



Intersection of Gender, Class, Ethnicity and the Anthropocene in Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja*

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Abstract: Ecocriticism as a critical practice emerged in the European and American literary domains in the 1990s. However, much earlier than this many writers had used this device unconsciously in their creation. One such creative head is Gopinath Mohanty, Winner of the first ever Sahitya Akademi Award (1955) for his novel, *Amrutara Santana* (1947) Born on April 20, 1914, in Nagabali, Cuttack. He joined the Odisha Administrative Service in 1938 and retired from the service in 1969. During his early posting in the Koraput District as an administrator, he came in close contact with the tribals ('Kondh' and 'Paraja' primarily) and took a special interest in learning their languages and life-style. Some of his major creative works of this time deal with tribal life and society. The paper will deal with Mohanty Gopinath's *Paraja* (1987), initially written in Odia by Gopinath Mohanty and translated to English by Bikram K Das in the year 1987. The novel accounts for the innocent Paraja tribe people living magnanimously with nature. The protagonist of this novel is Sukru Jani who has four children, two girls and two boys. This paper will dissect the intersection of gender, class and ethnicity in the story. This paper will primarily emphasize on climate change and its aftermath resulting in strong suffering for the Paraja community especially to Sukru Jani and his family. Keeping in view the dominance of haves over the have nots which ultimately resulted in mass hazards in the means of exploitation of women of the community, the Anthropocene attitude which eventually led to a famine resulting in food scarcity which in addition aggravated to community turmoil by showing the social hierarchy between the Sahukar, forest guard, village head and the poor Sukru Jani. In a nutshell this paper will cover and discuss the overall dimension of Ecocriticism via the tale of gender issues, class struggle, identity crisis and the Anthropocene for which there is huge impact and change in the geography of Sarsupadar (setting of the novel) along with the changes in the life of Sukru Jani who is the representative of the entire Paraja ethnic.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Magnanimous, Anthropocene, Ethnicity, Gender, Class struggle

I. INTRODUCTION

Born on April 20, 1914, in Nagabali, Cuttack, Gopinath Mohanty held an M.A. degree in English literature with a brilliant academic career all through. He joined the Odisha Administrative Service in 1938 and retired from the service in 1969. During his early posting in the Koraput District as an administrator, he came in close contact with the tribals ('Kondh' and 'Paraja' primarily) and took a special interest in learning their languages and life-style. Some of his major creative works of this time deal with the tribal life and society. It is amazing that such a magnum opus *Paraja* had been completed when Gopinath was barely twenty-nine; and four years later, his monumental novel, *Amrutara Santana* (1947) was created. His serious literary activities that began in 1934 spanned over fifty-five years. Gopinath's creations in print include twenty four novels, twelve collections of short stories, one anthology of poems; two biographies in Odia, one auto-biography; three plays; two critical essays; five books on tribal language and culture; seven translations into Odia (including his Soviet Land Nehru Award winning translation of Gorky's *My Universities* (1923) Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1868) and Tagore's *Jogajog* (1929) one biography in English, as well as a number of scholarly essays relating to old palm-leaf manuscripts of Odia Mahabharata. Mohanty Gopinath's *Paraja* Oxford University Press, 1987 a novel was written originally in Odia in 1945 and later translated into English by Bikram K Das in 1987. The writer in his acknowledgement writes that he is "deeply indebted to Dr Bikram K Das, Professor of English in the SEAMO Regional Language Centre, Singapore, for translating "*Paraja*", as none of his fiction had ever before appeared in English. The English version of *Paraja* has received wide reviews from the press in England and in India. The translator Bikram Kumar Das writes that no translation can capture the varied riches of Gopinath Mohanty's Odia prose vigorously colloquial and forthright at one moment and sublimely effervescent and lyrical at the next. This sad tale about the life of the aboriginal Paraja tribe of Koraput, Odisha is the story of many such tribes who live secluded lives. Bikram Das, the translator labels it as a sociological and anthropological documentation, and its sociological, philosophical concerns that are dealt with in *Paraja* are contemporary even though the novel was written way back in 1945. "The choice of the tribal canvas ... becomes singularly appropriate to Mohanty's theme: the primeval consciousness of his tribal protagonists reflects perfectly the situation of the archetypal human being ..." In the citation of the Jnanpith Award, it was said: "in Mohanty's hands, the social is lifted to the level of the metaphysical". Though a pessimistic novel, yet the pathos highlights existence, innocence, human endurance, and the will to wage war against a hostile world. Life is celebrated through dances and

songs, festivals and rituals, marriages and relationships. Mohanty belongs to a generation of writers to whom social commitment comes spontaneously. *Paraja*, like all his other novels, is born out of passionate social consideration, verging on anger. At a basic level, his work has to be interpreted as an indictment of social oppression and abuse. Among his novels, *Dadi Budha* (1944), *Paraja* (1945) and *Amrutara Santana* are remarkable for their portrayal of tribal life in the densely wooded hills and forests of the Eastern Ghats.

II. ECOCRITICISM

Ecocriticism emerged in the 1960s with the start of the environmental movement and the publication of *Carson Rachel's Silent Spring*, (1962). Ecocriticism is the interdisciplinary study of the connections between literature and the environment. Ecocriticism is a rapidly emerging field of literary study that considers the relationship that human beings have to the environment. As Cheryll Glotfelty noted in the Introduction to Glotfelty Cheryll's & Fromm Harold's *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) "Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts" (Glotfelty viii) Environmental critics explore how nature and the natural world are imagined through literary texts. As with changing perceptions of gender, such literary representations are not only generated by particular cultures, they play a significant role in generating those cultures. Thus, if we wish to understand our contemporary attitude toward the environment, its literary history is an excellent place to start. While authors such as Thoreau and Wordsworth may first come to mind in this context, literary responses to environmental concerns are as old as the issues themselves. Deforestation, air pollution, endangered species, wetland loss, animal rights, and rampant consumerism have all been appearing as controversial issues in Western literature for hundreds, and in some cases, thousands of years. It draws on contributions from natural scientists, writers, literary critics, anthropologists and historians in examining the differences between nature and its cultural construction. Ecocriticism emerged in the 1960s with the start of the environmental movement and the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, but really began to take off in the 1980s.

So far, there have been two waves of ecocriticism: the first in the 1980s and the second in the 1990s. The first wave emphasized writing about nature as both a field of study and as a meaningful practice. It maintained the distinction between human and nature, but promoted the value of nature and the need to speak and stand up for nature. People believed it was the duty of the humanities and the natural sciences together to raise awareness and come up with solutions for the environmental and climate crisis. The second wave expanded upon the first, broadening the reaches of environmentalism. Ecocritics of this wave redefined the term environment to include both nature and urban areas and challenged the distinctions between human and non-human and nature and non-nature. This wave also led to the ecojustice movement by examining the way that the poorest and most oppressed members of a population fall victim to the most adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation. Different types of ecocriticism include: pastoral, wilderness and ecofeminism. Pastoral Eco criticism: found primarily in British and American literature, focuses on the disjunction between urban and rural life, often idealizing nature and rural life and demonizing urban life. There are three branches of pastoral ecocriticism: classical, romantic and American. Classical is characterized by nostalgia and nature as a place for human relaxation and reflection. Romantic is characterized by portraying rural independence as desirable. American emphasizes agrarianism and represents land as a resource to be cultivated. Ecofeminism: analyses the connection between the domination of women and the domination of nature, usually by men. It draws parallels between women and nature, which is often seen as feminine, fertile and the property of men. Its name was coined by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974. Ecofeminism uses the basic feminist tenets of equality between genders, a revaluing of non-patriarchal or nonlinear structures, and a view of the world that respects organic processes, holistic connections, and the merits of intuition and collaboration. To these notions ecofeminism adds both a commitment to the environment and an awareness of the associations made between women and nature. Specifically, this philosophy emphasizes the ways both nature and women are treated by patriarchal (or male-centred) society. Ecofeminists examine the effect of gender categories in order to demonstrate the ways in which social norms exert unjust dominance over women and nature. There are two branches of ecofeminism: Radical: This branch is often called radical ecofeminism because it reverses the domination of men over women and nature. Radical ecofeminism builds on the assertion of early ecofeminists that one must study patriarchal domination with an eye toward ending the associations between women and nature. Of particular interest to those theorists is the ways in which both women and nature have been associated with negative or commodifiable attributes while men have been seen as capable of establishing order. That division of characteristics encourages the exploitation of women and nature for cheap labour and resources. Cultural: The second branch of ecofeminism contradicts the first, arguing that Cultural ecofeminists, on the other hand, encourage an association between women and the environment. They contend that women have a more intimate relationship with nature because of their gender roles

III. ANTHROPOCENE

'The Anthropocene' is a term coined by Eugene Stormer in the 1980s and popularized by Paul Crutzen in the 2000s refers to a new geological epoch in which human actions have irreparably affected the planet: one in which humans have become the dominant force shaping Earth's bio-geophysical composition and processes. Human as the centre of earth or the age of human. The Anthropocene has been widely adopted across academia as a catch-all description of the overwhelming impact of human activity on the planet. Its key markers include climate change and its consequences (e.g. sea level rise), the effects of plastic pollution on marine and terrestrial processes, unprecedented rates of biodiversity loss and extinction, and the changing chemical composition of soils, oceans, and the atmosphere. Academic interest in the Anthropocene has been paralleled by a growing awareness of its existence in the public sphere. For example, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) dedicated an entire journal issue to the Anthropocene (UNESCO 2018), while many of the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Sustainable Development Goals (2016-present) are built around key Anthropogenic concerns, such as global emissions, ecosystem damage, and overreliance on fossil fuels. This exploitation of environment is clearly seen in Mohanty Gopinath's *Paraja*. Anthropocene is utterly visible throughout the novel as there is always the forest guard a human in the village who controls and corrodes the forest for his own betterment. Productions such as Edward Burtynsky's film *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch* (2018) are drawing public attention to both the term and the challenges that it poses in the contemporary world. The Anthropocene has thus become a 'charismatic mega-concept' (Turpin and Davis 6) that bridges the natural and the social sciences, and academia and the public realm, igniting heated debates across all of them.

As far as this paper is concerned; this paper aims to intersect gender, class, ethnicity and the Anthropocene in Mohanty Gopinath's *Paraja* Oxford University Press, 1987. Much research and discourse had been done on Mohanty Gopinath's *Paraja* Oxford University Press, 1987 as a tribal novel that too to a minimal limit of social magnum but in this paper, I have elaborated *Paraja* in a broader spectrum as an ecofeminism, green criminology, here "green" means the wild areas of the world which humans' harness and which mandates a duty towards its protection and green crime refers to the exploitation and neglect of the vulnerable green areas of the world" (Das 38). Marxism and sociological work of literature henceforth below an attempt has been made to elucidate the same to present the sharp ideas and teachings as a fable to bring forward ecological, sociological, Marxian and gender awareness to foster green and clean attitude for a better and breathing environment thus a sustainable society. *Paraja* the novel consists one hundred and fourteen chapters which describes a complete cycle of one year from the present winter to the next year's winter is a tragic tale of the ruptured life of a tribal family, of its failed endeavours at betterment of living. It is a circumstantial tragedy that is generated by the insider's conspiracy of events. It is seen that it is the insiders only who exploited the insiders. This paper focuses on the way the tribal communities assert their selves and express the way of disagreement towards the hegemonic tyranny the modernity and the various forms of pseudo-modern institutions such as court, policing, and government have inflicted upon them. Although Gopinath has tried his hand at various literary forms, it is for this novel that he will be best remembered. "Fiction, I realized, would best suit my purpose" he once said in an interview to Indian Literary Review. He uses the novel to portray and interpret several dimensions of human existence. He draws the material for his writing from his rich experience and transforms it imaginatively into a powerful image of life. In *Paraja* the exploiter who is outwardly a non-tribal moneylender representative of the "Haves" is in reality the entire ethos of a materialistic civilization seeking to encroach upon and engulf a primordial and elemental way of life. *Paraja* is a faithful record of the beliefs, manners, rituals and customs of the Paraja tribe and also a moving narrative of hopes and fears of hopeless tribes' representatives of the "Have Nots" who are untouched by urban and modern ways of living and thinking. The Adivasis were shy of the outside world and avoided interacting with people from the mainstream. This attitude of the Adivasi put them at a disadvantage and the migrants who had usurped the forest and occupied their land were now the landlords or the *jenmi/Sahukar*, who employed the Adivasi in their lands for meagre wages (Das 3). The setting of *Paraja* is a small village, Sarsupadar, of Koraput District in the tribal belts of the Eastern Ghats of Odisha.

The village is inhabited by the Paraja and the Domb tribes. The plot of the novel is perceived against the exploitation of petty government officials and money-lenders in the context of colonial Odisha. Sukru Jani is with two sons and two daughters. The local forest guard asks Sukru Jani to send one of his daughters to him for a night for sexual advances. When Sukru Jani refuses to do so, the forest guard, out of anger, imposes a heavy fine on him for illegal felling of trees for which Sukru had earlier got the permission from the forest guard but not in written rather verbally. "The benign practice of sustainable use of the forest was illegal and the ecologically destructive activities like felling Sal, teak, and deodar to build seats and rail tracks were considered legal (Das 45). Further the guard imposes fine on his son on charges of brewing illicit liquor. To pay the fine, Sukru Jani and his two sons borrow money from the local money-lender the Sahukar and work as bonded labourers for some years. The money-lender dupes the poor tribals, appropriates their land and keeps one of the daughters of Sukru Jani as his concubine. When Sukru Jani and his sons discover that the money-lender is in no mood to return the land they had hypothecated, they kill him with an axe and surrender themselves to the local police. *Paraja* thus ends with a tragic note this scene traces the elements of gender politics, green criminology, class division the hierarchy and exploitation.

IV. GENDER

The women in the novel look always leaving a mark of dissent against the mainstream notions of life. They are always extremely dedicated for work that is why the main criteria for a good woman among Parajas were nothing like dowry, beauty, etc. but hard work. This is exemplified in *Kajodi* the promised girl to Mandia whose hard work and consistency in the fields made Sukru to agree with him in hurry. The notion of this ideal woman among tribal people is evident in the words of Jili “I am not like one of those lazy women from the plains who do not work and only cat and sit at home” (Mohanty 78). From the time Mandia had been arrested for distilling liquor “illegally” Jili was the head of the family. She was the main source of income. She had to go out into the jungle each day and collect edible roots. It is very notable that once she along with Bili realized the miserable and desolate condition of the family she felt no going to dance and playing. This shows the stark change in their lifestyle. The imagination and aspiration of the female characters can be always summoned in a totality of immersing in the edifice of struggle to life and disagreement with the mainstream notions of womanhood which is way much modern in real terms. Paraja girls along with the boys may not have sexual innocence. The dormitories of dhangdas and dhangdis (young adivasi boys and girls) are their socially sanctioned springboards of sexual freedom. But for them sexual trade is unthinkable which was sought by Sahukar. Although Frustration and famine led to theft of rains brought forward severe food scarcity eat away Jili’s spirit and the happy-go-lucky sparkling girl crumples up with fitful gloom and real fear ‘thinking of nothing except her loneliness. She felt herself growing old without having received anything from life. She had gathered nothing, saved nothing and there was no one to call her own’ Nothing shakes one’s worldview more than the experience of a natural disaster. Disaster by definition is conceived of as a rupture or inversion of the moment of disjuncture when nature topples what we see as the natural order of human dominance. The natural environment that sustains human populations appears to rebel against us, wreaking havoc on our lives and throwing into question our very identities, as disaster reconfigures suddenly and brutally the lifelong relationships that we have fostered with other people and the places we inhabit. Replenishing rains that nourish lives and livelihoods suddenly transform, into raging torrents of destruction that erase the signs of human dominance from the landscape (Anderson1). This is strikingly same what happened in *Paraja* of vast climate change which eventually resulted in hopelessness and disparity in the lives of Paraja and in addition due to the famine the geography of the village got changed to a greater extent. But she refuses to go down and try to find a job in her own way. Again, the traumatic condition of Jili as she was helplessly trapped in when Kau paraja told Sukru about her going to Sahukar then Sukru the father out of anger told her to not show her face again. All doors are closed to Jili in this critical condition where she had been compelled to do and obey the order of Sahukar. This pathetic state of Jili whose mother is no more to console her reflects the patriarchal hegemony existed among tribal people. This is evident how the female of the Paraja ethnic undergo chronic suffering and absolute isolation from the mainstream. So far Jili, she had seen her relationship with Sahukar through a romantic haze, but now she is compelled to see it in the harsh light of necessity. Though the whole affair was sordid and ugly she found no choice but to go back to him and beg him to let her have a place at his feet. The extreme agony felt at aversion got from others can be seen reflecting in her words when she says she came of her own when head man asked her how did she came here. The choice of the tribal canvas, whether by chance or choice, becomes singularly appropriate to Mohanty’s theme: the primeval consciousness of the tribal protagonists reflects perfectly the situation of the archetypal human being; their stark joys and interwoven anguish embody the complexity of the human condition.

The extreme sort of dissent is vivid when we find that the contrast between natural and man-made calamity is glaring Sukru Jani’s wife, Sombari, was dragged away one day by a man-eating tiger while she was collecting dry twigs in the forest. Though Sukru Jani suffers out of this bitter tragedy, for him this event is comprehensive since it is part of life. What he cannot comprehend is the infinitely convoluted process by which he and his children are transformed from freemen into gotis or serfs, bound to the Sahukar forever as the society in the name of modernization is now ultimately controlled and driven by someone more having and powerful the haves over the less having class rather not having the have nots of society. Almost all the characters especially the female characters and the young characters in *Paraja* vehemently show their dissent through various ways of expression. Mohanty considerably gives an account of Tribal women’s dual oppression on account of gender and tribal as well as other discriminated situations of womanhood. *Paraja* explores the female subjugation and subordination in a great way along with dealing with repeatedly discussed issues related to women such as of rape, sexual assaults, physical violence at work place and etc. Mohanty exposes gender problems both outside and inside the community of *Paraja* and talks about the wretched condition of women and their dissent against the imposed notions of womanhood among them. Thus, novel gives a thorough picture of the tribal women’s life and their fight for their entity as an evitable part of the society or the community’s. It is well evident that she was still having a pulling feeling to go and to be with his father and brothers because even when Sahukar outstretched to embrace her after the talk between head man and him, she was lost in her own thoughts of going with his father and brothers.

V. ETHNICITY

The songs and dance shape the life of the *Parajas* which has been entangled with miseries and hardships. The songs acted for them something special. Unlike the modern musical shows their gathering and dancing in the intoxication of the night – in a way- was a way of asserting their identity and raising the voice of not conquering in front of others. This dance which is the expression of the untainted affinity towards the way of life they are leading is confined in the totality of the joy they show during these songs. Instead of being passive or submissive towards the shackles made by the police or the forest guard or by some colonial representatives, the tribal life seems to be full of fever of activity this presents a vivid description of the Paraja ethnic. The novel is rich in ethnographic detail as the novelist minutely records the rituals, beliefs, ceremonies and tribal wisdom regarding the eco-system and the landscape. The novelist presents a comprehensive account of the numerous activities of the Paraja starting from one winter to another winter spanning a full year. An important event in the novel is the hunt during the spring festival. All the able-bodied men of the village proceed on a hunting expedition which continues for two or three days. ‘The men would go out into the jungle, prepared to face the taunts of their woman if they returned empty – handed.... success was greeted with garlands and dancing and rejoicing (Mohanty 159). The hunting expedition is metaphoric too as Mandia and Bagala set out not just to hunt an animal but also their mate. It is Bagala who captures Kajodi and runs away into the jungle and exercise the ancient Paraja right of marriage by capture. The tale of these tribals is a sad one but it has great charm. Gopinath Mohanty’s attempt is highly successful in depicting the lifestyle, culture, manners and customs of the tribal people belonging to the Paraja tribe of Odisha.

VI. CONCLUSION

Paraja, (1987) communicates the agony of the tribals, of marginalized Paraja community people of the Koraput district of Odisha. It is a unique story which narrates the angst and suffering of the tribal people of Paraja community in Koraput and subtly exposes the wicked deeds of miss utilizing the power of government officials who captured the land of Sukru Jani, protagonist of the novel by conspiracy and reduced them to poor bonded labourers known as gotis. This paper's outcome is it traced and dissected the intersection of elements of ecocriticism, ecofeminism, class division which traces Marxism, ethnicity of Paraja's and the Anthropocene where human controls the nature and eventually this invited massive climatic change in scarcity of rain which gifted a famine further diminishing the geography of the place and lives of its dweller Parajas in the novel *Paraja*. The story entails the misery of Parajas in detailed by side the major exploitation of nature by clearing the forests for material gain, gender discrimination as tribals were exploited from all means. Things get more complicated when the elder daughter, Jili, becomes the mistress of the same Sahukar who had snatched their land, cheated, exploited and tortured her father and brothers. Sukru Jani and his sons appeal once more to the Sahukar to return their land, but when their humble submission is met with abuses, they lose their head and kill the Sahukar. In the end, nobody wins (Hazam 2). In brief the study highlighted the attitude of outsiders who with the help of insiders polluted the lives and at last raged with anger it was a great scene of massacre which gifted only mass loss by all means.

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