

The Forest Writes/Rights About Ethnico-Ecological Lives

ARUNABHA BOSE

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Vivekananda College, University of Delhi, New Delhi (India)

ABSTRACT

One of the ways in which Mahasweta Devi authors an ethnocentric ecological discourse is by devising an ecofeminist model rooted in maternal restructuring of power relations. She uses a postcolonial version of ecofeminism to counteract the phallogocentric narrative of capitalist development and to simultaneously recuperate the aboriginal woman. Mahasweta's subaltern Eco-history of the forest (Aranya) becomes a recuperative Eco-feminist history and a revisionist Eco-Ethnohistory. She forces the bourgeois reader to rethink the forest as a unique Bio-Habitat with its own relations of social and economic exchange, its own cult of diffused maternal principle existing in the interpersonal relation between women and nature and its own natural laws serving the predesignated function of safeguarding the "Mother" Forest from phallogocentrically constrained models of development. The history of the forest and its denizen predates contemporary epistemological disciplines like anthropology and palaeontology. Mahasweta's aranya in gestating insurgent Eco-masculinities/femininities goes beyond being a reified feminine cosmos for the Santhals, Mundas and Doms. It prefigures a fluid, permeable and genderless model of Enfleshed Bioregional Ecocentric Subjectivity. The forest becomes the locus of reclaiming the lost ecocentric maternity and "natural history"; of reinstating one's attachment to the abandoned maternal principal of nature. Vandana Shiva in Ecofeminism identifies the Third World woman as a custodian of indigenous knowledge and biodiversity, whose non-dominant culturally embedded practice of bio-conservation, differs from the androcentric, masculinist and Eurocentric dominant model. In Armenian Champa Tree, Little Ones, Salt, The Book of Hunter, Kunti and Nishadin and Water; Mahasweta shows the intimate correlation between transplantation of native aboriginals, forced migration, cultural disappearance of Third World indigenous life forms and globalised development.

Key Words : Epistemological, maternity, gender, forest, development

INTRODUCTION

One of the ways in which Mahasweta Devi authors an ethnocentric ecological discourse is by devising an ecofeminist model rooted in maternal restructuring of power relations. Androcentric Postcolonial history in its pursuit of "national events" has expelled women's histories and indigenous histories; the unwritten and unhistoricised accounts of forests go hand in hand with the historical absence of the aboriginal, be it Birsa Munda of Chhotanagpur or Titu Mir of Narkelberia. Mahasweta Devi shows female tribal subjectivities as enfleshed, corporeal and ecologically embodied. She

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uses a postcolonial version of ecofeminism to counteract the phallogocentric narrative of capitalist development and to simultaneously recuperate the aboriginal woman such as Chandidasi Gangaputri in *Bayen* (2002), Nishadin in *Kunti and Nishadin* (2014) and Tejotia in *The Book of Hunter* (2009) who are cast off into the forest as terrible and terrifying emasculating spectres. Thus, Mahasweta's subaltern *Eco-history* of the forest (*Aranya*) becomes a recuperative *Eco-feminist history* and a revisionist *Eco-Ethnohistory*. She forces the bourgeois reader to rethink the forest as a unique Bio-Habitat with its own relations of social and economic exchange, its own cult of diffused maternal principle existing in the interpersonal relation between woman and nature and its own natural laws serving the predesignated function of safeguarding the "Mother" Forest from phallogocentrically constrained models of development. Her project is to recreate the lost past of the Sabars, Santhals, Oraons, Hos, Mundas, Doms and Dusads by firstly excavating the lives of tribals whose vocational and religious labour are embedded in practices of nature worship; secondly by delegitimising colonial archives with its traditional presumptions about the primitiveness of ecocentric lives and finally by reordering the epistemological discipline of social anthropology by examining the complex genealogical descent of aboriginals from the forest dwelling primal goddess; known as Devi Aranyaka in *Kunti and Nishadin* (2014) and Abhayachandi in *The Book of Hunter* (2009). Thus, the *Aranya* becomes a Bio (Social) Sphere that stands in opposition to the tribal terrain under decolonised development in Palamau, Singbhum, Tohri, Kuruda, Hesadi and Lohri. The history of the forest and its denizen predates contemporary epistemological disciplines like anthropology and palaeontology; in *Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha* (2015), the rebirth of an extinct paleontological specimen reverses the temporal sequentiality of social history to suggest a new evolutionary paradigm in which the extinct reptile houses the adivasi's ancestral soul. Having witnessed the advent of man as well as geological extinction, the pterodactyl becomes an embodied prefiguration of biological extinction and of veiled future anteriority as it warns about the encroaching threat of developmental capitalism. The *Aranya* is *alive* but not in a way reducible to Romantic Vitalism; it is strategically and ideologically the locus of non-mainstream insurrection be it the Charsa Forest offering refuge to the Santhal Naxalite fugitive BashaiTudu in 1970, the Narkelberia forest offering strategic advantage to the anticolonial Wahabi insurgency of Titu Mir in 1829-1830 or the Chhotanagpur forest offering ideological lifeblood to Birsa Munda's *Ulgulan* in 1899-1900. Thus, Mahasweta's *saranya* in gestating insurgent Eco-masculinities goes beyond being a reified feminine cosmos for the Santhals, Mundas and Doms and instead prefigures a fluid, permeable and genderless model of Enfleshed Bioregional Ecocentric Subjectivities.

The Kshatriya Queen's encounter with her untouchable aboriginal "other", the Nishadin in *Kunti and Nishadin* (2014) constitutes an ethnological encounter between a phallogocentric, masculinist feudal structure and a gynocentric, ecological kinship structure. The Nishadin calls the entrenched feudal structures of Kshatriyas rooted in fratricidal violence, *Rajavritta*. In opposition to it, the *Lokavritta*, the Law of Forest (*Vanavritta*) or Eros is rooted in Gyn/Ecological principle of nurturance and sheltering. It does not impose social inscriptions upon the 'natural/erotic' body of its children. The Nishads-Kirats-Sabars-Nagavanshis being children of Devi Aranyaka offer a critique of the dominant feudal culture of Hyper-masculinity and patrilineality staged in the Kurukshetra war. The climactic encounter between Kunti and the Nishadin, both metaphorically and literally constitutes a confrontation between an Androcentric-Inorganic and an Ethnico-Ecofeminine Organic view of female subjectivity. Kunti is unable to reconcile her two bodies – the erotic/unlawful/pleasurable/pleasure-seeking body with the de-eroticised/lawful/pleasure-giving/marital body as patriarchy has denaturalised female sexuality. It is the Nishadin who deconstructs patriarchal power relations of

the *polis*; the dominant *Rajavritta* regularises and contains sexuality and creates a stratified *polis*. In opposition to it, *Lokavritta*, the Law of Forest or Eros does not impose social inscriptions upon the 'natural/erotic' female body so that "if a young Nishad girl makes love to a boy of her choice and gets pregnant, we (Tribals) celebrate it with a wedding" (Devi, 2014: 40-41). *Lokavritta* becomes an ideological opposition to the militant, phallogocentric, mainstream ruling class ideology of *Rajavritta* as well as an ecocentric, communitarian, heterogeneous alternative to the Dominant Public Sphere. *Lokavritta* becomes an alternative to the pure position of phallogocentrism; it is the Law of life, the maternal principle which is gestated/generated by the Goddess Aranyaka. It restores libidinal autonomy to sexualised land and female body. *Lokavritta* offers a positivistic representation of the forest ecosystem as not simply a pastoral retreat but also social alternative to an androcentric and acquisitive state regime. *Lokavritta* is also an ideological position of subalternity as it annexes ecological laws within social regulations; it demonstrates the political underpinnings encoding prevailing definitions of illegitimacy and unnaturalness since "Nature abhors waste. We (Forest Tribals) honour life. When a man and woman come together they create a new life" (Devi, 2014: 41). Thus, extending bio-conservation to social inclusion and rehabilitation; Nishad women being conservationists of life and land respond to the pulsations and flow of desire in nature. *Aranya* is ruled by widowed tribal women whose ecological subjectivities recognise the mute organicism of non-human life forms. Kunti's exile to the forest away from the domain of (Masculine) aggression and deforestation, signals her severance from the Law of the Father and entry into the domain of the Maternal Unconscious and Ecofemininity as she enters the womb like darkness of the *Aranya*. Kristeva in *Revolutions in Poetic Language* (1984) speaks of the semiotic as a bodily eruption or excess that ruptures the stable ego boundaries of the symbolic during states of religious ecstasy or *jouissance*. The semiotic in other words can be seen as a revocation of the Gyn/Ecological that has been repressed by the normalising operations of the phallic law. The forest thus becomes the locus of reclaiming that lost ecocentric maternity and "natural history"; of reinstating one's attachment to the abandoned maternal principal of nature which the paternal symbolic law of *polis* had declared unlawful. Ram Dayal Munda in *Adi-dharam* (2014) affirms that "The Forest has great importance as the first level of civilisation. If forest is mental peace for the Adivasi, agriculture is his life breath. The forest could only be complimentary for a continuous living" (Munda, 2014: 8-9).

Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies in *Ecofeminism* (2014) identify the Third World Woman as a custodian of indigenous knowledge and biodiversity, who's non-dominant, alternative and culturally embedded practice of bio-conservation differ from the androcentric, masculinist, monocultural, Eurocentric and dominant model. The indigenous woman and the indigenous flora/fauna are both objects of genocidal violence, identity dissolution and cultural extinction. Ecological factors like famine in *Salt* (2009) and reckless mining activities in the ferrous rich sites of Lohri in *Little Ones* (2009) show the intimate correlation between transplantation of native aboriginals, forced migration, cultural disappearance of Third World indigenous life forms and globalised development. In other words, the impoverished and disappearing cultural history of the tribes is situated (*in situ*) in the forest and in *mythos*. The mythopoeic fables of tribal ecosystems can be found in the aboriginal practices of self-representation such as the *Panchali* (devotional lyric in folk meter) dedicated to *Jaguli Manasha*, the protecting deity against snakes or the lyric forms eulogising *Baghut Thakur*, the protecting deity against tigers. When rain finally lashes the parched sandbanks of Charsa in *Water* (2011), the untouchable water-diviner, Mughai and his son, Dhura perform a benedictory incantation in adoration of *Bhadu* and *Manasa*, resplendent with the *Shankhini*, *Chitibora* and *Chandrabora*, the rain-time goddesses. These extra textual fields of ecological/cultural inscription

function as what Derrida calls “Archi-Writing” in *Of Grammatology* (1997); they serve an anterior ethno-texts to the scientific discourses authored by Ecologists. The pterodactyl in *Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha* (2015) is not a teratological aberration *sui generis* but a prehistoric life form corporeally embodying the ideological/ecological interspersed of human exploitation, disappearance of forest, fallowness of land and barrenness of aboriginal cultural habits/habitats. The pterodactyl like the Indian aboriginal cannot survive in the decolonised terrain under development; it carries the knowledge of human extinction which eludes the technologies of empiricism and dissemination. Thus, the pterodactyl becomes the pre-historic *gestalt* turned heuristic archetype turned aboriginal unconscious whose return, ruptures and distorts the inexorable economic logic of decolonised development. Cataclysmic Ecological events of pre-anthropocene epoch seamlessly merge with the global pandemic of transnational development in the Neo-Bakhtinian Chronotope to announce the geological extinction of the modern man due to precipitant ecological damage.

Just as Mary Daly talks of a Gynocentric Ecological model in *Gyn/Ecology* (1990), Mahasweta reveals an Ethnocentric Ecological model where the Nishads, Kirats, Sabars and Nagavanshis exist as ecological communities whose ethnic traditions and pre-agrarian/pre-modern consciousness is shaped by the cultural/ideological osmosis between the bio-sphere and forest eco-sphere. Kalya’s father Megha Sabar was robbed of the title of feudal chieftain and banished from the community in *The Book of Hunter* (2009) as he violated the tribe’s sacred law by hunting a female deer during the mating season. The pre-agrarian community of Hunter-gatherers rather than place man at the apex of an anthropocentric pyramid recognises his embeddedness in a dynamic ecological web as they possess an inter subjective consciousness that encircles the anthropocene and the pre-anthropocene. Donald Worster in *The Ends of the Earth* (1988) and Raymond F. Dasmann in *Towards a Biosphere Consciousness* differentiate aboriginal eco-subjectivity from bourgeois techno-subjectivity.

“The ecological relationship of hunter-gatherers, nomadic-pastoralists and others who retained a self-sufficient existence cut off from dominant cultures, survived on resources of single ecosystem or contiguous and related ecosystems. Their sustainable way of life did not bring about changes in the natural biota deleterious, I call them *Ecosystem people*. Ecosystem people (tribal societies subsisting on hunting, gathering and minimal agriculture) believe that the balance between human populations and the resources of their environment is not maintained through conscious decisions or overall awareness on the part of the individual”. (Worster 1988: 277)

Thus the Sabars and Nishads exhibit an aboriginal variant of the Jungian Collective Unconsciousness or primal/primeval archetype in which the tribe’s consciousness is de-centralised and dispersed amongst the animate ecosphere and not localised within the human cosmosphere. The roots of interpersonal and collective subjectivity lie in the maternal restructuring of tribal relations; women be it Tejotia in *The Book of Hunter* (2009) or the widowed and nameless Nishadin in *Kunti and Nishadin* (2014) are the givers of law and leaders of bioconservation. Irigaray in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993) identifies such a woman-centred ethical model which is based on egalitarianism, nurturance, gestation, inclusion and self-effacement as opposing an androcentric model based on stratification, narcissism, exclusion, violence, sadism and self-absorption.

Similarly Sara Ruddick in *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (1995) identifies a correlation between maternity, preservation, conservation and peace. Ruddick recognises a matricentric epistemological practice or Maternal Thinking as a Feminist Standpoint governed by the ethical imperative to preserve/conservate the vulnerable “other”. According to her, a “*Holding*

Attitude is governed by the priority of keeping over acquiring, of conserving the fragile”; this maternal model of Eco-conservation is a Feminine alternative to scientific manipulation and technocratic capitalism. Similarly, Paula Gunn Allen in *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1992) reimagines a non-hierarchical, non-progressive and non-mechanistic approach to nature. She contests the teleological ordering of history and modernity, drawing a connection between colonisation and chronologisation

“The American Indian view time as cyclical and space as spherical whereas the non-Indian tends to view space as linear and time as sequential. Indian time rests on a perception of individuals as part of an entire gestalt in which fittingness is not a matter of how gear teeth mesh with each other but how the person meshes with the revolving of seasons, of land and the mythic reality. Women’s traditional occupations, their arts and crafts, their literature and philosophies are more often accretive than linear, more achronological than chronological and more dependent on harmonious relationships of all elements within a field of perception than Western culture in general” (Allen 1992: 211-212).

Allen calls such ecosystems *Ritual Gynocracies*. Tribal ecosystems in Mahasweta’s fiction similarly perceive the vegetal and human worlds as syncretic. Thus, forest ecospheres following a gynocentric genealogical model establish relations of non-dominance, reciprocity and co-existence with the natural world. But unlike in Western anthropology where the maternal principle is seen as an animistic totem or fetishistic confirmation of Paganism and Dionysian anarchy predating the emergence of the Masculine *body politic*; the maternal in Indian aboriginal imagination is a pervasive ethnographic, ideological and ecological principle. The maternal is an organic *Eco-Political* and *Eco-nomical* figuration as it engenders tribal laws pertaining to paddy plantation, spring rites, hunting, seasonal migration, marital arrangements, kinship structures and the spatial demographics of tribal habitation. A social arrangement which privileges gynocentricity and maternal thinking invariably becomes egalitarian, polymorphous and diversified. Mahasweta’s Ecofeminist model recognises the phallogocentric bias of empiricist epistemological systems, modern technological discourses, mainstream nationalist assertionism and colonial/postcolonial models of capitalist modernity as they not only perpetuate a retrograde gender politics but also a regressive dimorphism between Man/Woman, Culture/Nature, Modern/Primitive and Public/Private. Such a view refuses to see Man as an organic/ecological species. Such a negative assignation of identity parameters ironically colonises Woman, Nature and the Primitive in a grand appropriative gesture. Evelyn Fox Keller in *Reflections on Gender and Science* (1995) and Elizabeth Dodson Gray in *Green Paradise Lost* (1981) attempt to read Man’s domination of nature as the psychological desire to assert social/biological independence by severing connections with the powerfully devouring Mother and Mother Nature; invariably reducing them both to sexually pliant forms of dormancy. Phallic technology is the retributive instrumentality of *mastering* Nature. I would like to call such tribal ecosystems in Mahasweta’s fiction as *Forest Gynocracies*. But Third World Women writers caution against the transcultural and transgeographical homogenisation of Nature-Feminine affinity since women’s *naturalisation* and *deculturation* are not biologically determined but dependent upon religious, economic, juridical and political factors such biological division of labour.

One such Gynocracy is described in *Byadkhanda* or *The Book of Hunter* (2009), where a female Shaman, Tejotia acts as the oracle of the forest Goddess, Abhayachandi. Oral history when transcribed has the desire to dismember and disseminate history as a self-contained narrative and thus impose a peremptory closure on history but the Shabar’s chief priestess, Tejotia’s indigenous narrative defies historical completion. The “knowledge” which tribal chieftain, Danko Shabar passes

onto his daughter Tejotia and is the source of her cultural power is precisely historical knowledge of the forest; be it the hunt for the blue *gandharaj* flower, the *Dikbandhan* ceremony to protect against natural calamities and snakebites or the injunction against hunting deer during mating season. But uniquely we do not find any bureaucratisation and systematisation of knowledge in the Foucauldian sense. What we do find in this unique subaltern oral history is how genealogical roots are traced back to mythological fable of King Kalketu and Queen Meghbatī; aboriginal versions of Shiva and Shakti reincarnated as forest dwellers. The “subjects” of metropolitan history have a homogeneous conception of identity, are unified and not multiple unlike the Shabars who as children of Abhaya have a totalising self-identification with the forest and not nation-state and in true *Deleuzian* sense have a nomadic, deterritorialised *non-identity*. So, therefore such primitive societies inhabit the Jungian state of *collective unconscious*, which predates the historical arrival of autonomous individualism necessary for the formation of historical subjecthood. There is a polyphony of *female voices* be it Meghbatī’s, Tejotia’s or Phulli’s merging seamlessly with ancestral reverberations of the maternal forest. Tejotia’s wastrel son, Kalya is eventually killed during the ceremonial elephant hunt forcing the tribe to migrate as the “cities encroach”. Kalya, before his untimely death educates the Brahmin poet Mukunda about Shabar eco-ethics which regard every element of the forest as reverential when the Brahmin demands lion skin and deerskin for his puja rituals.

Aboriginal ethnicities create an alternative figuration of subaltern identity in which identity is seen as interminably mutable; it is not embodied within the morphological limits but disembodied, uncontained and emptied out in the organic ecosphere. In other words, Sabars, Nishads and Doms resubjectivise the inanimate forest as a pleomorphic semantic space invested with the cultural semantics of the tribe such as the elephant hunt and Bonodurga Puja. Tribal subjectivities like those of Mughai Dom in *Water* (2011) and Dulan Ganju in *Seeds* (2009) are dispersed along non-biological fields; rather they are territorialised and rooted in land. Land in tribal cultural semantics is not dead matter but nurturing, forbidding and mystical; Forest is undifferentiated culturally from the aboriginal’s selfhood. In true *Deleuzian* sense, the children of the forest *become minority* and exhibit a diffuse geopolitical *nomadism*; like Deleuze’s Rhizomatic model, land embodies a geological materialism of desire. Various imagined as a nurturing agrarian goddess, a gestating mother, a non-acquiescing mistress, a disloyal whore and a forbidding witch, land in Mahasweta’s fiction is invested with a libidinal economy of desire. Nature relents to submission during paddy season but threatens her children during famine, deluge and forest fires. Phallocentrism is rooted in a binary logic requiring devaluation of the Feminine and Maternal. This pathological denial and disavowal of the Feminine is anchored in the anthropocentrism of Masculine imagination which reductively generates an ideological complementarity between femininity, irrationality, emotionality, submission, non-productive/non-utilitarian labour, *mythos* and the natural. The anthropocentric worldview feeds the primal ego drive of phallic imagination based in recognition of the Masculine as rational, objective, dominant, monologic, utilitarian and cultural. Van Plumwood in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993) shows how dualistic thought sustains the “logic of colonisation”. For Plumwood, gynocentric cultures and gynocentric labour (re)production lead to an alignment between women’s childbearing “nature” and natural ecological cycle of growth and regeneration. Labouring bodies are morphologically finite and in Merleau-Ponty’s terms *immanent* like nature, whereas male bodies are *transcendent*, productive and infinite in their exploitative greed. For Plumwood, the cultural pursuit of transcendental dualism has reduced Nature/nature to being the “other” of culture, reason, mind, rationality, spirit, human and civilisation. Femininity and Naturalism, for Plumwood are interlocking structures which

mutually evolve and reinforce each other.

“The key exclusions and denials of dependency for dominant conceptions of reason in Western culture include not only the Feminine and nature, but all those human orders treated as nature and subject to denied dependency. *Dualism* can also be seen as an alienated form of differentiation, in which power construes and constructs difference in terms of an inferior and alien realm. The set of interrelated and mutually reinforcing dualisms which permeate Western cultures form a fault-line which runs through its entire conceptual system. The human/nature contrast can only be understood as part of interrelated set. Each of them has crucial connections to other elements and has common structures with other members of the set. They should be seen as forming a system, an *interlocking structure*” (Plumwood, 1993: 42-43)

The expansive ecocentric worldview of the Doms in *Water* (2011) reconfigures gender polarity; it engenders an indigenous ecological ethic which I would like to call *Green Indigeneity*, which differs from the Eurocentric, Liberal Progressionist model of Ecofeminism. The reason *Green Indigeneity* is a more flexible epistemological category is because it is embedded in a historical recognition of the graded inequality and sedimented imbalance of power in the colonial discourse, the elitist mainstream anticolonial discourse and the post-independent bourgeois discourse of decolonisation. Each of these hegemonic discourses has elevated the nationalist heterosexual male bourgeois while pejoratively aligning the native (*Adi-vasi*), woman (*Adi-Shakti*), Tribal religion (*Adi-Dharma*) and land (*Adi-Bhumi*) together as impure, primitive and primal. The woman is subjected to Masculine fantasies of sexual colonisation while the decolonised Third World Nature and Ethnographic Minorities are subjected to bourgeois fantasies of political hegemonisation. Mahasweta's short stories like *Douloti the Bountiful* (2015) and *The Hunt* (2015) frequently show tribal ecosystems and Forests as sexually cartographed terrains murderously acted upon by the Timber and Sal felling lobbies of rural contractors. This primal land or *Adi-Bhumi* which resists decolonised development (and inherited colonial economic structures) is for Mahasweta, the Feminine “other” of the Masculine nation-state (*Bharatvarsha*). These *Green Habitats* resist the ideological territorialisation of developmental modernity or what Vandana Shiva calls *The Myth of Catching-up Development*. The eco/gyno centred communities of Doms construct an alternative mythopoeic fable of origin, in which they trace genealogical descent to a female river Goddess, Bhagirathi. The originary narrative of the Doms' ancestral labour reads like a quasi-mythological tale of alternative origin; unlike the *Bharatvasi* they claim to derive their existence from *Nether-Ganga* or *Patal Ganga*. The river Ganga washes away ritualised pollution, sins and provides salvation. In an ironic reappropriation of this myth, the Doms although themselves impure and polluted purify the society by cremating dead bodies which would otherwise rot and contaminate. The Doms thus call themselves *Gangaputras* and *Gangaputris* in a unique genealogical appropriation of the “ecological” matronymic as opposed to the “social” patronymic. The ancestral profession of Maghai Dom is incompatible with the archetypal image of maleness in the postcolonial Lacanian Symbolic. The Nether-Ganga which percolates deep within ground signifies the Freudian Id, the primal drive and the pre-oedipal maternal Imaginary; the indented female body like the Nether-Ganga has porous ego boundaries and overflows during menstruation, pregnancy and lactation. Instead of becoming an agrarian labour or *khetmajdoor*, which requires the furrowing of female land with a phallic plough, Maghai chooses to sing, placate and court the elusive female river prioritising a feminised personal morality over economical exigencies. As a man who sleeps on the sandbanks of Charsa, whispers into the bowels of earth and orgasmically serenades Charsa when she heaves

during monsoon as a voluptuous goddess, Maghai performs non-utilitarian, non-industrial, non-mechanistic and non-Masculine labour. Thus, Maghai is effectively *Eco-feminised* as he divines water springs and beseeches Nether-Ganga; this self-manufacturing of a hybridised and contaminated subaltern identity is not the fashionable non-conformist position of the Western Ecological activist but an ethical reassertion of aggressive ethnicity. I would like to call this a *Subaltern Eco-Masculinity* in which the aboriginal male culturally castrated by Neo-colonialism and Developmental capitalism embraces Feminine virtues of cultural diversification, participatory and non-competitive ethos, ecocentrism acknowledging interconnectedness of life forms, non-anthropocentric spiritualism, non-dualistic holistic ethics of regeneration and reciprocity. The Water-Diviner and the female river constitute what Derrida in *Of Grammatology* (1997) calls *copula* in which neither have mastery, neither is a presence or absence, position or negation, consummation or virginity but both are copulated/enfolded into one another. They form a Neo-Deleuzian *Desiring Production* in which subaltern eroticism is rooted in the ecological materialism of the female river as she gasps, rises and finally “comes” metonymically staging an orgasmic emergence. Animistic Tribal ecosystems before being invaded by the Brahmin and Kshatriya clans show an organic balance between the Masculine archetype (Jungian Animus) and the Feminine archetype (Jungian Anima). The Doms by using non-intrusive indigenous methods build a temporary Dam that doesn’t attempt to contain Female River’s vigour or impose an infantile sense of mastery over it as Neo-colonial Ecological models of Dam construction usually do.

Carolyn Merchant in *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and Scientific Revolution* (1990) draws thematic interconnections between gendering of Nature as a nurturing mother and ecological change. For Merchant:

“Nature was contrasted with art. It was personified as a female being, e.g., Dame Nature; she was alternately a prudent lady, an empress, a mother etc. The image of earth as a living organism has served as a cultural constraint restricting the action of human beings; one does not readily slay a mother or mutilate her body. Not only did the image of Nature as nurturing mother contain ethical implications but the organic framework itself, as a conceptual system, carries with it an associated value-system” (Merchant 1990: 2-3).

Such an organic, almost protestant prelapsarian worldview is rooted in a woman-centred experience. While reproduction, fertility and organicism lead to a false idolatry of maternal Nature, subsequent Western cultures have seen Nature as a disorderly woman or witch who brings famine, plagues and flood according to Merchant. Merchant identifies the transition from nurturing mother to disorderly woman as necessary for the ideological justification of commercialisation, mechanical progress and empiricism. Mechanism paved the way for rational science to discipline aberrant Nature into submission; invariably leading to the demise of organicism, eroticism and femininity. Merchant’s argument is not entirely borne out by Mahasweta’s fiction. Tribal eco-subjectivities perform a historical retrieval and figurative unveiling of the maternal and organic as an antidote to postcolonial pipe dream of ecological mastery. Women in tribal ecosystems are not abstract figures, symbols or totems but Law-givers, preservers of political ecology, conservationists, healers and Native Historians. In fact, Maghai’s relationship with river Charsa enacts all the sexual antagonism in a man-woman relationship. Greta Gaard in *Ecofeminism and Native American Culture: Pushing the Limits of Cultural Feminism* (1993) has similarly counteracted this myth of women as de-historicised, metaphorical abstractions racialised and colonised for phallic mastery.

In (*Shishu*) *Little Ones* (2009), Mahasweta invokes another Netherworld Tribal God, Jwalamukhi and shows a complex social-ecological-physiological relationship between diseased

ecosystem and shrivelled humanity. In a grotesque parody of the fable, Mahasweta shows a pathologised ecosystem ruined by governmental apathy and mining lobby as well as the physiological abnormalities plaguing its stunted and disfigured tribal population. Instead of river goddesses, the Agariya tribe of Lohri, carrying the hereditary caste trade of mining and forging iron; are descended from a demon clan of *asuras* such as Lohasur (patron demon of iron), Koilasur (patron demon of coal) and Aagaiyasur (patron demon of fire). The Agariya youth idolise the mythical monster, Jwalamukhi who rebelled against the Hindu deity, Sun. Unlike postcolonial geologists who blast sacred tribal hillocks, the Agariyas reverentially protect the red coloured iron rich land. The Agariyas of Kubha who attacked mining contractors and governmental lobbyists run away and merge with the forest thus becoming ghostly apparitions haunting the imagination of postcolonial contractors. The re-emergence of the old Agariyas as shrivelled, stunted and impotent “little ones” shows a terrifying return of the repressed as a regressive spectre. The devolution of grown Agariya men and women into infertile dwarfish ghouls metonymically stages the modern aboriginal’s relapse into infantilism as if to mock the evolutionary teleology of technocratic and ecocidal progress. The Agariya’s refusal to practice agriculture is an ideological struggle to mould ecological futures; the aboriginal “self” lacks autonomous selfhood and thus can immerse, blend and camouflage with environment. The political resistance of Agariyas attempts to unsettle capitalist technocracies by evolving *ecological democracies* in which the subject merges with the habitat thus demolishing what Marx called alienation and almost inventing a unique version of ecological Marxism in which social relations are contingent upon ecological affinities. Tribal subjectivities go beyond Man/Nature boundary so that the self is morphed with the environment.

Ironically in *The Armenian Champa Tree* (2009), Mahasweta goes beyond cultural Feminism to recognise the relational, ethnological and ethical awareness of animal rights amongst tribal children. A “feminised” Buno boy Mato runs away from village in a desperate bid to save his pet goat, Arjun from the Kapalik’s wrath. Tom Regan in *The Case for Animal Rights* (2004) and *Animal Rights, Human Wrongs: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy* (2003) theorises the moral advocacy of seeing animals not as means to human ends but as ends in themselves. Regan affirms the inherent worth of nonrational and nonhuman creatures as they still have intelligence and capacity to feel; according to him, Moral Agents (capable of moral judgement) must attend to the needs of Moral Patients (incapable of moral judgement in so far as they are incapable of articulation). Hegemonic disciplines whether legal, religious or epistemological believe that irrational, rebellious and disorderly women are cultural anomalies like “unconscious” and “unsubjective” animals; both are objects of male scopic/scientific fascination, to be anatomised, classified and made productive for civilizational ends. The dormant “Mother” Nature, desubjectivised women and defenceless animals are clubbed together under the empiricist category of “It”. This debate about anti-rationalism is best illustrated by Kapalik’s and Mato’s differing attitudes towards the baby goat. For the Kapalik, the goat is an unfeeling religious totem to be sacrificed to Kali in order to protect the village from floods whereas Mato is sensitive to an anthropomorphic version of vitalism that animates all life forms including animals. Instead of establishing dominance over the animal, Mato treats it as Regan’s “Moral Patient” and a Moral companion.

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