, p. 3). Partha Chatterjee says in *Subaltern Studies I* that "The tension between a peasant community and an external force also becomes clear in the case of the operation racially and culturally distinct from the peasantry" (Guha, 1997, p.19). The well-being of Bisra Munda is not taken well by Lala Baijnath as his land's well-being depends on Oraons, Mundas and untouchables. He favours *adivasi* labour because they are available at low wages and also they keep their word. It is very easy to tie them up with debt. Devi says: "If they once put their thumbprint on paper, they give bonded labour for generations. Of course this is just as applicable to untouchables" (Devi, 1980/2002, p.25).

Baijnath feels secure in working with Mundas and untouchables with whom he keeps up the creditor-debtor relationship. The moneylenders always want the untouchables and the *adivasi* should stay poor. As Bisra Munda has no necessity to do bonded labour for Baijnath, Baijnath insults him by calling him the Munda's money lender. Lala Baijnath stays in the same village and is known as the moneylender who lends money instead of interest and bonded labour. He never wants to be separated from *adivasi* labour. For Tirathnath, to help the *adivasis* and the untouchables without bonded labour is nothing but his failure. All the sharecroppers making the thumbprints make permanent, bonded labour. So he tells the Manager to give the *adivasis* and the untouchables last year's maize which is full of bugs. The Manager also thinks about how to cheat them by giving two and half seers writing ten seers. But Chagan Dusad, with his little education, claims to be able to write. He knows that the manager will cheat them. "T'manager will cheat like a bastard. That fucker is a tick on t'tiger's neck" (Devi, 1980/2002, p.43). Chotti Munda,

gathering all the Mundas, attacks Tirathnath and loots his granaries. The English feel similar tendency of Birsa Munda in Chotti Munda. So when in the course of conversation, drought and the loot of granaries come up, they remember the revolt of the Birsa Munda and Alluri Raju:

We English trembled for fear of Birsa Munda? Of course we were able to defeat him later. But don't call them peaceful. Playing the tuila, dancing the group dance and then shooting arrows. A most complicated people...We shouldn't forget that Alluri Raju, the leader of a tribal uprising, was put to death just the other day in South India (Devi, 1980/2002, p. 43).

Erika Cudworth states: "Liberation ecologism suggests that struggles for intrahuman justice are closely bound with those to prevent environmental exploitation. In theoretical terms, it brings the conceptual apparatus of postcolonialism to bear on debates around social difference and human-environment relations" (Cudworth, 2005, p.34).

Like an ecocritic of the postcolonial society Mahasweta Devi also thinks that her writing about the tribals' oppression is an integral part of the struggle against genocide and ecocide. It is what binds all people against the forces of oppression. Eliane Potiguara shows in her article "The Earth Is the Indian's Mother, Nahandecy" how the capitalist economic model changes the indigenous existence as well as their rituals and practices in a similar way with the aggregation of wealth, products, metals, currency and personal property in India. Yet the purity of their rituals is placed in danger by the white people who try to bring them under their grip to make fulfill their necessity (Warren, 1997, p.140-154).

### **Ecological Concerns and Ecological Knowledge**

The Mundas, being the original inhabitants, always maintain the ancient pattern of settling. When a particular village or settlement becomes overpopulated, heads of the society find another unoccupied place and assess its aptness in terms of soil, water and wind flows. If it seems favourable they drive a pole (Khunt) into the ground. The adjacent virgin forest will also be cleared to set up a village. Thus the Mundas' pattern of setting up a village becomes very healthy and pollution-free as it is completely free from overpopulation. Mahasweta Devi along with subaltern humans also contributes a picture of the subaltern nature in this novel. She demonstrates the tribal's sense of responsibility for nature.

Offering Dhani Munda's ecological talent Mahasweta Devi highlights how it leads towards a harmonious relationship between human beings and non-human nature. Dhani is seen to address the jungle "Our Mother". He says to Chotti: "Let me learn ye t' jungle. With jungle learnin' ye won die starvin'. What isn't there in t' jungle" (Devi, 1980/2002,p11). Dhani Munda's closeness to nature enables him to listen to the cry of the forest:

...T' forest cried. Told him, Birsa, Diku-Master-White man ----together they've made me unclean, naked, undressed, clean me up. Chotti gimme yer word, ye'll not tell no one all that I've told ye ? (Devi,1980/2002, p.14).

As Vandana Shiva shows in her book *Staying Alive* how modern science snatches motherly wisdom from nature, Mahasweta Devi also depicts the domination of the Gormen, Diku or White men over nature. Robert Boyle, aggressively treating the faith of the Indians, sees nature as a goddess and

argues that "the veneration, wherewith men are imbued for what they call nature, has been a discouraging impediment to the empire of man over the inferior creatures of God" (1988, p.18). The tribals are quite conscious of healthy ecology and the same concern is seen from Dhani Munda also. Dhani Munda suggests Chotti not to hunt birds more than requirement: "There's a whole buncha birds in t' sky? Kill ten?...Ten birds, ten mouths to feed at home" (Devi, 1980/2002, p.15). Mahasweta Devi says, "A tribal lives in harmony with the nature around him, with human beings, even intruders. So when he kills it is a necessary killing" (Devi, 1980/2002, p.xix). In an interview with Spivak Mahasweta Devi tells about the forest movement of the tribals who protest against teak planting. The *adivasis'* ecological knowledge and skills are exploited by the landowning class. The government introducing teak (*Saguna*) tries to dishonour the tribals' religious sense connected to sal trees. Ruining the teak nurseries they plant sal. In *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, spirituality is most clearly noticed in their struggles for survival. Mahasweta Devi shows how the white Gormen for their sense of profit disruptions the spiritual connection between the tribals and the trees they are emotionally attached.

Mahasweta Devi, in her interview with Spivak says that the birth of *Chotti Munda* comes from her experience of the first forest movement which appeared as a war of the tribals who destroyed teak nurseries plant sal. "Out of this feeling of exileration came *Chotti Munda*" (Devi, 1980/2002, p. xv). The tree Sal, with which they are spiritually connected, is cut down and teak which is worthy of making profit is planted. "The cry went up: *saguna hatau, sal bachao*" (xv). Karen Warren states that during Chipko Movement the local women complain against the felling trees for trade by the contractors who damage a huge number of uncut trees also and shows how the indigenous forests are being replaced by the teak and Eucalyptus monoculture plantations. She believes that the monoculture plantation is gender biased as it produces only cash value, reducing the fuel and fodder and privatizing everyone's access.

Again Vandana Shiva states in *Staying Alive* that natural forests stay barren due to monoculture plantation of commercial species. Thus development is considered maldevelopment which is devoid of "the feminine, the conservation and the ecological principle" (1988, p.4). She also thinks that 'Taylorism logic' (Shiva, 1988, p.85) to bring homogeneity in trees is far better than monoculture plantation of a similar species. Even for Vandana Shiva, an assortment of crops provides better results than monocultures which are considered responsible for soil erosion. Thus, she concludes, "Uniformity is intrinsic to centralised seed production, which on the one hand displaces mixed cropping patterns and gives rise to monocultures, and on the other displaces genetic diversity in crops by the introduction of highly uniform hybrids" (Devi, 1980/2002, p. 117).

In *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* the novelist points out that despite the tribals' connectedness to nature they are compelled to kill the trees unlawfully to build moraine for their survival. As in one hand, Mahasweta Devi shows the tribal people's closeness to nature, on the other hand, Mahasweta Devi holds the ecological crisis in Chotti's region where Chotti observes the absence of deer which are killed by human beings to fulfill their passion of hunting and the left animals hide into the deep forest for fear of the human. The bond, the connection and the sense of obligation the author shows in Chotti for his land is possible only in the case of the Mundas. Chotti understands that only his order to his fellows can save the land so Chotti uses his title 'God', offered to him by the people of his region for the good of the land and so he requests his followers:



But ye call me a god. I'll take an 'offering'.

What'll ye tek?

When ye dig the pond each one put that scummy mud on t' land, carrying as ye can. T' land's cryin' like a babe sick wit' hunger. We'll give, we'll carry (Devi, 1980/2002, p.152).

Mahasweta Devi exuberantly depicts the forest as a helpless woman who after being oppressed by the male dominant society informs the social reformer of the dirty incident. The forest is the utmost appearance of the earth's fruitfulness and productiveness, which it stood for as the Mother of the Earth. Vandana Shiva says: "The ecological crisis is, at its root, the death of the feminine principle, symbolically as well as in contexts such as rural India, not merely in form and symbol, but also in the everyday processes of survival and sustenance"(1988, p.40).

Mahasweta Devi shows how 1950s drought becomes a curse before the Mundas who suffers a lot from the scarcity of water. Everywhere there is a lamentation of water (Devi, 1980, p.98). People wait at the station to get water from the engine, the water they drink after cooling it. All the wells of the village have been dried up. So people take water from Tirathnath's well as well as station well. In the time of drought, the Mundas feel helpless as they are alone with their sufferings. They know if there follows heavy drought Tirathnath will take the opportunity of the bonded labour to give them water: "I can't give to all, but only to my bonded labour!" But the Mundas do not want to give the bonded labour rather they want to dig wells. Vandana Shiva in her book *Staying Alive* says that the drought and desertification of India is anthropocentric rather than natural calamity. It is a consequence of reductionist knowledge and dominant modes of development that destroys the cyclical life of rivers, soils and mountains. Another picture Mahasweta Devi shows in this novel is the identity crisis of the Mundas because of development. Vandana Shiva states that dipping human activity to labour, and changing it from an output to an input is a prescription for unemployment, displacement and destruction of the livelihoods of small family farmers and the communities. In this relevance, from the perspective of ecology, a study of postcolonial ecological issues is significant to draw-out its effect on marginalised communities. Narsingarh's king scratching the title 'King' starts to do corrupted work by exporting tiger-skins. The novelist describes:

He's got connected to the export of leopard-skins, tiger-skins et cetera. Forest law do not apply to him. He doesn't fall in the purview of any law....He's strong in that strength, he poisons the springs of drinking water and goes on killing tigers. Other animals are also dying (Devi, 1980/2002, p.10).

Lori Gruen in her essay "Dismantling Oppressions" states that women and animals are considered powerless to understand science and so demoted to the status of inactive entity, their misery and demises are reasonable in the name of development. She also says, "Animals clearly can be seen as pawns in a power dynamic by which man asserts his superiority" (Gaard, 1993, p.74). Tom Regan informs in his book *Animal Rights, HUMAN WRONG: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy* that the U.S. Department of Agriculture provides three hundred twenty-four fur mills to be controlled all over the country. Regan shows that the profit makers have no direct economic interest in the rough treatment they make for the animals and the mental condition through which the animals

go in fur mills. "By contrast, the condition of an animal's coat is, and necessary steps are taken to preserve the coat's integrity" (Regan, 2003, p. 14). Peter Singer in his book *Animal Liberation* says that every tiny piece of actual ground assists the argument that the advanced mammals go through pain sensations at most equally like the human beings. Mahasweta Devi delineates how the king arrogantly behaved with his tenants a few generations ago and now the forest king is busy in killing the tigers and exporting their skins. Peter Singer states:

...although contemporary attitudes to animals are sufficiently benevolent—on a very selective basis—to allow some improvements in the conditions of animals to be made without challenging basic attitudes to animals, these improvements will always be in danger of erosion unless we alter the underlying position that sanctions the ruthless exploitation of non-humans for human ends. Only by making a radical break with more than two thousand years of Western thought about animals can we build a solid foundation for the abolition of this exploitation (Singer, 2002, p. 213).

Despite the Mundas' close association with nature, they are obliged to do the work of felling trees for their survival. In the capitalist system also the Mundas are exploited where "t' contractor works to see how low he can get labour" (Devi, 1980/2002, p. 139). Judith Plant in her essay "Learning to Live with Differences" says that the Western civilization does not know how to offer value and live with differences. Nature here stands for timber to be harvested. In the myopic Western view, the re-plantation of single species and tree farms that do not rebuild forests replace the once-built diverse forest ecosystem for the ravenous hunger of single-industry economies. Karen J. Warren says: "Virgin timber is felled, cut down; fertile soil is tilled, and land that is 'fallow' is 'barren', useless" (1997, p. 12). Vandana Shiva says that the forest crisis is the product of a reductionist forestry which sees the forest as a timber mine, not as an essential means of soil and water preservation. Thus the isolation of the forests' natural value from their commercial value leads to the devastation of the fundamental ecological process associated with the contribution of forests and trees. She thinks that on the one hand, the forest is connected with the struggles of women, tribals and peasants and on the other hand it is victimised by the maldevelopment. Thus it becomes easy to summon the environmental degradation as well as the degradation of energy by unlocking new ways for reductionist science and commodity production. Ecofeminists opine that the exploitation of nature cannot be stopped without destroying human oppression. The connection between the Mundas and the land is so strong that they can easily take up a barren land and make a relationship with it. Their power of making a connection with it makes the land fertile. The landowners and moneylenders always want to utilise the Mundas through bonded labour or by giving them barren land. They never support the Mundas in the acquisition of land. So, when Harbans Chada and Tirathnath come to know about Chotti's acquisition of land from a trader they become dissatisfied. They opine:

It's not correct that Chotti and company should own even stony land. This might alter the balance of their mental make-up. They may get a sense of property rights in land. This is not desirable. They should be kept like spectres without any recourse, without any materiality, forever dependant. Like those who are kept apart by earth, by water, by air. (Devi, 1980/2002, p. 148)

Chotti understands, "Be it barren, be it stony, a bit of land means tying one's drifting existence to an anchor" (Devi,1980/2002,p. 147).

Illustrating medication knowledge of Chhagan's mother Mahasweta Devi shows how the tribal women are closer to nature. She portrays:

That Chaggan's mother made some herbal paste, and cured Tirath's mother menstrual problems. Now the thing is to go to the doctor, but Tirath has never seen a physician like Chhagan's mother. As long as Chhagan's mother was alive no one in Chotti village worried about the health problems of women and children (Devi, 1980/2002,p.154).

Michelle Dimeo and Rebecca Laroche think that this kind of medical knowledge comes through the interaction "between nature and that need" (DiMeo and Laroche,2011, p 99). They state:

While this dialogue with nature may not sound particularly 'ecofeminist' in our presentist understanding of the term, it does suggest that early modern women had an understanding of and interaction with nature in a more intimate sense than most of us moderns can claim(DiMeo and Laroche,2011,p.100).

They try to make a connection between historians of medicine and ecofeminism by investigating how early modern women or aboriginal women's domestic or homely medical knowledge can communicate their connection with nature as Sylvia Bowerbank states: "[t]he ecological ideas and habits of the majority of early modern women emerged from their lived experiences of daily life" (DiMeo and Laroche,2011,p.89). Karren Warren shows that women are more dependent than men on trees and its products. So they become the primary victims of environmental degradation and the reduction of forest products as they have to go far distances to collect the necessary ingredients to meet household needs.

It is the insider most inside the culture –the Chipko women of india,...who are the experts, who have what feminist foresters call indigenous technical knowledge (ITK) and feminist philosophers call epistemic privilege around forestry production. Because local women are the primary users of forest commodities in most developing countries (Warren, 1997, p.6).

Thus, while women can identify thirty-one products from nearby bushes and trees, men only find eight. Women's closeness to nature gradually makes them powerful to earn knowledge which grows out from their daily felt and lived experiences as managers of trees and tree products. Even today 80 percent of the World's medical care depends on women. As the primordial pattern of women's knowledge is disfigured, it should not be expected to search for women's skilled knowledge in the contemporary period. Warren thinks that women's knowledge is essential for dealing with the complex roles she plays as mothers, wives, peasants, healthcare workers or environmental defenders. Warren states: "If their indigenous knowledge of the sustainable ecological community has often been destroyed by maldevelopment, women are still invested by their daily practices in the reinvention of such knowledge"(Warren, 1997, p. 89). For Warren, Women's medical knowledge is a huge source of experience and indigenous women's medical knowledge is built up over forty centuries. Vandana Shiva says that in Ayurvedic medicine a measured portion of copper powder is used for diarrhoea, cholera and typhoid. The knowledge women apply for water purification is availed from natural products. Women's association with nature offers substitutes to male-dominant patterns of water management as well as health care

processes which are not harmful for the ecology of the human body. Vandana Shiva states: "the honge, nirmali and drumstick trees are partners with women in the safe and easy cure of everyday illnesses like diarrhea, which can otherwise be fatal (Shiva,1988, p.204). The knowledge of the 16<sup>th</sup> century women in Europe is discarded from the practice of medicine and healing because they are addressed as witches. As Vandana Shiva says: "A deeper, more violent form of exclusion of women's knowledge and expertise, and of the knowledge of tribal and peasant cultures is now underway with the spread of the masculinist paradigm' of science through 'development'" (Shiva,1988,p.20-21).In this regard Mahatma Gandhi's emphasis on the virtue of truth is essential. The virtue of truth reveals the truth of unity is indispensable for preventing ecological disaster as it is not disrupted by human rules. Gandhi says that the only virtue he wants to claim is truth and non-violence. He believes in living in harmony with the environment, emphasizing that human actions should not harm the delicate balance of the natural world. His teachings reflect a deep awareness of the interconnectedness between humanity and the environment, advocating for a responsible and ethical approach of the earth (James,1999, p.241-258).

### **Culture of Archery**

Another significant facet Devi depicts in *Chutti Munda* is the culture of the Mundas. She illustrates how the Mundas are connected to their culture of archery which can wash off their sorrows. In an interview she says, "Archery was very much in their blood. And in Heaslong market I saw this fantastic archery competition, for which an old Munda was brought as judge..." (Devi, 1980/2002, p.xi). Karen M. Fox in her article "Leisure: Celebration and Resistance in the Ecofeminist Quilt" says that leisure is relevant to ecological feminism as it is an essential part of a healthy and self-affirming lifestyle that offers a new way of defying oppression and nurturing cultural practices essential for the survival of nature, women and other marginalized groups. So, when Bharat manifests his desire to learn from Chotti, he says in a very cool voice, "There's no spell Bharat. Only practice, an' practice, an' practice" (Devi, 1980/2002, p.67). While training the young Mundas, Chotti finds out that he bears the qualities to motivate them through the hurdles and thus his legacy will continue through their success. Before the archery competition in Chotti fair, Chotti's devotion to practice areer play and his winning at the fair bring a kind of solace and peace in his mind not only for being rewarded but also his capability of protesting against the landlords and the moneylenders. Mentioning Joseph Pieper's social perspective Karen M.Fox states:

Culture depends for its very existence on leisure, and leisure, in its turn, is not possible unless it has a durable and living link with the cultus, with divine worship....Culture...is the quintessence of all the natural goods of the world and of those gifts and qualities which, while belonging to man, lie beyond the immediate sphere of his needs and wants. (Warren, 1997, p.160)

Murray Bookchin's social ecology is significant in the development of the green movement. He draws out in his *Ecology of Freedom* the ecological crisis from the viewpoint of society where "the domination of humans by human-hierarchy replaces the more specific Marxist concept of class exploitation, or the feminist concept of patriarchy" (Mary Mellor, 1997,p. 150). Chotti area becomes an open battlefield where the leaders of the Youth League Party create one after one

violence to show their power and slowly involve themselves in various kinds of criminal activities. The author describes:

If Romeo and Pahlwan had killed every Adivasi in the area, no one would have found it 'unexpected'. There are adivasis, there are subcastes, the Romeos kill them, it happens like this. But if one or few adivasis kill the Romeos it is an unexpected event. The Romeos kill, they're not killed. This is the rule. Under all regimes (Devi, 1980/2002, p. 283).

They understand that the presence of Romeo, Pahlwan and Dildar will create problems which can not be avoided. For Bookchin, a good society means an ecological society where humanity and human-nature relations create a harmonious structure as analysed by the green thinkers. He asserts that humanity not only exists in human nature but it presents in the entire evolution process. He believes that this humanity creates second nature which he calls human culture. First nature (ecosystem) is always restrictive to second nature while second nature incessantly intercedes first nature. Bookchin suggests that the ecosystem should be developed through the immanent power of human culture.

Culture is, perhaps, the product of this history just as the flower is the product of a plant. Like history, or because it is history, culture has as its material base the level of the productive forces and the mode of production. Culture plunges its roots into the physical reality of the environmental humus in which it develops, and it reflects the organic nature of the society, which may be more or less influenced by external factors (Mukherjee, 2010, p. 47)

## Conclusion

Throughout the literary work *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* Mahasweta Devi explores history, nature, and culture of the Munda communities and asserts their empowerment and survival. The perspective of Postcolonial ecocriticism not only highlights their colonial and postcolonial complexities but their relations to their environment also. Anthropocentrism inherent in Eurocentrism, justifying those practices of European colonialism degrades indigenous cultures and it is found in various activities done by the landlords, moneylenders and white Gormen who, ignoring Mundas' existence, impose their power on them. Mahasweta Devi shows the Munda communities' constant effort to survive in spite of getting so many barriers in acknowledging their identities. As an activist, she focuses on those issues in *Chotti Munda* which are relevant to postcolonial ecocriticism. From the beginning of the fiction Devi shows the subordinated status of the Mundas through the bonded labour by which they are bitterly oppressed and exploited. Dhani Munda's narratives relating to Birsa Munda and the Ulgulan movement produce spirit and energy to Chotti Munda to fight against the injustices. Mundas being fostered by the forest resources learn how to use those sustainably. Even their ecological concerns and ecological knowledge are so intimate and deep that their survival, not being limited to themselves, encompasses the survival of all beings though their existence is at stake at the hands of the capitalist society whose only purpose is to make money. The culture and knowledge of archery bring out the empowerment of the Munda communities. It may be worthwhile also to reproduce for a moment, the particularities of the production of the subaltern voice.

The subjective experiences of Chotti are acknowledged and honoured, while the author demands they be considered a prime part of their process of development. The novel aims to bring a change in the system of survival of the Munda communities. It also challenges the reduced identities of the Mundas and provides an alternative measure through the culture of archery which resists against the reductionist perspectives, offering a more comprehensive understanding of knowledge. Thus, postcolonial survival not only designates survival through colonial experiences or survival through similar kinds of domination, rather it expands its field from the very root of culture to the stem of development and civilization.

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