



An eco-feminist reading of Mahasweta Devi

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Abstract

Some people's dissent is a way of life. When Mahasweta Devi isn't fighting for her beliefs as a political activist or academic or journalist or creative writer, she's outspoken. In India, she is widely regarded as one of the country's leading literary figures. As a prolific novelist, playwright, short story collection, and children's book author, she has penned over a hundred volumes. In addition to Bengali, she has also translated her writings into English and other languages. She was inspired to become a writer and an activist because of the harsh realities and systemic injustice she witnessed. Bengali People's Theatre movement of Bengal, after Naxalite uprising of 1950s and her first-hand contact with Bihar, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh tribals affected her life and profession.

Key words: Eco-Feminist, India, 'Breast-Giver etc.

Introduction

Mamta Devi (1926-2016) was an accomplished Bengali novelist. When it came to fighting, Devi's weapons of choice were fictitious and social compositions. Since she's done so many things, she's outstanding. During the period from 1981 to 1992 she published a number of novels, short stories, fictitious books, plays, and revolutionary literature. Besides her revolutionary literary style, she is well-known for her enormous contributions to the communities of displaced labourers in north-east India, where she worked for several months. For this reason, she became a socioeconomic observer for the downtrodden because of her close connections to these groups. She's always believed that it's the everyday people that get to shape the course of history. For her, the plights of others were a never-ending source of artistic pleasure. When Mahashweta Devi, a Bengali poet and civil rights activist who died tragically in Kolkata, first took up the letter for the purpose of writing, she was fighting racial inequity. Instead of being a spectator, she was an honourable representative of the country's mistreated and ignored citizens. Her savage writings allowed millions of indigenous Indians to voice their grief. Bengali author and well-known social campaigner Rabindranath Tagore dedicated a whole book to the plight of the world's poorest and most disenfranchised citizens.



Additionally, she slams civilization for the humiliation it inflicts on some of its poorest members.

eco-feminist

On the basis that patriarchal practises hurt women, children, and other living things, ecofeminism is a theory. The male-dominated culture assaults and abuses both women and environment. Both women and environment are being exploited as a result of their narcissism and biases. Ecofeminists often scrutinise the power of males over women and environment. 'Under the patriarchal system, the exploitation of nature and the subjugation of women go hand in hand. Business and modern technologies are contaminating and degrading nature. In the previous three decades, our country has seen a great number of demonstrations against gender inequality and environmental degradation. In the battle for life and sustenance, more and more women are taking centre stage. It is clear that caste, class, and gender concerns play a significant role in many of the current problems in the nation. Equal rights for women, as well as wise use of natural resources, are two issues that many women care about. Some of them even write on both women's problems and environmental issues in one piece. The famous Bengali author Mahasweta Devi is one among them.

Breast-Giver, the short storey by a Jnanpith Award winner, tells the narrative of Jashoda, a middle-class lady. When her husband, Kanganalicharan, was tragically killed in an accident, he left a large family behind. Jashoda, the heroine, is forced to work as a chef in a lower-class Haldar home, despite her lofty brahminical origins, because of her acute poverty. A male member of this family, however, sexually abuses her and labels her as the family's thief. However, she refuses to speak out for the sake of her impoverished family, which includes a disabled husband and small children. Male members of the Haldar family's avarice and worldly pleasures characterise her employment as a wet nurse. Thus, Jashoda becomes a professional mother who spawns annually in order to maintain her breasts full with milk. As a result, she breastfeeds 20 of her own children and 30 of her employer's children. Her health begins to suffer as a result of the constant suckling, and she is diagnosed with breast cancer. As far as we know, the mother of fifty children died alone and in agony. Women and Mother Earth are depicted in Mahasweta Devi's narrative via her use of imagery.



The protagonist, Jashoda, is introduced as a silent observer whose only connection to the action is as the wife of Kanganicharan. She's just an average mom who doesn't look beyond her little circle of friends and relatives. Her history is likewise a mystery. As a geologist working in the dark with just an oil lamp for light, she lives to please her spouse. Jashoda's way of life may be summed up in this description of the act of falling in love. Her spouse treats her as little more than a sexual object. When contrasted to Earth, Jashoda's body represents the agony and lack of compassion that comes with drilling. Even though both women and the natural world support life and provide resources, they are undervalued and underappreciated in our culture. Both Jashoda and Mother Earth are victims of men's constant desire and greed, and they are often beaten and tortured.

Not only does Jashoda's family suffer from great poverty, but so does the prevalent social structure that implicitly urges women of low background to submit to their master's family members' whims and desires. Using the rape episode, the author makes the point that patriarchal ideas about women as just sexual objects persist even in the minds of children. Rape is nothing more than a man asserting his control and power over a woman. Here, rape is used as a metaphor for actions that disrupt the natural equilibrium, such as mining, destroying hills and mountains, sand mining, and more. Housemaids are generally seen as tools of subservience in a male-dominated culture, and they are constantly exposed to sexual and other forms of invasion by male members of the households for whom they serve. It is through the storey of Jashoda that we see the situation of housemaids in our nation as a whole.

An eco-feminist reading of Mahasweta Devi's 'Breast – Giver'

Various schools of thought have sprung from feminist views in the past. Ecofeminism is a prominent one of these movements. Recent decades, particularly the 1970s, have seen a rise in environmental and feminist activism throughout the globe. In the wake of environmental degradation becoming a major worldwide issue, feminist researchers have begun to draw parallels between environmental degradation and the gender-based violence and exploitation that women are subjected to. Ecofeminism has arisen as a result of the integration of these two intellectual processes during the last three decades. Françoise d'Eaubonne, a French feminist, invented the term ecofeminism in 1974. It quickly developed into a movement that applied feminist concepts and ideas to environmental challenges and concerns.. Feminism and the environment are sometimes referred to as "ecofeminists" or "feminist environmentalists."



Ecofeminism, according to NeeruTandon, is an ideology based on the belief that patriarchal practises hurt women, children, and other organisms. The male-dominated culture assaults and abuses both women and environment. Both women and environment are being exploited as a result of their narcissism and biases. Ecofeminists often scrutinise the power of males over women and environment. NeeruTandon argues that under the patriarchal system, women and environment are exploited simultaneously. Business and modern technologies are contaminating and degrading nature.

Conclusion

The Mundas' eco-friendly cultural traditions have made a significant contribution to environmental preservation. In this novel, nature isn't just a backdrop; it's as much a character as the tribals themselves. The indigenous people's ecological understanding is hailed as a weapon in the fight against global warming. To counter the dominance of Western industrial growth, Mahasweta's work emphasises the virtues of tribal culture as an alternative paradigm for ensuring the long-term health of our planet's biosphere. Aranyer Adhikar, Devi's book, rails against the supposed cultured people's disregard for nature. Environmentally conscious long-term behaviours of the marginalised people are more environmentally helpful than the caste Hindus and the British conquerors' duplicity. Their presence enhances the natural splendour of the forest by helping to keep nonhuman nature evergreen.

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