

Shattered Dream in Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja*

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Abstract

This paper attempts to analyze an amazing picture of the tribal people as known Paraja in the third world countries. They live around the river and ponds of the dense forest. Through the acts of tyranny and atrocity, the moneylenders, exploit their illiteracy and human rights. The unity of Paraja illustrates poverty-ridden Sukru Jani, the protagonist of the novel, Paraja. It portrays the sense of loss and feeling of revenge grown in the tribal people at the end. Though poor and illiterate, he is a giant pillar against the social power system. The novel shows how the moneylender or governor harasses and compels the tribal community. The tribal people innocently fall in the coil of the village landlord agency of the government, because they are not skilled and knowledgeable. They are culturally deprived and exploited by the moneylender in the society.

Keywords: exploitation, tribal people of the society, third world countries, loss and revenge.

Introduction

The population of tribes is always an inspiring area of various writers of third world countries in English literature. Tribes, (*Adivasi*), are known as the most extensive to the tribal people of the third world countries. A 'tribe' is a collection of individuals sharing common culture, a clear linguistic, and well-defined political and cultural boundaries. For ages tribes are considered as a primitive segment of the third world society. Sydney Albert Hornby's *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* defines the word "tribe" as a racial group especially in primitive and nomadic culture, united by language, religion, custom and living as a community under one or more chiefs" (1368). They live in forests and hills without any contact with other civilizations. Weronika in his essay entitled "Into the Wild Woods: The Significance of Trees and Forests in Fantasy Fiction," suggests us to perceive the beauties and imagination of the trees and forests, which are "one of the basic elements in the world of building literature and culture" (39). Jones further highlights the significance of the trees and forests that work like a world of fairy tales which everyone gets "obliged to visit during his or her journey" (39). Furthermore, the poem entitled, *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* written by Robert Frost is a haunting poem that portrays the forest as "a symbol for eternal knowledge" (47). The British Government has

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introduced the system of land ownership and revenue system in the forest for the tribal people and the annual tax is beyond the capacity of tribal cultivators. So, many non-tribal have begun to settle in the tribal areas and offer credit facilities. Initially it provides relief to tribal but gradually the system becomes exploitative. Over the years the tribal population has faced all types of exploitation.

Portrayal of the Issue

Tribes are known for their suffering and deprivations. The people of forests are exploited by the so called mainstream people or non-tribal in different ways. They are cheated by the moneylenders and the police officials. They become a goti (*Mohara*) or bonded labour to the moneylenders. They have a natural horror of the law and police. It makes their job easy. It is easy to exploit the hill people because they do not know their rights and laws. In *Paraja*, as Safvan mentions that “the exploiter who is outwardly a non-tribal moneylender is in reality the entire ethos of a materialistic civilization seeking to encroach upon and engulf a primordial and elemental way of life” (2). Exploitation is like a spider’s web and it is not possible to come out of web easily. The poor tribe can only fight against their fate. In the same fashion, Mulk Raj Anand mentions that “they can do nothing but accept their faith and fate” (155). So, it is time to propagate the need of education in the hill to know their rights, justice and laws which will help them live like human beings in their own huts in the hill.

Gopinath Mohanty is an eminent Oriya novelist of the mid-twentieth century. He has won the central Sahitya Academy Award in 1974 for his prose-epic, *Matimatala (The Fertile Soil)*, 1964). In his fiction Gopinath Mohanty explores all aspects of the life of Orissa people, especially “the life of plains and of hills” (17). He evolves an unripe prose style, lyrical in style, choosing words and phrases from “the day-to-day speech of ordinary men and women” (21). Bikram K. Das has translated Mohanty’s award winning Oriya novel *Paraja* (1945) into English and it has documented “the life, customs, culture, festivals, songs and dances of the Paraja tribe”(52) of the Koraput region of Orissa as well as their poverty, struggles, deprivation and exploitation by the non-tribal.

The aims and objectives of this research highlight the discrimination and exploitation of the Paraja tribe in terms of money. Most often, the word exploitation is used to refer to economic exploitation, that is, the act of using another person’s labour without offering them an adequate compensation. It is mentioned in the research that *Paraja* is the story of exploitation. According to Raj Kumar, the novel *Paraja* delineates “the predicament of a tribal community today and the varieties of exploitation that the tribal belonging to it have to suffer” (1). They know exploitation as old as the strong and silent hills around their village. The moneylenders have different ways to make the tribesmen into a goti, (or *Mohara*) a bonded labour. According to the office of the research-innocent, UNICEF shows that “bonded labour is an abuse analogous to slavery in which individuals are pledged to

work either for a money lender or a landlord to repay a debt or loan” (71). In this novel Gopinath Mohanty illustrates how the tribesmen borrow loan from the Sahukar, a term referred to the moneylenders, for marriage or to give bride price, and for grains during the month of the rainy season and become a goti (or *Mohara*). The poor tribal would mortgage their land and the Sahukar become the master of their land, their bodies and souls too. The protagonist of the novel Sukru Jani and his two sons Mandia and Tikra become goti due to the exploitation of the non-tribal such as the Forest Guard, and the Sahukar, and also they are exploited by the officials in the court. Everyone has exploited the poor hill people in the different ways. Their dream they build around their family shatters and ruins.

A frequent reason for the tribesmen to seek loan from the Sahukar is that their peculiar marriage customs. A young man must pay Jholla or bride-price to the girl’s father. No marriage is solemnized unless the bride-price has first been given. In order to pay this huge amount of three to four score rupees, they received the loan from the Sahukar. If they are unable to repay the money, they become a goti (or *Mohara*). They will lose their freedom, soul, body and everything when they become a goti.

The gotis never argue with the Sahukar because their spirit has been crushed by the life of a debt-bounded slave. They used to do their duties with bowed heads and downcast eyes obsessed with their own suffering. Sukru Jain and his family is the victim of the exploitation in the novel. He weaves a beautiful dream about his family. But everything shattered due to the cunningness of the Forest Guard. He has got the permission from him to clear the forest, as he is the authority of the forest. When he is not interested in sending his daughter Jili to him to quench his lust, he takes vengeance over him by charging fine on him. To pay the fine he borrows money from the Sahukar and become a goti. Earlier they are the king of the forest, but now they are strangers in the forest. They become an outsider in their own place.

In Chapter thirty two, Gopinath Mohanty brings up the horrific practice of the bonded labour. As they are illiterate, they do not know the calculation done by the Sahukar in their big ledger book. They simply put their thumb impression wherever the Sahukar say. When the liquor shops are forced to close by the government, the money lenders have started the general merchandise shop. Through this shop they lend grains to the tribes and collect it back at the time of harvest.

The following story tells how the tribes are exploited by the moneylenders and become a goti to them. One day one poor Paraja has gone to the Sahukar to borrow one putti (measurement) of mandia (a sort of grain used to prepare gruel). The Shukar has given the mandia to him but has made him to tell all four of his family members such as the clerk, his wife and his savant that he has taken one putti of mandia. He charged fifty percent interest for one putti of mandia. After one year the tribe has come back to give his debt of one and a half putti of mandia with interest. But the Sahukar furiously shouted at

him saying that he has taken four puttis of mandia and interest of that is two puttis and the mandia he has brought is not enough for the interest. The thing is that the tribesman is cheated by the Sahukar by entering the grain borrowed by the tribesman in four different ledgers and charged interest for four times. The poor crime cannot understand anything. He keeps on saying that he has taken only one putti of mandia. Finally, the Sahukar calculated the money and made him as his goti. Furthermore, Amiya Bhushan Sharma quotes that “the Paraja never complains and goes against the law” (14). They accept their fate silently. Like this, there are number of stories which tell us how these peoples are exploited in terms of their poverty by the non-tribesmen. The police and other officials become mute towards the Sahukar for his gifts. The tribesmen only scold their fate as: “The great ones of the earth are unconcerned about the opinions that such insignificant folk hold about them. Their eyes see only the ashes remaining from the holocaust that they themselves have caused, but not the fire that smolders underneath and the fire feeds on itself and waits” (127). Silently and patiently, the tribal community tolerates the atrocity and injustice of the non-tribal people in their own society.

Not only the men but also the women of the tribal community are exploited by the non-tribal. The erosion and exploitation of the Paraja by the outsiders is evident in the migration of Jili and Vili, the daughters of Sukru Jani, as labourers at a road construction site. For the highway road project the men from outside have gathered men and women from the hill for the work. The supervisor of the project misused the girls for his lust. Jili and Vili become the victims for his lust.

The Sahukar finds a new method to exploit the tribal people. He has grabbed Sukru Jani’s rice –land, the fertile land of his ancestors which has become his prized heritage. He has an eye on that land earlier. Sukru Jani mortgages the land to release himself from the Sahukar and to bring back his daughters from the highway project, because the Paraja girls should work for their father and their husband. The Sahukar has decided to grow orange trees in the land. The tribal never go after money. They used to cultivate the edible one which would satisfy their food problem. The non-tribal who occupies the hill has stared cultivating money crops. It will spoil the soil and life of the land, but these do not bother the Sahukar. He has given a ‘moving’ speech in front of the hill folks to make himself as a well-wisher of the poor tribesmen as,

I have taken some land in this village on mortgage and I intend to have an orchard. I shall set up my warehouse here and give loans of paddy and mandia to the villagers to help them in their need. And I shall also give them loans and engage many labourers. I shall lay roads inside the village and ask my labourers to dig a tank so that there will be enough drinking water for everybody. You will see how I change the face of the village. (253).

In this manner, the Sahukar persuades the tribes to mortgage their land for loan to him. Eventually, the Sahukar becomes the master of tribal's land.

Mandia and Tikra distill liquor secretly to earn money to release their land from the Sahukar. Along with the elders of the village Sukru Jani and his sons have gone to meet the Sahukar to release their land. The Sahukar does not show any interest to give back the land. He cheats them by referring to the oral agreement according to which the land has been mortgaged to the Sahukar for thirty years. He said how much money he has spent for the land and tells the terms of the agreement as, "Sukru Jani, were my gotis, and he mortgaged his land to me for thirty years and got himself released and came here. And told me: "enjoy my land for as long as you wish, even beyond the third years; only write off a part of my debt each year" (337). But earlier the agreement goes, "Sukru Jani would be released but his son would remain with the Sahukar. The land could be redeemed if Sukru Jani paid twenty five rupees to the Sahukar, until then it was his" (233). There is no written agreement. It is all done by word of mouth, tribal fashion. Sukru Jani calls on Dharmu, the Just One, and the Earth goddess Dharatini to be his witness. By tribal custom, Sukru Jani is released from the goti at the very moment the agreement has made and indeed the land has passed into the Sahukar's hands. The illiteracy of the tribal makes them the victims of exploitation.

Apart from the struggles and sufferings, Sukru Jani and his sons are exploited by the court officials also when they approach them to file a case against the Sahukar to get their land back. They become confused and surprised by seeing the throng of people in the court. The three of them, Sukru Jani and his sons, merely stand there, with staring eyes and mouths agape. They approach the writer who has taken the bananas and the eggs, the gifts which they have brought to give the magistrate. The writer takes the opportunity to exploit the poor tribesmen of the hill. He asks, "The paper will cost you two rupees, plus five rupees for the stamp that has to be fixed to your petition; I shall give you details of the other costs when the time comes" (346). The tribal people are like the central figure for their Sahukar or the local governance in their community.

The magistrate has given the hearing date on the sixth day of the coming month. But the writer and his friend the Pujari along with the Sahukar exploited the poor Paraja as they do not know anything about the day and date. They give wrong date to Sukru Jani by saying that the date falls on the Sixth Tuesday from today. They told him that count five Tuesday in between and come on the Tuesday following, and remember to bring his witnesses. After chains of Tuesdays have passed, they reached the court, but no one has come there including the writers and the Pujari. Sukru Jani understands that both the writer

and the Pujari have cheated them by taking bribe money from the Sahukar. When he asks him the writer shouts at him as, “Go you idiot! If you make trouble, I will drag you to the magistrate and then you will see! What fools these people from the hills are! You explain something to them ten times, and they still don’t understand. Then they come and blame you!” (366). The tribal people cannot understand anything. Eventually they accept their poor condition. They blame their own fate and faith.

There is a saying which tells that if an innocent takes up his courage, it is impossible for anyone to stand in front of him. Sukru Jani and his sons decide to meet the Sahukar again to settle down the matter of land in any way. They fall at his feet and weep to make the stone melt. But the stone hearted Sahukar never shows any courtesy to them. He is very stubborn. He roars like a rage, kicking them away and roaring like a beast. He says, “I shall drive you from court to court through the length of the country. I shall make you sweat out your lives as gotis, and I shall rub your noses in the dust. If I don’t, my name is not Ramachandra Bisoi!”(372). By hearing this something explodes inside the heads of the Paraja, their eyes glaze, and they tremble all over. Mandia Jani moves forward with a roar like a wild beast. Within a flash he has raised his axe and has brought it down on the Sahukar’s head. Immediately the other two have joined in. The Sahukar falls like an axed tree and Mandia goes on dealing blow after blow, shouting: “You don’t enjoy the land! You don’t enjoy the land,” (373). Then they have realized the seriousness of the crime. That afternoon they have gone to the police station to surrender themselves. This is the end of the poor Paraja, the ancestor of the land, our ancient ancestor.

Conclusion

This is the sad end of a Paraja tribe. One must understand that it is not possible to cheat or ill-treat one for long. One day or the other he/she will show his/her real colour and that will end in a cruel manner, like that of the Sahukar. The novel, *Paraja* suggests such a tragic grandeur of the life of the Paraja. It portrays both the decay and destruction of the family of Sukru Jani whose life is ceased slowly by modernization that spreads in the hills. The exploitation of man by man becomes a cosmic tragedy of blighted happiness and shattered dreams. How many dreams are shattered in this novel, dream of Sukru Jani, Manida, Jili, Sahukar and money-lender! In *Paraja* no one wins. Finally everyone is defeated by the fate and faith. Mahasweta Devi remarks that “atrocities and injustices are justified when the tribal people are oppressed in the society” (75). Gopinath Mohanty wants to present social awareness about the oppression and abuse of the Paraja (the tribal people). The novel depicts the agony of the tribal people to the society. They need special attention to avoid exploitation. They should first specifically strengthen their sense of self and inner capacity to fight against the tyranny and injustice of the society. Education is the only solution to eradicate new policy measures to prevent them from discrimination and exploitation in our society.

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