



Ecocide and Identity: Tribal Resistance in Mahasweta Devi's *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*

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Abstract:

This paper examines Mahasweta Devi's *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* as a narrative of tribal identity, resistance, and ecological consciousness. The novel is read as a collective history of indigenous struggle, tracing the continued exploitation of tribal communities from colonial to post-independence India. It highlights how systemic marginalization, land alienation, and industrial expansion disrupt both cultural identity and environmental balance.

The paper's central contribution is to read the novel specifically through the lens of ecocide—understood as the large-scale destruction of ecosystems leading to the displacement and marginalization of dependent communities—rather than through a general ecocritical approach. Drawing on the concept of ecocide alongside Nixon's slow violence, Shiva's developmental violence and Guha and Gadgil's environmental justice framework, the paper demonstrates how these distinct but complementary frameworks illuminate different dimensions of ecological destruction in Devi's narrative. The paper further contends that tribal resistance in the novel is not only political but also ecological, rooted in an alternative worldview that emphasizes coexistence rather than domination. Ultimately, the study positions Devi as a writer-activist who foregrounds subaltern voices while articulating an indigenous ecological ethic relevant to contemporary debates on development and sustainability.

Keywords: Tribal Identity, Ecocide, Ecocriticism, Environmental Justice, Indigenous Knowledge, Bioregionalism, Subaltern Studies, Environmental Humanities, Resistance.

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Introduction:

Chotti Munda and His Arrow by Mahasweta Devi is a strong critique of the process by which the tribal populations lose their land, culture, and ecological “lifeworld”. The novel unfolds during colonial and post-colonial India, tracing the evolution of tribal life under the impact of industrialization, the state and capitalist expansion. Such processes are not only undermining economic structures, but they also redefine the connection between human communities and the natural world. In this paper the novel will be examined under the prism of ecocide, the broader destruction of ecosystems and the resulting displacement and marginalisation of dependent communities. An ecocide reading is not necessarily a general ecocritical reading that would focus on the representation of nature or the human-environment relationship in a general sense; rather, an ecocide reading emphasizes the structural nature of ecological violence, and as such, would allow to analyze environmental destruction as a legally and morally cognizable harm done to certain tribal communities. This specificity makes ecocide different from Nixon’s slow violence (a representational and temporal framework), Shiva’s developmental violence (a critique of economic models), and environmental justice (an approach that charts the unequal distribution of environmental costs and benefits). The paper combines these frameworks by claiming that the destruction of the link between ecosystems and communities is not only a symptom of inequality or an act of invisible violence, but a categorical wrong and deserves to be analysed separately from these. The study endeavors to first highlights the concept of ecocide and moves the study of Devi’s novel from a socio-political to an integrated ecological-political register.

Review of Literature

Mahasweta Devi's critical writings have always highlighted her interaction with subaltern voices and her depiction of the exploitation of tribes. Her work has been analysed by scholars using postcolonial and subaltern approaches, focusing on issues of bonded labour, marginalisation and resistance. Educational studies include ecocritical readings of her fiction, focusing on her depiction of nature and environmental ethics, as well as the interdependence between tribal communities and the environment. But the current literature frequently considers ecological issues as subsidiary to socio-political issues. To fill this, void this paper foregrounds ecological destruction and in particular, ecocide as central to the story line. The study builds on the writings of Timothy Clark, Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil and considers the novel in the context of the larger discussions on environmental justice and sustainability, thereby making an integrated study of ecology and identity.

Theoretical Framework: Ecocide and Environmental Humanities

Although increasingly in the legal spotlight and in academia, the term ecocide must not be interpreted only as environmental destruction rather it is a systemic violence that is woven into the fabric of political and economic systems. Ecocide is the widespread significant harm, destruction or rendering useless of ecosystems, thereby depriving the inhabitants of the enjoyment of the environment in peace. In literary/cultural studies, ecocide becomes more interpretative as it designates the process of destroying an ecosystem and of destroying the community that depends on it, in as much as the identity, culture and life of the community is defined by the ecosystem. It is important to differentiate the analytical framework of ecocide from the other set of the resources of theories. Rob Nixon's "slow violence" is essentially temporal and representational, as it

highlights the slow, diffuse, and invisible nature of environmental harm, and the difficulty of telling a story about it (Nixon 2). Although Nixon's framework is useful for the understanding of why ecocide can be hidden and resistant, it does not identify as any harm to a community or ecosystem. Vandana Shiva's "developmental violence" places the same violence into a critique of the capitalist and colonial models of development, specifically focussing on the destruction of subsistence economies and indigenous knowledge systems (Shiva 12-15). Guha and Gadgil's environmental justice framework charts how the resources of the forest are being distributed, and who benefits from its destruction and who suffers its consequences (Gadgil and Guha 3). All these frameworks bring a different analytical perspective. By designating the destruction of ecosystem-community bonds as a categorical, legally and morally cognizable harm, and not as a symptom of inequality, a product of invisible violence, or a structural feature of capitalist development, but as a form of existential annihilation that tears down not only ecosystems, but also the identities and histories of the communities that inhabit them, Ecocide synthesises and extends these contributions. The reading of *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* is a distinctive analytical work that attempts to capture the idea that the displacement of the Munda community, the destruction of forests and the loss of Munda knowledge of the forest are not separate events that exist in isolation, but are part of a single, named, form of violence. Environmental justice is about the disproportionate impact of ecocide on marginalised communities, especially on indigenous and tribal groups who have a very close and intimate connection to their ecological surroundings. This slow violence is clearly visible in *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* with the slow depletion of forests, slow pollution of land, and slow erosion of traditional livelihoods. Ecocide is also related to postcolonial ecocriticism which emphasizes the continuation of environmental exploitation by colonial and postcolonial regimes. The question of modernity or modernity itself is deeply

entangled with ecological crises as it promotes a universal model of development that ignores local ecological knowledge systems, as Dipesh Chakrabarty says (Chakrabarty 13). Ecocide in Devi's is not a singular event, but rather a longer history of colonial resource extraction and current industrial expansion. In short, ecocide in *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* is an environmental degradation, a socio-political marginalisation and a cultural erasure. It involves a material and symbolic process, and not only an ecosystem but the identity and history of the community is broken.

Textual Analysis

Chotti Munda and His Arrow, translated by Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak, has been widely read and criticized all over the world was written by Mahasweta Devi. The novel is a story not of a single protagonist, but of the tribespeople of India, who narrate the nation's history from the British until independence and beyond, through the lens of the tribals. Through the portrayal of tribal struggle, the novel articulates multiple ecocritical perspectives like *bioregionalism*, *environmental justice*, *oikopoetics*, and *ecocide* woven into its narrative fabric. The textual analysis is broken down into four thematic subsections:

- (1) land dispossession and ecological loss,
- (2) human-animal relations and biocentric consciousness,
- (3) bonded labour and environmental exploitation, and
- (4) role of the state and political parties.

I. Land Dispossession and Ecological Loss

Among the many fictional works of Mahasweta Devi *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* has been translated by Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak into English and thus it has received a global readership and critical attention. Though the story evolves around the main protagonist, Chotti Munda, but as we read the novel it unfolds not *a story about a Chotti Munda* but a tale about the tribals of India. It is a story which maps the growth of India from British imperialism to independence and beyond with its foreground as the tribal sector which has been unduly exploited over the years by people having vested interests. *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* portrays the pathetic predicament of an entire world of tribals who are sometimes referred to as the citizen of a 'Fourth World'. Through the portrayal of the tribal struggle one may witness how the novel has unfolded many ecocritical perspectives which have been interwoven in the entire fabric of the story. Many of the ecocritical concerns like bioregionalism, environmental justice, oikopoetics and ecocide have found more patent and latent expression in this novel. There is no doubt that while writing the novel Mahasweta Devi was overtly concerned about the tribal struggle and the exploitation that they have faced, but as Timothy Clark has pointed out, 'ecological problems are seen to result from structures of hierarchy and elitism in human society, geared to exploit both the people and the natural world as a source of profit (Clark, 2). The presence of ecocide in the novel is not merely implicit but structurally embedded within its narrative logic. The repeated displacement of tribal communities, the extraction of minerals, and the systematic destruction of forests together constitute a clear instance of ecological violence that goes beyond environmental degradation to encompass cultural and existential annihilation. Ecocide in *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* operates as a slow and cumulative process, where the erosion of the natural environment is inseparable from the erosion of tribal identity. The transformation of forest land into industrial zones, the pollution of soil and

vegetation, and the depletion of biodiversity reflect what may be termed as “slow violence,” wherein destruction unfolds gradually yet irreversibly. This process is further intensified by the logic of capitalist expansion, where land is reduced to a commodity and nature to a resource, thereby legitimizing exploitation in the name of development. In this context, ecocide also assumes a distinctly postcolonial dimension, as the patterns of extraction initiated under colonial rule continue into the post-independence period, revealing a continuity of ecological and social injustice. Thus, the novel not only documents environmental loss but also foregrounds ecocide as a critical framework through which the interconnected destruction of land, culture, and community can be understood. Thus while she was writing about the Mundas or Kherias or Gonds or Nagesias she was equally ecologically concerned. Her concern for the environment and the man-nature relationship maintained by the tribals become clear when in an interview with Gayatri Chakroborty Spivak she informs her that just like the Native American ‘the Sobors (the hunting tribes) will beg forgiveness if they are forced to fell a tree: You are our friend. I do this because my wife doesn’t have any food, my son doesn’t have any food, my daughter starves. Before they killed an animal, they used to pray to the animal: the bird, the fish, the deer’ (Devi, *Imaginary Maps*, ii). Thus Mahasweta Devi understood that the relationship that the tribals share with nature and animal is not based on the greed that is the dominant driving force in this world of globalization.

Chotti Munda and His Arrow is written in somewhat bildungsroman manner where it explores the growing up of Chotti from a mere boy to a legend. Chotti Munda is the descendant of Purti Munda who came from Chaibasa to Palamau with his wife and children in order to find a place where they could build a small village. But wherever he tried to settle down something remarkable used to take place and thus every time he had to abandon the place and look for a new place. In one instance stone age weapons were unearthed and immediately the land was claimed as the property of the

Government. As a result, various kinds of *dikus* (foreigners in tribal language) — ‘White-Bengali-Bihari’ (Devi, *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, 1) started to pour down and therefore the Mundari world started to shrink. Thus, in the very beginning of the story we get to see how the land acquisition by the government for different purposes not only forced the tribals out of their home but completely exterminated the environment sometimes to extract mica or coal or sometimes to carry out an archeological excavation. Mahasweta has pointed out that the tribals ‘help nature to survive’ and ‘lives in harmony with nature around him’ (Devi, *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, xxii). Thus when Purti Munda came from Chaibasha to Palamau to settle down he cleared only the portion of the jungle to make it worth living but unlike his urban counterparts he did not have any intention of financial gain. Belonging to that particular bioregion, the tribals had a sounder knowledge of the ecology of the region and they were cautious of not disrupting the balance of nature. They regarded the forest as their home and kept it like their home.

But Purti Munda was exceptionally unlucky because Chottonagpur plateau being a mineral rich area wherever he tried to settle he was evicted from that land and soon an industrial area would crop up which disrupted not only their habitat but also the character of nature at large. This recurring displacement reflects what Vandana Shiva terms “developmental violence,” wherein capitalist expansion transforms land into a commodity, severing communities from their ecological and cultural roots. Shiva argues that modern development is predicated on the erasure of subsistence economies and indigenous knowledge systems. In the case of Purti Munda, displacement is not simply geographical but epistemic—it dismantles a way of life that is deeply embedded in the rhythms of nature. Ecocide here thus manifests as ecological dispossession, where the destruction of the environment is inseparable from the destruction of community identity. The consequence of such rampant industrialization is discussed in detail in Mahasweta Devi’s

journalistic works. Once while visiting the Singbhum area in Bihar she came to know how a factory was polluting the area beyond any measure:

‘A visit to Singhbhum was long under contemplation, so the invitation to attend a meeting, or sammelan, of the tribals of Rajenka and other villages were most welcome. The ACC factory of Jhikpani is causing much distress in the locality because cement dust carried by the wind is ruining crops and vegetation.... The approach to Chaibasa was marked by a changing landscape. The field lay barren and grey under layers of accumulated cement dust. The tree looked ghostly, the leaves hanging listless, heavy with cement.’ And these ‘cement dusts accumulated and hardened by night moisture, kill vegetation slowly. Trees wither, paddy, lentil and jowar plants give up and die, unable to survive in soil hardened by cement dust’ (Devi, *Dust on the Road*, 58). This form of environmental degradation exemplifies what Rob Nixon conceptualizes as “slow violence,” a mode of destruction that is gradual, dispersed, and often invisible, yet profoundly damaging in its long-term effects. The accumulation of cement dust and the silent death of vegetation illustrate how ecological harm unfolds incrementally, escaping immediate recognition while permanently altering the landscape. Nixon argues that such violence disproportionately impacts the poor, who lack the means to escape its consequences; similarly, in the novel, the tribals are left to endure environmental devastation that they neither caused nor benefit from. Thus, the pollution described here is not merely environmental damage but a politically structured form of ecocide. The plight and disappointment of Purti Munda was thus not only out of the hassle of resettlement, but from the fact that their ‘Mundari world’ was shrinking with the destruction of the forest which was regularly and compulsively carried on by the ‘Whites-Biharis-Bengalis’-people who did not belong to that region and harboured only the motive of gain. The Mundas only wished for a place to settle in, they did not understand the financial gain that can be incurred from the land. The right

sense of the term 'home land' was probably understood by the Mundas properly who respected and protected their land as their home.

Chotti Munda was named after a river-the river around which Purti Munda ultimately brought up his little village. Objects of nature are most respected by the tribals and just as a Hindu boy would be named after a god, Chotti was named after the river which was an important source of their sustenance. Extreme poverty led Chotti's parents to send Chotti to his sister Parmi's in-law's house where he spent most of his childhood under the guidance of the legendary Dhani Munda, the valiant comrade of Birsa Munda. Dhani Munda was a deft archer of his time and this is the specific quality that drew little Chotti towards him. Chotti had an ambition of winning the archery competition at the Chotti Fair and thus he was drawn to Dhani who, he knew, could teach him the skills that are required of a winner. Dhani Munda while tutoring his student sometimes spoke of the great Birsa Munda and his *ulgulan*. Long hours of practice at archery and these little stories and anecdotes on Birsa Munda moulded not only Chotti's skill as an archer but also his mind. Eventually we will see him not only winning mere prizes at the Chotti Fair, but he will be instrumental in winning back the respect from the Munda community on the same ground where the fair is held every year.

The story of *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* is spread over a vast period of Indian history. The story opens when India was not even independent and ends much after the Naxalite movement. And throughout this entire time frame the one element that remains common is the exploitation of the tribals and exploitation and ruining of the ecological balance. This dual exploitation of man and nature is evident in almost all the works of Mahasweta Devi. Devi believes that a creative writer should have a 'social conscience' and a 'duty towards society' (Devi, *Imaginary Maps* ix) and thus she portrays, writes her stories, colours the setting, builds the character in the most realistic fashion

possible. The land that once belonged to the tribals is no more their as landowners have come from distant cities and have claimed authority over the land and have changed their Munda identity to bond labourers. When Dhani Munda advises Parmi's father in law to sow pepper in order to make more money, Parmi's father-in-law replies with indignation:

'T' land belongs to t' Lalas-traders. Given us to farm cos there is no good crop. Soon's they know pepper, they'll take away. We too know pepper grows there. Knowin' we can do nothin'. It's enough that t' rice grows'.

Dhani's proud reply: All t' arable land belongs to t' Mundas and t' Oraons' is strongly opposed and discarded as his nephew points out that everything has changed and now 'All t' land is Diku land- Hindu land'.

(Devi, *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* 13)

Dhani will obviously fail to understand this because 'he went to all the revolts in the hope that Mundas would establish villages in forest and arable land and farm rightfully and in peace, and that other adivasi groups would do the same' (Devi, *Imaginary Maps* 14) Dhani's participation in most of the tribal revolts suggests that the struggles of the tribals for their land and peaceful farming rights have been going on since time immemorial, but the government has failed them time and again. *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* clearly portrays that this exploitation has not ended with the end of British imperialism but rather has taken an ugly turn in the initial years of our independence. The son of the soil thus, is uprooted from their rightful place and has been turned into a mere cog in the giant wheel for profit making. Dikus—the outsiders are now the land owners and it is according to their wish that they have to till the land and it is their wish that will drive their life. The Munda tribal community, on the other hand understands the importance of the

jungle, respects it because they know that them everything that is required to survive. But the dikus fail to understand this because their relationship with nature is not based on mutual love but on the assumption that he is the master.

For the tribals jungle is 'Our Mother' and learning the jungle well Dhani believes 'ye won' die starvin'. What isn't there in t' jungle?' (Devi, *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, 14) Jungle is not even their dwelling place but it is like a mother to them who sustains and nourishes them. The bounty that it offers is not be exploited but to be preserved. For Dhani, Birsa Munda is the Father Earth or Dharitri Aba who is destined to protect their mother-the jungle. This understanding of the forest and the role of man is in confirmation of oikopoetics, which is a nexus of the sacred, the human, natural and cultural phenomena woven in an integrated relationship. To the Mundas the forest is not wilderness to be preserved, it is home, mother, sustainer. An old man from Palamau would say to Devi that "Jab jangal giya, hum log bhi mara — When the jungle goes, it's the end of us" (Devi, *Dust on the Road* 9). The forest is destroyed, therefore, not just ecologically, but existentially – ecocide in the truest sense of the word – the annihilation of the conditions of life of the community.

II. Human-Animal Relations and Biocentric Consciousness

One of the more consistent ecological arguments in the novel is regarding human-animal relations. The relationship of the tribals with the animals is not an ostracizing one but a biocentric ethic of all living creatures, which runs in stark contrast to anthropocentric and extractive logic of diku world. Devi stated to the interviewer, Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak, that if the hunting tribes are forced to cut a tree down, they will ask the tree for forgiveness: "The Sobors (hunting tribes) will pray to the tree before they cut it down: the bird, the fish, the deer" (Devi, *Imaginary Maps* ii). It

isn't anthropocentrism doing ecology; it's a different ontological relation to the animal world, one in which killing is acceptable only if it's needed, and one in which acknowledgement and apology are present. As in Dhani Munda's instruction to Chotti: 'T' most important thing in archery is concentration and when ye kill finish with one arrer: Don' make t' prey suffer for nothing' (Devi, Chotti Munda 14-15). Chotti Munda says, "t' family of life grows larger wit' girl animals, girl birds" (Devi 97) when his son Harmu kills a female hare. Instruction and rebuke are both based on an understanding of reproductive ecology and sustainability of population that does not exist in the diku world of extractive hunting. This is quite unlike the non-tribal world's attitude towards animals. The king of Narsingarh is now "the 'forest king'" who is "the export of leopard-skins, tiger skins etcetra. Forest laws do not apply to him" (Devi, Chotti Munda 139). He even poisons a spring of water so as to kill more tigers, for "the price of seven tiger skins has come to twenty-one thousand rupees" (Devi, Chotti Munda 146). This poisoning of water - a sacred source of life - is itself an act of ecocide, destroying an entire ecosystem element in order to extract monetary value from its fauna. The novel follows the gradual death of animals and the breakdown of the balance between humans and animals. The Pahan asks Chotti "Ye don' bring birds an' rabbits no more?" "Wher do I get it?" is Chotti's answer. They've killed all" (Devi, Chotti Munda 207). Chotti comforts his wife, "... those happy days are past; those days will come back, when the tiger will jump" (Devi, Chotti Munda 161). He tells Harmu: "Now deer don't come drawn by the smell of ripe paddy. They are not there. Everyone, hunting in any fashion, has killed them off. If there are any animals left, they've gone off into deep forest for fear of the human" (Devi, Chotti Munda 161). One of the most instructive moments in the novel is when Chotti refuses to shoot a doe, even when he is hungry: "Nah! that's a doe. I too feel like shootin', but they are bein' killed off like we are. Way in t' forest mebbe there are some. Now comin' out. There'll be increase if we let

t' doe live" (Devi, Chotti Munda 190). The comparison of the tribal community with the animals, "they're being killed off just like we are" – is not a metaphor; the animals are being killed just like the people are being killed. This recognition of the suffering of the tribes and the animals is exactly what ecocide describes as a single suit of suffering: the destruction of an ecological community of interdependent beings.

III. Bonded Labor and Environmental Abuse

The novel's portrayal of bonded labour cannot be divorced from its ecological argument that the vicious circle of debt servitude that ensnares the tribals is a cause and a result of the ecological destruction. In this context, ecocide is a part of social and economic exploitation and can be seen as reinforcing the unequal distribution of environmental resources and burdens, as described by Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil (3). Lala Baijnath is aware of the exact process of exploitation: "adivasis work for incredibly low wages... They work as they give word. It is very easy to bind the adivasis in debt, if they once put their thumbprint on paper they give bonded labour for generations" (Devi, Chotti Munda 32). Lala's calculated contempt is a window through which we can understand the structural logic through which tribal dispossession is constructed: ecological destruction = lack of forest = borrowing = bonded labour = perpetuation of poverty. According to Guha and Martínez-Alier "the first lesson is that the primary cause of the environmental destruction in the world is the demand for natural resources generated by the consumption of the rich (whether rich countries or rich individuals and groups within countries) ... The second lesson is that it is the poor -- and the poor in this world are the ones most affected by the environmental destruction" (Guha and Martínez-Alier 3). Chotti Munda and His Arrow is an ongoing graphic piece of work that reflects just such a dynamic. When Lala Tirathnath refuses

to help during a drought, Chotti organises his community: “men dug up the sand, and put in planks with no gap in-between on the walls of the pit. The women threw the sand at a distance, on the bank. Gradually they dug ten pits. The water came up” (Devi, Chotti Munda 128). This ecological knowledge is expressed through Chotti’s teaching: “Don’ dirty this water with dirty clothes or baths.... Precious water” (Devi, Chotti Munda 128). This very knowledge, however, cannot be owned or made “commoditizable” by the Lalas, and that is what makes the tribals “useless” to the extractive economy except as labour. The destruction of the forest drives the hunger driven tribals into the very vandalism of their ecologic world: “the villagers who get the jobs of killing trees, deforest the hills, and breaking stones to make moraine are driven by hunger, and they become instruments of destroying ecologic world” (Devi, Chotti Munda 149). How to simply survive is captured by the lamentation of Bharat Munda, who must abandon his rightful place within the world and become slaves to the will of others if he is to survive.

IV. The State, Political Parties and Structural Ecocide

Chotti Munda and His Arrow is not the victim of just one person’s act of ecocide. Structurally, it is enabled and sustained by the state and its institutions, thus making it systemic, not incidental. Devi’s words to Chotti Munda, “No, no we’re people of t’ forest land, yes. Daroga’s Gormen fr us” (Chotti Munda 76) reflect the tribals’ understanding of the state, and that the police inspector and the government are for the outsiders and not for the forest people. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has pointed out, the colonial modernity in India established a political space which was politicized in the name of “the direct domination and subordination of the subaltern by the elite” (Chakrabarty 13). The novel does substantiate this idea, as the subaltern not only is the marginalised person, but nature, too, is at the mercy of those in power. In the post-independence India the tyrannous

attitude of the landowners is enhanced by the monstrous atrocities of political party members who like saviours, perform the role of the agents of further deprivation. In the novel the Youth League makes both the Lala and the brick-contractor Harbans Chadha extract a “cut” from the tribals. But when the tribesmen stand in opposition, the League runs amok in the village, and slaughters the Pahan. The violence of ecocide is not just environmental, it is also a systematic assault on community governance systems and spiritual authority. This aspect is highlighted by Guha and Gadgil's account of the colonial transformation in indigenous belief systems: “With the encroachment of agriculture and pastoralism over the territory of the food gatherers, and their belief system rooted in the destruction of the very tool by which they lived, the belief system of the coloniser would have been very different from that of the former food gatherers who had taken an active part in the conservation of the resource base of their territories.” (Guha and Gadgil 78)

The forest is no longer the home of the tribals but becomes a resource of the capitalist and the state. The removal of land, the exploitation of the tribals and the annihilation of the forest go hand in hand, each reinforcing the other in a self-perpetuating cycle of ecocide. The act of the Pahan setting fire to the Kurmi village before he went down into the forest alone and was “swallowed” by it (Devi, Chotti Munda 96) is the most focused image of this cultural annihilation in the novel. The fire of the Pahan is an act of total abandonment in the presence of ecocide, as he does not burn down the forest, but the human settlement which cannot be maintained within the system of ecocide which has engulfed the forest. The Pahan's fire is an act of surrender to the logic of destruction; the silence is a clear acceptance of the annihilation of the Munda community.

Conclusion

Chotti Munda and His Arrow is not only a tale of the tribals' plight but also a reflection on the harmful impacts of the forces that impact and destroy the environment and its inhabitants—the tribals. The forest, land and wildlife loss in the novel is not a coincidence rather it is a pattern of exploitation of nature and people. As this paper showed, the idea of ecocide helps to extend the simple observation of the ecocritical field that the environment and community are linked into a structural framework of colonial and postcolonial modernity as a categorical harm. This work is not about the unique possibilities of ecology or ontological proximity to nature in the tribals, but rather about the ecological and historically evolved relationships the Munda communities in the novel cultivate with their bioregion, which are systematically undermined by processes described in the novel. It is important to keep in mind the difference between an essentialist argument and a historically based argument because the historical approach recognizes that indigenous ecological knowledge as a cultural and historical construct and that its loss is not the loss of essence. What also comes out of this study is that the wound mentioned in the novel is not dramatic, immediate and of big magnitude but slow and continuous. Forests are lost over time, animals are lost over time, and communities are lost over time. This gradual deterioration makes the violence more difficult to spot, but equally devastating. The novel's contribution to the science of ecocide scholarship is exactly this. The form of the gradual unravelling of a tribal ecological world over the course of one protagonist's lifetime is just what makes cumulative, structural ecocide visible and narratable. The novel ultimately challenges our notions of development and progress. Any growth model that is ecologically damaging and displaces communities is not really sustainable. In bringing together ecological, identity, and power issues, this paper has shown that the ecocide framework is more than another label on an already existing strategy, but a set of questions, a

moral dimension, and a structural analysis of the nature of violence which the novel of Devi has been documenting for decades. More importantly, the novel suggests that the indigenous understanding of the world is a one worth paying close attention to — one that might provide a better, more balance, and more humane way to live in harmony with nature, and which destruction is a crime against the nature of human and nonhuman life.

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