

**THE TWO SHADES OF VIVACIOUS NATURE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF  
CHINUA ACHEBE'S THINGS FALL APART AND MAHASWETA DEVI'S  
ARANYER ADHIKAR**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Since the creation of human lives, Mother Nature had been playing an important role. The human psychology and culture both are intensely influenced by her. Especially in some of tribal cultures she is even worshiped since the ancient era. In Postcolonial writings we often come across with the indigenous people and their assimilation with the unpredictable nature. In the novel Things Fall Apart, Achebe represented the vivacious nature what the Europeans called 'dark' or 'darkness'. He established the high cultural value of the Black people while worshipping and interacting with the Dark Nature in solitariness. The entire Igbo community was greatly influenced by Nature. On the other hand Mahasweta Devi depicted the real life of Munda tribes in her novel Aranyer Adhikar. In this novel too, the struggle of this community had been reflected. Nestled amidst the plateau of Chhotonagpur they encountered the colonizers. Their zeal for nativity and fight for forest in order to establish their right made the nature vivacious. The Nature accelerated the Speed of the Arrow and echoed the slogan of 'Ulgulan'. The protagonist of this novel was a gift of the Nature.*

**Keywords:** *Psychology, Influenced, Worshiped, Indigenous, Assimilation, Encountered.*

## INTRODUCTION

Chinua Achebe's novel "Things Fall Apart" depicts the initial interaction between an Igbo village in the Niger region and Christian missionaries and British colonial governors. Achebe presents this narrative predominantly from the perspective of the colonized, albeit using the language of the colonizers. This approach highlights Achebe's purpose and mission as a writer. "What I think a novelist can teach is something very fundamental, namely to indicate to his readers, to put it crudely, that we in Africa did not hear of culture for the first time from the Europeans." (qtd. in Gikandi 24). Consequently, a significant portion of "Things Fall Apart" delves into portraying the lifestyle, customs, traditions, beliefs, and societal norms of the villages of Umuofia and Mbanta prior to the arrival of the white man.

Throughout the novel, Achebe uses different pictures of nature such as the ceremony of the week of peace, yams, night trees and evil forest. These things each symbolize and signifies the good and bad side of nature's character. "Yams the king of crops, was a man's crops." (Achebe, 23). In Igbo society, the quantity of yams grown and harvested is treated as a symbol of wealth and strength. A bountiful yam harvest demonstrates to others that you possess the capability to cultivate numerous yams, signifying wealth and earning respect within the village.

Franz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, had commented: —For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity.(34) In "Things Fall Apart," Chinua Achebe highlights the profound spiritual bond between the Igbos and their natural surroundings, going beyond mere physical presence. Achebe presents nature as a vibrant character in the story, actively interacting with the human figures. The Igbos' inherent reverence for nature is apparent in their everyday actions and mindset, shaped by their environment. Achebe showcases how the Igbos' farming methods, spiritual convictions, celebrations, and overall perspective are closely connected to the natural realm.

Firstly, it is important to note the various individual and community activities that were observed during different seasons among the Igbo people. The Igbo community adhered to strict rules during both planting and harvest seasons, believing that any deviation from the natural order would upset the earth. For instance, it was mandatory to observe the "week of peace" before the initial yam planting, as yam held a sacred significance for the Igbo people. Maintaining peace

within the household and society was believed to keep the earth content, leading to a successful harvest. Therefore, when the protagonist Okonkwo violated the sanctity of the week by being violent towards his wife, he faced severe consequences to atone for his transgression against nature. One of Okonkwo's neighbors admonished him for his actions in this manner: — “You know as well as I do that our forefathers ordained that before we plant any crops in the earth we should observe a week in which a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbor. We live in peace with our fellows to honor our great goddess of the earth without whose blessing our crops will not grow. You have committed a great evil”. (Things Fall Apart. 30) During the week of peace, the Igbo people refrained from working on the land. This tradition reflected their deep respect for nature, which they viewed as a living entity in need of rest before the upcoming year of labor. Following this period of peace, both men and women, alongside the earth itself, busied themselves with planting and cultivating new yams. The New Yam Festival was then celebrated with utmost sincerity, serving as a time to express gratitude to Aní, the earth goddess and the provider of all fertility. Aní played a greater part in the life of the people than any other deity.

The reverence that the Igbos had for their ancestors further demonstrated their deep affection for the land. Their ancestors were seen as integral to the land itself. Achebe describes the community's burial ground to illustrate this connection: “The land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the ancestors. There was coming and going between them . . .” (Achebe, 122)

The deceased members of the community were considered an integral part of the land. To the Igbos, nature held divine significance, with trees, rivers, hills, caves, and other elements of the environment believed to possess sacred powers. Aní represented the goddess of earth and fertility, Amadiora as the god of thunder, Ufiojioku as the god of harvest, and Anyanwu as the sun god. The Igbo people revered the Oracle of Hills and Caves, following its guidance with unwavering dedication. Mentioned was a significant ancient silk-cotton tree deemed sacred, believed to house the spirits of unborn children. Women seeking children would often sit beneath its shade. The Igbos believed in the influence of the divine on human life from birth to beyond death, viewing any disruption of the natural order as a disturbance to the flow of life. Unnatural occurrences like twins, diseases such as smallpox and leprosy, or death by suicide were approached with distinct rituals and practices.

Greg Garrard, a dedicated ecology critic, explores the concept of "indigeneity" in his renowned book *Ecocriticism*, a theme that may be linked to the environmental concerns depicted in Aranyer Adhikar. Garrard expresses his views on the significance of "indigeneity" in the context of environmental issues

"Settler-Indigenous relations were never codified in a treaty; rather, the Indigenous inhabitants were coerced into relinquishing their land without any recompense (154). In fact, the Munda tribes were forced to give up their land in the face of colonialism. In the film "Aranyer Adhikar," indigenous cultures are endangered by colonial influences. The unique identity of the Munda tribes is also at risk due to the violence brought by colonial powers. The British Raj and Dikus aim to disrupt the deep ecological bond between the Munda tribes and the forest. Shawn Wilson expresses his views on this matter.

"Identity for Indigenous peoples is grounded in their relationships with the land, with their ancestors who have returned to the land and with future generations who will come into being on the land" (p.76, 80).

The tribal communities in Chotanagpur heavily rely on the forest for their livelihood. The forest is rich in agate, a valuable stone used for making various items like rail lines, ornaments, necklaces, chains, and statues. Unfortunately, the so-called civilized groups like the British Raj and local Dikus exploit the Adivasi people, including the Kol, Vil, Santhal, Munda, Ho, and Sabar, under the guise of progress. Outsiders come into the forest and take control over everything that belongs to the tribals. These oppressors, often from different castes or countries, dispossess the Munda tribes of their lands, leaving them without access to the resources essential for survival. The indigenous people are marginalized, forced to abandon their homes, water sources, and forests, as their rights are violated. Lisa Udel highlights the shared experience of colonization and exploitation faced by Indigenous communities globally, as they strive for sovereignty and resist colonial oppression. The tribals of Chotanagpur are no exception, fighting against colonial exploitation and striving for self-determination in the face of oppressive local governments. "no one can herd cows and goats in the forest. The tribals are not allowed to collect wood, leaves, honey from the forest (Devi,69)." That is why all the villages evacuate their land. On the contrary, Birsa Munda is brave enough to lead a fight against British Raj, money-lenders, zamindars, missionaries, and brokers. James Wilson opines that many tribes call themselves 'the first people,' 'the original people,' or the 'real people' (Devi, 8).' Likewise, Birsa declares himself

as "Dhoroti Aba" (the father of the earth). Birsa led a rebellion known as Ulgulaan against the colonizers. Unlike the Hul of the Santhals or the Mulki war of the Sardars, Birsa called for a significant uprising with Ulgulaan. To the Munda tribe, Ulgulaan holds the same significance as Hul does to the Santhals. Ulgulaan's fire does not burn the forest; instead, it ignites the hearts and blood of the people. The tribals view the forest as their mother, and by seizing the land, the colonizers have desecrated this sacred bond. Birsa's essence is intertwined with the soil of Chotanagpur, and his blood flows through the Tajene and Kanchi rivers. As the colonizers exploit the forest, his forest mother weeps on the riverbanks. (Devi, 153). Birsa wants to purify his forest mother by burning the fire of Ulgulaan (Devi 17, 18). Birsa declares: Ulgulaan has no end, God has no death (Devi, 28).

The story of Birsa Munda's imprisonment takes on the form of an environmental cautionary tale. In the novel *Aranyer Adhikar*, the idea of ecological catastrophe is depicted as a form of environmental righteousness. The Munda community views Birsa as the protector of the land. Birsa's arrest is believed to have brought a curse upon the village, leading to changes in the weather. According to the narrator of *Aranyer Adhikar*: "Birsa went to jail; since then, there has been no rain for two consecutive years. There is no water in the air; the ground is bursting. There is no dew, even on a winter night. The leaves are drying up. The girls dig holes in the sand of the river hoping for some water. At the end of the night, a little water rises in that hole. In 1897 the crops of Bhadra month got burnt; Rabi crops did not grow" (Devi, 114). In Linda Hogan's novel *People of the Whale* (2008), the act of killing a whale is depicted as being supernaturally connected to moral failings, specifically the colonial oppression of Indigenous peoples (Garrard, 171, 3rd ed.). This connection between the whale's death and the custody of Birsa leads to a supernatural drought. Within the A'atsika tribe, the whale is revered as holy, while the Munda tribes view Birsa as sacred. The disruption of the natural environment in the story results in apocalyptic consequences.

## CONCLUSION:

In the year that Okonkwo took eight hundred seed-yams from Nwakibie, it was considered the worst year in living memory. Everything seemed to be out of sync - events were either happening too early or too late. It felt like the world had gone awry. The initial rains were delayed, and when they finally arrived, they were short-lived. The scorching sun returned with unprecedented intensity, burning away all the greenery that had sprouted with the rains. The

earth felt like hot coals, cooking the yams that had been planted. Okonkwo, a diligent farmer, had started planting with the first rains. He had sown four hundred seeds before the rains ceased and the heat returned. He anxiously scanned the sky for rain clouds all day and stayed awake at night. Returning to his farm in the morning, he saw his struggling crops. Despite his efforts to shield them with sisal leaves, the plants were withering. He replaced the burnt sisal rings daily, hoping for rain to come at night. However, the drought persisted for eight market weeks, ultimately leading to the demise of the yams.

Okonkwo planted the remaining seed-yams once the rains returned. He found some comfort in the fact that the yams he had planted before the drought were his own, from the previous harvest. He still had eight hundred yams from Nwakibie and four hundred from his father's friend. However, the year took a turn for the worse. The rain poured down in violent torrents, causing havoc by washing away the yam heaps, uprooting trees, and creating deep gorges. The rain eventually lessened in intensity, but continued without a break. The usual spell of sunshine that came during the wet season did not appear. Although the yams grew lush green leaves, every farmer knew they needed sunshine to thrive. That year's harvest was dismal, resembling a funeral, and many farmers cried as they unearthed the pitiful, decaying yams. One man even took his own life by hanging himself from a tree branch.

The fate of Okonkwo and the people of Umuofia are determined by the unpredictable nature of the environment. Their agricultural success relies on the essential elements of rain and sun. When drought and subsequent flooding destroy the yam harvest, it leads to a year of scarcity and the looming threat of starvation.

Undoubtedly, the novel Aranyer Adhikar highlights deep concerns about environmental destruction. A significant issue driving Birsa's movement is the threat to the lands of indigenous people. This led Birsa to initiate the Ulgulaan movement against the oppressive British Raj and local Dikus. The struggle of Ulgulaan and the spirit of Birsa seem endless. The Munda tribes aspire to reclaim the entire forest, envisioning a return to its original state. They believe this can only happen without the interference of Mahajan, Dikus, or Saheb. Birsa's words echo this sentiment. "Rights over the forest is the original right of Krishna India. Ever since the white man's land was sleeping under the sea, the black people of Krishna India have known the jungle as their mother (70)."

Birsa could not endow with Munda tribes rice instead of ghato (an indigenous contemptible food), freedom instead of suppression, liberty from captivity, and the right to agricultural land,



home, and forest (112). Nevertheless, Birsa's spirit inspired the Munda tribes to hold their heads high. Birsa was aware that guns are more powerful than arrows. Birsa also knew that not all battles can be judged by success or failure. Even though the Munda tribes lost the war, their struggles continue to exist in human blood, in dispossession, in the songs of black men, in memories, in tasteless food, and in the pale skin of naked Munda children .

This paper is concluded with the note that Postcolonial Eco-criticism can play an important role in the study of present environmental humiliation. This critical school can throw new approach into the western ideas of development which, under the disguise of neocolonialism, has been a cause of global environmental crises. A unbiased view of maturity is the need of the hour and postcolonial ecocriticism can contribute to global justice and sustainability by exploring themes centered on nature and environment across different literary works. This paper focuses the same issues of two different worlds.

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