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RECLAIMING POWER THROUGH NATURE: ECOFEMINIST EXPLORATION OF MAHASWETADEVI'S NARRATIVES

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ABSTRACT

This paper, titled Reclaiming Power Through Nature: Ecofeminist Exploration of Mahasweta Devi's Narratives, investigates how women protagonists in Mahasweta Devi's short stories—The Hunt, Draupadi, and Statue—derive strength and resilience from their intrinsic connection to nature to resist patriarchal oppression. Through an ecofeminist lens, the study highlights how Devi portrays tribal women whose identities are deeply intertwined with the natural world, drawing on this bond to reclaim autonomy and power within a male-dominated society. Nature serves not only as a source of solace but as a force of empowerment that fuels their resistance against societal marginalization and exploitation. The paper reveals how Devi critiques the commodification of both women and the environment, presenting nature as an ally in the protagonists' struggle for identity and justice. By reclaiming their connection to the earth, these women transcend cultural oppression and assert their agency, embodying ecofeminist ideals of resilience and reclamation of power.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Nature as Empowerment, Patriarchal Resistance, Tribal Women, Reclaiming Identity

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1. INTRODUCTION

At the heart of ecofeminism lies a profound understanding of the intrinsic ties between women and the natural world, rooted in the belief that women are inherently more aligned with nature than men, and that nature itself embodies a feminine essence. Coined by the esteemed French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne, the term "ecofeminism" represents a fusion of ecological and feminist thought, emerging as a contemporary articulation of ancient wisdom surrounding women's roles in ecological discourse. This philosophy intertwines insights from feminism, science, development, technology, and local perspectives, addressing the experiences of women and all marginalized groups, including queer communities. It unravels the cultural associations between women and nature shaped by various social, cultural, and scientific revolutions, revealing the parallel treatment of both in a patriarchal, consumer-driven society. Just as there is no ONE feminism, ecofeminism embraces a spectrum of ideologies, including liberal, Marxist, radical, socialist, and Third World feminisms.

While ecofeminism highlights the connections between femininity and nature, it also critiques the oppressive forces of male dominance that marginalize both. The terminology of "Mother Earth" exemplifies this marginalization, prompting ecofeminists to analyze how gender roles perpetuate societal norms that privilege male perspectives. Ecofeminists advocate for a broader worldview that honours the sacredness of the land, underscores humanity's dependency on nature, and values all forms of life. As various ecofeminist perspectives converge, they illuminate the intimate connections between women's lives and ecological conditions. Karen M. Fox, in her essay 'Leisure', published in Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature edited by Karen J. Warren, metaphorically describes this diversity as the "quilt of ecological feminism," emphasizing the need for inclusivity in theorizing and building ecofeminist thought. (p. 155)

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecofeminist thinkers illuminate the profound connection between traditional women's cultures and the natural world, suggesting that these cultures embody a consciousness that is less alienated and more in harmony with the rhythms of ecosystems. This notion of being "closer to nature" transcends mere proximity; it is rooted in the social constructs of gender and the historical division of labour that shape women's experiences. Within ecofeminism, radical ecofeminism often critiques the commodification of women, while cultural ecofeminism celebrates the inherent bond between women and the environment. By embracing roles as nurturers and providers, women cultivate a deeper awareness of both sanctity and pollution in their surroundings.

Maria Mies states in her book Ecofeminism that:

"As women in various movements... .....rediscovered the interdependence and connectedness of everything, they also rediscovered what was called the spiritual dimension of life - the realisation of this interconnectedness was itself sometimes called spirituality." (Shiva and Mies, 2014, p. 49)

Cultural ecofeminism draws strength from nature-based religions and goddess worship, emphasizing the spiritual dimension of life that arises from recognizing our interconnectedness with the earth. Maria Mies asserts that through various movements, women have rediscovered the essential interdependence that defines existence, a realization often termed spirituality (Shiva and Mies, 1993). This spiritual ecofeminism acknowledges the historical reverence for nature, particularly in Eastern cultures, where the divine feminine is embodied in concepts like Shakti. Vandana Shiva famously describes India as "the land of Shakti," paralleling the essence of women with this powerful force. In her book Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India, she emphasizes that forests symbolize the principles of diversity and sustainability that have shaped Indian civilization, demonstrating that this relationship is not primitive but a conscious choice (Shiva, 2016).

In an ecosystem, the intricate interdependence among organisms fosters a state of self-sufficiency. Any alteration to these variables can precipitate ecological collapse. Similarly, in human society, men and women function as interdependent elements, and exploiting either can jeopardize the stability of a just and civilized social order. The rise of consumerist culture, coupled with indiscriminate industrialization and commercialization in recent decades, has led to the rampant exploitation of nature and its finite resources. Nature's benevolent provisions have been subjected to relentless exploitation under the guise of development, resulting in a profound disruption of ecological balance and symbiotic relationships.

Within this framework of environmental degradation, women have emerged as both the most affected and exploited demographic. However, they have simultaneously played a pivotal role in advocating for the preservation of nature's identity and dignity, as well as their own. This perspective aligns with the core principles of transformative ecofeminism, which posits that women hold the potential to redefine their relationship with both nature and culture. It emphasises that ecofeminism grounded in women's traditional feminine virtues, maternal roles, and special relationship to nature need not be 'reactionary' it can also be 'revolutionary'. Moreover, ecofeminism can serve as a catalyst for women to engage in political activism and drive social transformation.

Ecofeminist literature adopts an essentialist approach, integrating intersectionality within Indian feminism. Fictional narratives by women offer intimate portrayals of the intertwined issues of environmental degradation, urbanization, and gender, providing relatable perspectives that amplify the voices of the marginalized. Mahasweta Devi, a prominent Bengali writer and activist, exemplifies this approach by highlighting the exploitation of indigenous peoples and their cultures, intertwining the fates of nature and humanity in her extensive body of work. Through over three hundred narratives, she vividly portrays the human-nature relationship and its unravelling under modern consumerism.

Devi's stories centre on women who navigate their marginalization, drawing strength from their deep connection to the environment. They emerge not only as survivors but as empowered figures who resist the patriarchal structures that threaten both their autonomy and the ecosystems they inhabit. While many Indian women writers enrich the tapestry of ecofeminism, Devi's unique blend of political activism and literary prowess infuses a fresh perspective into the discourse of Indian ecofeminism. Although her work is often analyzed through feminist and post-colonial lenses, there remains a gap in scholarship examining her as an environmental writer. Her narratives exemplify cultural ecofeminism, affirming that the connection between women and nature is vital, where the vitality of nature is inseparable from the vitality of women.

3. EXPLORING ECOFEMINISM IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S NARRATIVES

This paper delves into the intricate intersection of ecofeminism and identity in Mahasweta Devi's powerful short stories compiled in different anthologies,- The Hunt from Imaginary Maps, Statue from Old Women, and Draupadi from Breast Stories - illuminating the struggles of marginalized women as they confront the harsh landscapes of caste, class, race, and gender oppression.

The protagonists, Dopdi from the story Draupadi, Pishi (Dulali) from Statue, and Mary Oraon from the story The Hunt, embody the struggles of marginalized individuals grappling with the compounded burdens of caste, class, race, and gender in their quest for identity and purpose. Each narrative weaves a singular thread of struggle, highlighting these women's arduous journeys to reclaim their authentic selves within a patriarchal society. Socially ostracized and devoid of familial support, these characters exemplify remarkable resilience, drawing parallels between their fortitude and the nurturing strength of nature itself. Both women and the natural world are characterized by special features of self-sufficiency, self-protectiveness, and an inherent resilience that can transform into formidable forces when their autonomy is threatened. This ecofeminist framework resonates with economist Thomas Malthus's population theory, which posits that imbalances between population growth and food supply will inevitably trigger self-corrective mechanisms, whether through natural disasters or human conflicts. In this context, 'nature' embodies the powerful forces capable of responding to its violators.

In Mahasweta Devi's The Hunt from Imaginary Maps, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the woman-nature connection emerges as a central theme, intertwining the global concerns of ecology and feminism. Devi highlights the destructive impacts of post-colonial development projects on India's environment and its forest-dwelling communities, particularly tribal women. The narrative underscores the deep interconnections between women and nature, demonstrating how both become empowered to resist and protect their identities against their exploiters.

3.1. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The protagonist, Mary Oraon, an illegitimate tribal woman born to an Australian father and Oraon mother, resists patriarchal and caste-based norms imposed by upper-caste Brahmins. Described as tall and strikingly beautiful, with a golden complexion and flat features, Mary defies traditional tribal stereotypes. She sustains herself by herding cattle, harvesting, and selling forest produce in the Tohri Market, where she stands out as the only female vendor. Despite her illegitimate status, Mary embodies strength, independence, and self-respect, challenging societal boundaries by choosing a Muslim man, Jalim, as her life partner. Her desire for liberation from gender, caste, and class oppression becomes evident when she confronts Tehsildar Singh, a wood-logging contractor driven by consumerist greed.

Tehsildar Singh views the forest merely as a commodity, exploiting its resources for profit and decimating its natural balance. His lustful pursuit of Mary mirrors his exploitative relationship with nature, as he seeks to possess her just as he does the forest. However, Mary repeatedly rejects his advances, and during the Jani Parab, a women's hunting festival in Bihar, she ultimately asserts her agency. In a symbolic act of self-defence, she kills Tehsildar Singh, the oppressor, on the day of the festival, echoing the self-sustaining and destructive forces of nature that restore ecological equilibrium.

Mary's transformation into a predator, as she hunts her oppressor, parallels the empowerment of nature against its violators. Drawing on the divine power of Shakti, she reclaims her land and dignity, standing firm against both sexual and environmental violence. Through Mary Oraon's resilience and assertion of autonomy, Devi powerfully portrays the intersections of ecofeminism, post-colonialism, and tribal identity, illustrating how marginalized women can subvert oppressive systems to protect both themselves and the environment.

In The Hunt, Mahasweta Devi cultivates a deep ecological consciousness that aligns closely with ecofeminist theory, highlighting the intrinsic connection between women and nature. Mary's relationship with her environment is central to her survival, as she relies on the natural resources around her for sustenance. This symbiotic bond not only fortifies her against physical and social threats but also enables her to defend her dignity in a hostile environment marked by patriarchal greed and exploitation. Devi critiques environmental degradation and extractivism, emphasizing their disregard for ecological integrity and the ecofeminist perspective that sees both nature and women as victims of systemic exploitation.

Protagonist Mary Oraon serves as a representation of tribal women who resist the intersecting oppressions of gender, class, and environmental destruction. Her physical strength and sharp intellect, symbolized by her machete and assertive speech, empower her to resist the advances of men from dominant social classes. In this context, women from "third world countries" are often positioned as vulnerable to patriarchal and colonial exploitation, but Devi subverts this narrative. By crafting Mary with strong feminist attributes, Devi illustrates how marginalized women can challenge patriarchal authority and assert their identity, thereby reinforcing the ecofeminist critique of intertwined gender and ecological oppression.

The second story, Draupadi, from Mahasweta Devi's Breast Stories, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, stands as one of the most critically acclaimed and widely discussed works in Mahasweta Devi's literary canon. It tells the harrowing tale of a Naxal tribal woman activist who is captured, brutally assaulted, and gang-raped by government officials. Devi reimagines this narrative with a feminist twist, drawing inspiration from the Mahabharata. She introduces a radical ideology: "A man can easily strip a woman, but can he clothe her again?"(Devi, 2016, p. 32)—a profound question that also underscores a pertinent ecological crisis. By raising this issue, Devi critiques the patriarchal exploitation of both women and nature. In Draupadi, the forests emerge as more than just a backdrop; they symbolize a vital 'politics of survival,' offering sanctuary and strength to tribal women and revolutionaries in their resistance against oppression.

Draupadi is set in 1967, against the backdrop of a peasant uprising in the Naxalbari region of northern West Bengal. The story reflects the age-old exploitation of tribal groups in India, particularly in West Bengal and Jharkhand. It follows the Naxal peasants' fight for basic rights, while the Indian government, determined to suppress the rebellion, launches a hunt for rebels "all around the ill-famed forest of Jharkhani" (Devi, 2016, p. 17). Among the wanted is Dopdi Mehjen, a twenty-seven-year-old woman whose given name, Draupadi, was bestowed by the wife of zamindar Surja Sahu. The tribal pronunciation, however, renders it as Dopdi.

Dopdi and her husband, Dulna, worked in the region's villages, harvesting crops. During Operation Bakuli, when police cordoned off and machine-gunned three villages, the couple feigned death, escaping detection in the morning body count. This prompted the Special Forces to launch a massive armed search. Hidden in the dense and impenetrable Jharkhani forests, Dopdi and Dulna remained underground for a long period, eluding capture and destabilizing the military's efforts. The forest, a sanctuary for Naxalites and a militarized zone for the state, became both Dopdi's home and her shield. It allowed her to operate as an undercover agent, using the forest's labyrinthine complexity to confound security forces. Her deep connection with the land serves as a natural ally, aiding her survival and frustrating the antagonist, Senanayak, who—despite his theoretical understanding of tribal culture—fails to anticipate her movements or track her down.

Dulna and Dopdi, ululate and sing in their savage tongue, incomprehensible to their own tribe. Devi inscribes their language in the story Draupadi

"Samaray hijulenako mar goekope"

and,

"Hendre rambra keche keche, Pundari rambra keche keche" (p. 18)

Anthropologists speak of the relations between language and culture, which are more than the external expression and communication of internal thoughts. Language is an important variable and significant in its role in harbouring indigenous and subaltern epistemologies. It has the potential to tangibly influence people's human-human and human-nature relations, produce interlinkages between cultural identity, place, and nature, and evolve with the necessities of its environment. In the story, when soldiers shot Dulna, his body was thrown spread-eagled on the ground, and bringing 'a bloody foam to his mouth, he roared 'Ma-ho' and then went limp.' (p. 20) A poststructuralist perspective might argue

that words derive meaning only through their relation to other words within the framework of language and consciousness, both shaped by social constructs. In contrast, an ecofeminist critique posits that meaning is inseparable from its context, which is intrinsically linked to the environment and culture. This interpretation resonates within the narrative when the Department of Defence, despite extensive effort and research, fails to decode the tribal slogan 'Maho'. The slogan's meaning, deeply rooted in the cultural and environmental context of the tribals, remains inaccessible to the authorities, rendering them incapable of extracting information about the revolutionaries.

Thus, the search for Dopdi continues in the forest belt of Jharkahani. It is a carbuncle on the government's backside not to be cured by the tested ointment,…….In the first phase, the fugitives, ignorant of the forest's topography, are caught easily, ……..Now it seems that they have found a trustworthy courier. Ten to one it's Dopdi……No doubt it is she who is saving the fugitives now. (p. 21–22)

Dopdi's profound connection to her land and environment functions as a crucial mechanism for her survival, grounding her resistance in a deep cultural and ecological awareness. Her linguistic strength and cultural resilience not only fortify her, but also enable her to nurture and protect other fugitives. This alignment with the primal forces of the forest and soil facilitates her transformation into a formidable fighter, equipped with new survival and combat strategies. The police, despite repeated efforts, are unable to apprehend her, as she continues to destabilize their operations, demonstrating the limitations of their authority in the face of her embodied knowledge. Devi says in the story:

'The cause for fear is elsewhere. …….They must have forgotten book learning. Perhaps they are orienting their book-learning to the soil they live on and learning new combat and survival techniques…' (p. 23)

Nature serves as a teacher and trainer, instilling life skills in human beings. Women who are closer to nature have distinctive ecological knowledge. Deane Curtin in her essay Women's Knowledge as Expert Knowledge, says that due to cultural dualisms, 'Women's knowledge is bodily knowledge' (p. 90) and they tend to cultivate knowledge that integrates head and hand. Their knowledge consists more of "thoughtful ways of doing" than of "ways of thinking about." Dopdi's skills of killing by the means of a hatchet and scythe, bow and arrow, and practising guerrilla warfare are the outcome of this knowledge.

In the narrative, in an instance before Dopdi is apprehended and captivated by Senanayak, she detects a cop behind her and plans to kill the policeman who follows her. Dopdi misleads the cop in the opposite direction of the forest as she doesn't want an intruder to invade her safe territory of the forest; however, killing an enemy in the forest of Jharkani is child's play for her. She thinks:

'Huh! I can tell where I am if I wander all night with my eyes shut. I won't lose him that way. I won't outrun him……you can't run around in the forest. I'd run you out of breath, throw you in a ditch, and finish you off.' (p. 29)

Her knowledge of the forest road is so particular that nobody can defy her in that. To kill the cop, she thinks 'this area is quite enough. It's like a maze…… Dopdi will lead the cop to the burning 'ghat'. Patitpaban of Saranda had been sacrificed in the name of Kali of the Burning Ghats.' (p. 30). The invocation of Hindu goddess Kali by the author, at this point, is the portrayal of ecofeminist sensibility represented in the incarnation of 'Shakti' resembling the power of women announcing the onset of the Holocaust. In the final scene, after Dopdi is brutally gang-raped on Senanayak's orders, her defiant and unyielding stance mirrors the fierce, destructive imagery of Kali, reinforcing the connection between feminine power, resistance, and ecological embodiment. Here Devi describes:

Draupadi's black body shakes with an indomitable laughter that Senanayak simply cannot understand. Her ravaged lips bleed as she begins laughing. Dopdi wipes her blood on her palm and says in a voice that is terrifying, sky splitting and sharp as her ululation. What's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man? (p. 32)

Here, the rape of Draupadi draws a parallel to the rape of the Earth also, wherein both are exploited for the commodifiable attributes attached to them. In this inhuman incident, a woman's body is reduced merely to a commodity and a site of exploitation, merely in order to punish her. Where the rape of Dopdi on the one hand signifies an outrageous show to prove the power of "masculinity'," on the other hand, it also replicates the unmindful exploitation of land and its natural resources, indicating the paradigms of centuries-old patriarchal dominance over women and nature. Susan Griffin in her essay "Ecofeminism and Meaning" says,

'Here the word 'rape' becomes a metaphor to describe various kinds of ecological destruction, as in the rape of a forest, opening up another layer of meaning. Unwittingly this metaphor suggests a profound connection between the social construction of nature and the social construction of women. And simultaneously, it describes the desire to

conquer and violate woman and nature, and a less evident fear of both, since why does one have to conquer what is not challenging, fearsome, and in some way, wild, falling as it does outside the idea of mastery and control? (p. 225)

After the horrific rape, Dopdi 'chooses the front of Senanayak's white bush shirt to spit a bloody gob at and says, 'There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed.' (p. 33)

Dopdi's defiant behavior can be symbolically interpreted as a representation of Earth's fury, manifesting in catastrophic events such as earthquakes, tsunamis, and epidemics. Her rhetorical question, "But how can you clothe me again?" issued in a powerful voice, serves as a direct challenge to humanity's ability to restore the natural world to its original state. This moment encapsulates Devi's feminist critique, intertwining with her ecological concern for the violated 'Mother Earth,' repeatedly exploited and torn apart by mankind's relentless pursuit of development and resource extraction. Through Dopdi's rebellion, Devi underscores the inseparable link between feminist resistance and ecological preservation, issuing a stark warning about the consequences of humanity's continued disregard for both women and the environment.

While there is no single form of ecofeminism, all ecofeminists focus on the intimate connections between the lives of women and the ecological state of their environments. . Karen J. Warren (2014) conceptualizes this relationship through the metaphor of the "quilt of ecological feminism," where different "pieces" or aspects are selected to form a coherent whole. According to Karen M. Fox in her article Leisure- Celebration and Resistance in the Ecofeminist Quilt in Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature edited by Karen J. Warren states that 'leisure is an important segment of women's lives for connecting with nature and reaffirming themselves and their relationship with nature'. (p. 168) Leisure, while often perceived as peripheral or unremarkable, serves as a vital means of linking women to nature, health, self-expression, and self-affirmation. Particularly, leisure assumes significance when it provides a regular escape from stress, offering both joy and relaxation. These activities encompass elements of enjoyment, autonomy, and self-affirmation, all of which contribute to the multifaceted layers

In this context Mahasweta Devi's protagonist, Pishi (Dulali) from the story Statue, finds solace in such ecofeminist notions of leisure to bring meaning to her life. Abandoned and exiled by her family, Dulali lives a life marked by isolation. Throughout her seventy-eight years, she has faced gender-based exploitation, resulting in poverty, hunger, and ostracism. Married at the age of four and widowed by six, Dulali is deemed a social outcast due to her widowhood, viewed as a bad omen and excluded from social events. She resides in a single-room hut located beyond the courtyard of the Bhunya house, resembling the crone-like figure of Goddess Manosha from myth. Her survival depends on the meager provisions—'some rice-salt-oil-lentil at month's end, two saris yearly' (Devi, 2014, p. 13)—supplied by the women of the household. Through Dulali's character, Devi critiques the socio-religious and traditional practices enforced by patriarchy that oppress women, ultimately marginalizing their identities and consciousness.

Devi says about Dulali,

'Long ago, a long time back, she forgot to protest against other's behaviour towards herself. She has accepted hunger pangs as chronic and unalterable reality. She died, possibly, long ago. From earliest consciousness she remembers that she was at once unwanted and indispensable in the household.'(p. 13)

In this socially secluded state, she lives the life of a recluse amidst the natural environment that provides a companion to her meaningless life. She relentlessly occupies herself with tasks in her small room, determined to maintain some sense of purpose. The fire she keeps burning symbolizes more than mere warmth—it represents the fragile thread of life she clings to, sustaining her frail body through sheer willpower. The fire becomes her lifeline, a metaphorical source of vitality in a life drained of nourishment. As the narrative reveals, "with her belly always empty or three-quarters empty, there is nothing left in her body. She likes the fire's warmth and for lack of blood feels chilled all the time" (p. 14). The fire's warmth serves as her only defence against the cold emptiness of her existence.

Dulali's thoughts and dreams are only for food, and she recalls her entire life of misery and pain with a cry for existence. She confronts life's challenges by finding profound meaning and connection within the natural world, fostering a deep ecological consciousness and a powerful sense of belongingness. Wandering through the dense, untamed jungle of the Thakur homestead, she reflects on her past and long-forgotten familial ties. She survives on the offerings left for Manosha, the clan's deity. A proper understanding of Nature and the presence of seclusion in the lives of women reveal that leisure often acts as a vital link between women and the natural world, offering both solace and a form of joyful resistance. For Dulali, her bond with nature is profound, fuelling her will to keep going. Without the companionship of her natural surroundings, she might have succumbed to her despair. This relationship with nature allows her to express

her unspoken thoughts and grants her a sense of wholeness. This connection is captured in the following lines from the story:

Once in a great, while she leaves behind the clamour of the Manosha fair and goes to the abandoned river-bed on the last day of the rainy month of Sraban, when the sky casts a khol-blue shadow, and in the gaps of the white bonshiuli herb, on the surface of the river bed, one sees cheerful clusters of the yellow kadamba. She can't say why she goes. She sits on the flat stone. Then she doesn't look human. ……..... Years round there was a deep water in the Karnabati then. The pollen of the kadam falls on her thin body. She thinks and thinks. Then she forgets the past glory of the Bhunya family and thinks- Ripe kadam tastes good. I'll crush some and take it. I'll put some salt in the tart kadam and eat it with rice." (p. 16)

Dulali has spent her entire life isolated and alienated, and nature has been her only nurturer in her loneliness. Her only companions throughout life have been the fields and rivers where she often sought solace. While her life held the potential for growth and fulfillment, it was instead rendered desolate and unproductive, stifled by oppressive social norms and patriarchal control. The imagery of fertility, contrasted with barrenness, underscores the devastating impact of societal injustice on her ability to realize her potential. Karen M. Fox says 'The quilt of ecological feminism emerges from the voices and designs of women, indigenous people, and others who have been marginalized, and the pieces on the quilt are those that express a respectful connection between nature and women.' (p 168)

For many women, leisure is inextricably linked with relationships based on sharing trust, communicating, caring, and working together. It, like a quilting stitch, provides connection and accents patterns of community development, self-affirmation, and respect for the natural environment. Leisure becomes a means of joyful resistance and a way to feel truly alive. For Dulali, however, her time in nature stems not from happiness but from pain. Yet, these moments serve as her own quilting stitch, helping her reclaim her identity and femininity despite the suffering. In this way, even in hardship, nature becomes a source of strength and reaffirmation.

4. CONCLUSION

Rural women in Third World countries have the worst situation due to their distinct ecological practices. Urvashi Butalia in her article Indian Women and the New Movement describes the daily lives of village women in our country:

While they work on an average many more hours than their men, they eat much less. When there is little food, it is the woman who has to go without…….She works in the fields, looks after the children, comes home and prepares the family meal and then has to be available for her man whenever she is required……..rural women endure childbirth after childbirth which drains them of physical energy and destroys their health…….In any militant struggle that they, or their men, have been involved in, they are the ones who are most vulnerable to police and state repression. They suffer violence and abuse within……(p. 132-33)

In these narratives, Mahasweta Devi's portrayal of rural women in India vividly demonstrates their profound connection to nature, which sustains them both physically and emotionally. Ecofeminism as a notion and concept is structured around the fundamental necessities of life; called a subsistence perspective. Women share this perspective better than men and have a better understanding of their relationship to the environment. Devi's female protagonists not only navigate the delicate balance between survival, culture, and environment but also reshape their identities by asserting their socio-cultural significance. Their resilience in overcoming daily struggles and their intimate relationship with nature serve as powerful testaments to their strength, adaptability, and enduring relevance in the larger social fabric.

On the other hand, Spiritual ecofeminism, or the feminine principle, functions as a linking principle - as the life energy in everything and every human being. According to Starhawk, as explained in Ecofeminism, 'spirituality is largely identical to women's sensuality, their sexual energy, their most precious life force that links them to each other, to other living forms, and the elements.' (Shiva and Mies, 2014, p. 49) It is the energy that allows women to love and enjoy life. Ecofeminism strongly advocates for the replacement of this entire masculine system of dominance and exploitation with an ethic of care, a morality based on feminine characteristics of care and nurturing. This approach focuses on human benevolence and acting in a way that prioritises care for others. Ecofeminism brings forth the value of respecting both - WOMEN and NATURE.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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