

# Deficit of Cultures: Chinta – An Ecofeminist Study

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### ABSTRACT:

The proposed paper studies the short story Chinta from an ecofeminist perspective. Mahasweta Devi, a well known Bengali writer has produced a plethora of creative writing on tribal India. From the early age itself she penned her interest in the lives of tribal people of Bengal, Jarkhand, Madya Pradesh and surrounding states. She took a journey into these places on foot to understand and experience the life of tribal community. The very first book 'Jansi ka Rani' is the best example for her dedication towards her profession. She collected the required information from the people than referring back to already produced stuff in the field. The proposed short story also presents a realistic portrayal of a woman in a postcolonial India.

### KEY WORDS:

Chinta, Mahasweta Devi, Eco feminism.

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### Introduction:

Ecofeminism is a new dimension of feminism, finds shorts in the perception of nature in a patriarchal system. Nature and woman are associated to compare and dominate. According to feminists, in a patriarchal system nature is perceived as an object and provider of comforts to humans with feminine qualities. They equated nature with women in contrast to culture and men.

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As a branch of study ecofeminism takes a deviation from the environmental studies to feminism. The seminal book of Carson 'Silent Spring' draws attention of the activists who are concerned with nature. The book provides an insider's view on the impact of modernization on nature. Ecological feminist activists identified the cohesion between the women and nature. The ideologies of patriarchal system treat nature as a product to fulfill his whims and fancies as they treated woman. In patriarchal system women's assigned labor is with nature. She shares most of her time and life in nature to collect food and fodder for the family. The dependency of woman on nature is disturbed in the modern times as its strategies of development are based on the patriarchal ideologies and dominated by Pater. As the relationship between woman and nature is analyzed by Linda Vanca:

"A basic tenet of ecofeminism holds that the patriarchal domination of women runs parallel to the patriarchal domination of nature. Both women and nature have been controlled and manipulated to satisfy masculine desires, we say; both have been denied autonomous expression and self-determination". (p-60)

The early text of 1970s and 80s like Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, Val Plumwood's *Ecofeminism: An Overview and Discussion of Positions and Arguments* etc... laid the foundation stones of ecofeminist theory for academic discussions. Ecofeminism widened its scope as Charlene Spretnak describes "Ecofeminists address the crucial issues of

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our time, from reproductive technology to Third World development, from toxic poisoning to the vision of a new politics and economics – and much more” ( 1998, p-8).

Ecofeminism as a resistant movement involves a wide range of issues such as animal rights, racial women rights, third world woman rights, marginalized woman and so on without any difference of race and class to oppose domination and violence against them. as Karen J Warren in *Ecofeminist Philosophy: a Western Perspective on What it is and Why it Matters*, states: “ecofeminist philosophy is opposed not only to sexism and naturalism, but also to racism, classism, ageism, anti-Semitism, heterosexism and any other social systems of domination(“isms of domination”).

Chinta is a story of an abandoned mother of three children. The narration may not be called as an imaginative story as Mahasweta Devi worked with the tribal people. This is one of the fates of a woman in the tribal community. Chinta after the death of her husband becomes prey to the willing eyes. As the mother of a son she is trapped in many ways to by Utsab. He used all his means to create confidence in her to trust him. As a lonely woman she succumbed to his whims and fancies. He took her to Calcutta in the name of marriage. She left her son in the custody of her husband’s brother. However as in all the cases she is deceived by two daughters.

The cultural practices of the village abandoned her to go back to her village. She had some land and other resources to lead a respectable life in the village. But now she is not allowed to enter into the village in the name of customs and practices of the village life.

She does part time job in Calcutta to take care of her

daughters. She is not ready to abandon them to go back to her comfortable life. She suffered, humiliated, rejected but still not ready to go back. However the time has its influence. Her son has reached the age of marriage. So her son and his uncle with some other villagers come to take her back.

Going back to home is not an easy task for Chinta. She has to undergo a penance, which demands two hundred rupees as she has to feed the entire village to seek forgiveness and she also has to forsake her two girls. This is an impossible task for her to forsake her daughters or accumulating money. However now it has become an inevitable job for her to abandon her daughters. The villagers sold her daughters to flesh traders and forced to get back to the village.

In the name of God and customs of the village she is forced to return to her village. The moral policing of the customs of the village pressured her to abandon her own daughters. Mahasweta Devi is presenting that a village or community living or culture is the one which assures the safety and security for a helpless woman. But here the same cultural practices have changed their orientation. The demand for money is seen as the influence of modernity on the tribal culture. Money always plays a last role in the life of the tribal people. However now currency has taken the prime position. In the influence of money people has lost their compassion, concern, and care for their own members of the community. The disintegration of the cultural life of the villagers is captured through the life of Chinta. Chinta though has no interest in the villagers but succumbs to the belief or faith system which talks about afterlife.

On the other side, the city Calcutta where Chinta comes in the hope of constructing her new life lost everything.

The hope of new life devastated her. There is no security for her life. She becomes prey to eager eyes. Utsab who represents the modernity deceived Chinta. He easily breaks the trust of a woman like a modern culture which lost its power of assurance. It breaks and isolates the things.

As Mahasweta Devi writes in the initial lines of the story that the monsoon season and after the harvesting of autumn, the people from the villages move to cities to meet the ends. The dualistic construction of cities over villages supports the mastering of the cities on villages. Villages are treated as inferior to the cities. The natural habitation of the villages are also interiorized to the organized parks and trees in the cities.

In that sense women is associated with nature and interiorized to man. Val Plumwood while analyzing the conditions of women quotes that, “critical reconstruction must take account the way gender identity is imbued with power, and must confront the feminist version of the paradox of power-if feminine character and feminine values are shaped in subordination, how can they become in turn socially valued and socially dominant and still retain their character?”. (P-64, Val Plumwood) Chinta tries her hand in various levels to make a comfortable life for her daughters however without subverting the role and conditions of woman. The powerlessness of the Chinta and her concern for her daughters is treated as feminine as nature.

“she had no one. That she had to fend single-handed for her daughter, her unborn child and herself was obvious when, on cold winter mornings she took a bath and went to work in her faded and threadbare sari, when she managed to somehow put down a mid-morning meal of left over rice, sit-

ting next to her daughter on the veranda or when she had to run around at the end of the month for her wages of eight rupees” (86-87, Chinta)

The dualistic construction of reason over emotion positioned reason at the top of the hierarchy in opposition to ‘desire, caring, and love as merely ‘personal’ and ‘particular’ as opposed to the universality and impartiality of understanding. (P-167, Val Plumwood). Therefore “ ‘feminine’ emotions are treated as unreliable, untrustworthy and morally irrelevant, an inferior domain to be dominated by a superior, disinterested reason” (p-168, Val Plumwood). However, Chinta has all the concern over her daughters, is forced to sell them. Chinta’s decision is welcomed as rational and reasonable by the male group of people, who has come to take her. There is no value for the emotions of a woman than a man.

“Then why didn’t she go back home? That was the whole problem. Chinta had now spent 200 rupees as penance for having sinned. She had to feast the people of her village on rice and pithy. She also had to forsake her two girls. Only if she passed all these tests would she be accepted back by her community. Where will I get so much money, Ma? I cannot afford it, so I can’t go home”. (P-91 Chinta)

Mahasweta Devi while presenting the character of a tribal woman like Chinta, provides information about the conditions of the woman along with nature. Nature has become a part and parcel of Tribal life. As we can see through the life of Chinta the natural habitat has also lost its prominence in the life of Chinta.

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