



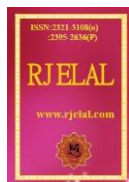
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## CORRELATION BETWEEN HUMAN LIFE AND NATURE IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S WORKS: A STUDY

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### Abstract

With the faster strides of commercialization and consumerism, environment has remained least cared today and thereby most neglected area. The materialistic tendency of mankind has led to the destruction of environment threatening the very sustenance of life-forms. Human rapacity for worldly pleasures has led mankind towards the portal of virtual annihilation through deforestation. Mahasweta Devi has pointed out to the innocent life style of the tribals in her texts and has taught us to be the friend, philosopher and guide to the healthy protection of environment. Considered uncivilized by the so-called modern urban, these tribals are ready to sacrifice even their life for the safety of the ecosystem. One gets a clear message that humans are expected to be participants and not conquerors in the ecosystem. The objective of this research is to focus on the correlation between human community and nature for the abiding sustenance of life in general.

Keywords: sustenance, ecosystem, commercialization, tribals, deforestation

The creator made nature to support and sustain the creatures like man, birds, beasts without discrimination. Human with a special gift of wisdom began the misuse of it and for instant pleasures he began to destroy the environment without caring a fig for his own survival. Authors like Wordsworth, Ruskin and Morris in England and Thoreau and Emerson in America advocated in favour of nature in their writings. Great Indian humanitarians like R. N. Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi also voiced for a life close to the lulling lap of Nature. To their own awe and agony, human beings have moved far away from the bounty of nature which forms an inevitable part of the environment.

The ceaseless degradation of our environment has greatly influenced both the human and the non-human entities on this planet. Unplanned destruction of nature and unrestrained resource exploitation in the name of development

and urbanization have proved to be fatal to all life-forms. Because of the rapid deforestation the humankind has been repeatedly facing some natural calamities like frequent earthquakes, tsunamis, floods and volcanic outbursts. The modern life is now confined to a small apartment where human beings are caged like zoo-animals. The humans' constant battle against the environment has reached such a height that no rational human being is assured of a life full of oxygen and other holy blisses of mother-earth. The varieties of species created by heaven as an integral part of environment are under serious threats of becoming a part of history like dinosaur. The relation between human and environment has declined in the speed of a rocket in the age of urbanization and gross materialism where instant comfort seems to be most covetous thing in life. In our country, after the Second World War the intelligentsia showed a path

of development that proved to be fatal. In order to set up steel mills, big dams, nuclear projects and such like so many people have been forced to be landless, dense and large forests have been eliminated and rivers have been poisoned. Human beings are in the habit of being conquerors of nature, they refuse to be regarded participants in ecosystem like other life-forms.

The tribals in India have their habitation generally in remote and isolated places of the forests and the hilly terrains. Unlike so called civilized communities, they live in a compact community and have their distinct culture, customs, beliefs and languages which are distinguished in themselves. They are happiest as long as their life is not disturbed by the powerful external forces. They live a life simple, pure, and pristine.

In most parts of the country tribals today are passing through an unprecedented crisis of tribal-identity. As the projects of economic development are reaching in the far-flung regions of the tribal belts, there is an influx of more sophisticated non-tribals who have no love for tribal culture, language and their natural bonding with mother-nature. They are being unlawfully and forcibly displaced from their native land.

There can be little doubt that, in recent years, ecology has become one of the central discourses in the literary world. Ecocriticism is the study of literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view. It investigates the interdependences between humans and the natural world in literature. It deals with how environmental issues, cultural issues concerning the environment and attitudes towards nature are presented and analysed in literature. One of the main goals in ecocriticism is to study how individuals in society behave and react in relation to nature and ecological aspects. This form of criticism has gained a lot of attention in recent years due to higher social emphasis on environmental destruction and increased technology. Mahasweta Devi's perspective on ecology forms an integral part of her entire creative output because she finds a close connection among human, environment and non-human. She believes that the survival of humankind

is possible only when human beings respect nature. Her writings unveil her concerns about the alarming imbalance between human and nature. She finds that consistent destruction of nature has severely affected the life of the tribals who depend on forests for livelihood. During an interview Mahasweta says to Spivak ; 'As long as the forests were there, the hunting tribes did not suffer so much, because the forests used to provide them with food, shelter, timber, hunting. But now that the forests are gone, the tribals are in dire distress. Some, like the Santals, or the Oraons from the Deccan have advanced because they took to agriculture long ago. But the smaller tribes, like the Lodhas and Kherias, you have seen, small hunting tribes all over India, suffer deeply'(ii-iii). The tribals believe that just as human needs land, the land also needs human to take care of it when it is sick. They are born with natural understanding of ecological perspectives unlike so called civilized people. Devi is not against development; she voices for sustainable development.

Mahasweta's such works – *Aranyer Adhikar*, *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, *Operation? Bashai\_Tudu*, *The Book of the Hunter*, and many other works show not only the interdependences of human, environment, and non-human, but also teach us what we should do and should not. Instead of studying literature from anthropocentric and androcentric viewpoint, attempts will be made to study literature from biocentric point of view. In her fictions the interconnectedness between human and physical environment is interwoven very deftly. Birsa Munda's deep love for nature and his sense of belongingness to it deserves detailed study from ecological perspectives. He feels that mother-nature weeps being tortured in the hands of *dikus*. He hears that Nature says to him to save her from the sufferings caused by the *dikus*. Birsha is born in Karmi's womb, but it is Nature that nourishes him since his childhood. Birsha tells her mother, nature, that he will bring back the lost chastity to her as all mundas are the sons of the soil. Nature provides them with the materials for making sheds of their huts. Nature also offers them flowers, fruits, and meats of animals of the forest. In *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* Chotti's lament that the tigers had been shot by the British from jeep and so, he would not be able to show the grandchildren tigers is a brilliant

piece of ecological concern. Another concern regarding ecology is also distinctly prominent when he says that the tribals do not kill female animals and female birds because they contribute to grow the families larger. Almost same note of concern we find in *Operation? Bashai\_Tudu* when Bashai tells Kali that he had seen all the woods when he was a child, but the government contractors cut down trees for timber. Forest Department plants trees, but does not care to protect them. Because of the destruction of nature the tribals do not get animal protein adequately. *The Book of the Hunter* is about the relentless felling, burning and clearing the villages, and townships have erased forests from the earth. To Thatha in *Oxygen Manifesto: A Battle for the Environment* Manipur had changed greatly within few years :

‘The trees, forests and streams were shrinking fast. There was barely any vegetation to hold the soil on the hilly slopes. Fresh water became a scarcity. Other than crows, all other birds had flown off to greener habitations. Fields produced less and demanded more labour and inputs. The birds no longer sang. Instead of tall mighty trees one could only see lantana and other weeds growing in the valley. There was no sound of cicadas in the evenings. Flowers stopped blooming and monkeys and rabbits stood driven out. The sun came down hard and rain clouds retracted away and afar’ (12).

It is about a powerful plea for human beings not to destroy it for our own sake. In other works also nature is an integral part of human existence. It is obvious that a tribal’s attitude to forest differs greatly from the other people. Such examples are amply scattered in her writings. In a conversation Devi says to Spivak that ‘The British had isolated the small tribes. They were afraid to touch the majority tribes for fear of widespread havoc. They branded the small tribes as criminal tribes because they lived in the forest and did not take to cultivation. These tribes had no concept on money. They would come out of the forest, go to the village market, place honey, leaves, roots, flowers, and silently take away whatever they needed : rice, oil, spices. So they were thieves! With the felling of the forests, these tribes were exposed to the current savagery’(v-vi). According to Ramachandra Guha ‘Industrialization had an organic connection with imperial expansion, as white colonists took possession of large parts of the globe, re-orienting local economies towards the

demands of the metropolis. British ships were built of Burma teak, their sailors wearing clothes of cotton grown in India, drinking Kenyan coffee sweetened with sugar planted in the Caribbean. ....the British were, through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, unquestionably the world leaders in deforestation’(6).

The late 20<sup>th</sup> century has woken up to a new threat - ecological disasters all over the world. The most important environmental problems that humankind faces as a whole are – nuclear war, population explosion, proliferation of exploitative technologies, climate change, pollution, global warming, scarcity of drinking water, insufficient rainfall, and extinction of non-human species among others. In such a context, learning from the tribals’ literacy of nature and application of it to the study of literature in order to restore an environment full of oxygen is extremely urgent.

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