

Literary Accounts: A Humanized Space of 'Red Corridor'

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Abstract: *The present research paper portrays the innocent tribals who are leading a contented and peaceful life in spite of the grinding poverty that compels them to fall prey to the exploitation by the authorities or the money-lender. They have more values than the civilized ones. The nexus between Government officials and the middle men has no concern for the well-being of the tribals, nor they have any respect for their culture or values. They just misuse these helpless people for their own vested interests. These people are left with no other choice but to stand up for themselves against the oppressors.*

Keywords: *Tribal, Government, Exploitation, Development, Mohanty.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Paraja, a novel written in 1945 by Gopinath Mohanty, portrays the Parajas' spirit of irrepressible struggle against the hostile environment. It is a pathetic tale of a miserable and helpless Paraja, Sukru Jani of Sarsupadar village of Odisha. He serves as an epitome-cum-microcosm of all the tribal people. He lives in extreme poverty which is not unusual or rare. Everybody is used to it. There are only few things which he possessed, a small hut without windows, divided into three portions, some utensils, a few clothes and a piece of land. His needs are simple and minimal like all the other tribals. All what he has is some mandia flour, a loin cloth and the shelter under the open sky. The material certainty of life is being missed as "their natural simplicity and honesty had been corroded by a lifetime of fear and insecurity" (Mohanty 35).

2. ANALYSIS:

All the society exhibits a clamour for an existential space. They claim for a space which is attached to their primitivism. They need a HOME to dwell with, to go outside and to return to. But the debacle they have faced in recent times is beyond human understanding in normal terms. As all their tradition and culture is on the verge of extinction. Their value system starts disintegrating as soon as the intrusion of self-proclaimed modernist and cultured outsiders happens there. Their lands have been illegally taken away from them by the non-tribals with the support of the Government officials although there is a law which "forbade anyone who was not himself a tribal to buy tribal land" (194). The land that the Shahukar has snatched away from the Kondhs, is taken away from him and is reinstated back to them. This fumes the Shahukar and he, with the help of the Revenue Inspector, wins over the tax collector. He gets the village headman changed as the headman only has the record of the lands. B.R. Prasad Reddy also asserts that for the tribals, their "land becomes the primordial source of exploitation" (27).

There is no written record of anything. The tribals believe that all their lands belong to the headman. They "believed that all their lands were a gift from the headman" (Mohanty 196). The entire documents were manipulated to exhibit that the lands actually belonged to the Shahukar, not to the Kondhs. The Shahukar's name was put in the records as the legal owner and "no court of law could have questioned his ownership now" (197). This is the situation not only of one village but nearly all the tribal villages. Elaborating on the condition of tribals in Odisha, Kiran Dungdung and B. K. Patnaik state that "It seems that neither the government nor civil society organizations exist in our study area to take care of tribal well-being, so people are left to their own devices" (107).

Much similar to AFSPA Act, Forest Law is used, misused and abused in tribal areas by Govt officials. The forest Guard also is an outlaw and offends the law quite frequently. He has been appointed by the Government only to look after the forests, but he roams in their villages as if it is his own territory. The tribals are ignorant. They do not know that it is a

serious crime to fell the trees and burn them down. But the Forest Guard knows it very well. Still for the sake of some offerings from the tribals in exchange of his favours, he permits them to cultivate the land. For his acts of benevolence he could ask for anything in return from them. "I have given what you wanted, old man; next time I come back, will you give me what I shall ask" (Mohanty 21). He roams around like a king with lustful eyes on the young girls whom he considers only a commodity. The tribals cannot afford to annoy him, "when they ask us for something, it has to be produced- even if it's our wives and daughters or else they'd have us all in handcuffs on some excuse or another in no time at all" (30). When the tribals show some disobedience, then he shows his true colours and takes vengeance from them as it happens with Sukru Jani. Dhepu Chalan, a tribal often chants these lines:

The Forest Guard's the rider,

The tribesman is the horse,

And always it's the rider who

Decides upon the course (38).

The tribesman serving as bonded labour or *Gotis* is also illegal according to the law, but the laws that prohibit it, fail to come to effect. The duplicity of the Government comes to light when the laws regarding the forest and liquor have been immediately implemented as the government and the business class could gain the maximum advantage out of it. The land covered with forests is neither of any use to Government nor to the local tribals as the Government has taken it under its own custody and prohibited its use by the tribals, "Anyone who had cleared a patch of jungle in which to grow his crops, slashing down the trees and burning them so that the ashes would enrich the soil, could be caught by the Forest Guard and fined or prosecuted" (11).

The tribals cannot possess or cultivate it, take honey or make liquor. It is only that land that they need which can solve all their problems. They wonder "God created all these lands for human beings- what a shame that man prevents his fellow men from putting them to their proper use!"(23). They do not even feel that cutting and burning of the trees, making liquor is an offense as they are ignorant. They have no knowledge of any law or crime. They are just dreadful of anything that is written on paper. "In their eyes, everything that grew on the hills and in the forests was theirs to use, like the sunlight and rain and air and water, whose use no one could restrict" (33).

In order to pay the taxes for the lands which the tribals have cultivated, the fines for the unlawful activity, which is not a crime in their eyes or the bride price, they have to go to the moneylender for borrowing some money. As soon as he borrows the money, all their life, liberty and happiness is lost and they get trapped in a web from which it is impossible to come out. As a result of the money that they have borrowed, they become slaves and have to work hard day and night for the money-lender. Still they are only able to pay the compound interest. Due to it, he and all his coming generations are bound to be slaves throughout their whole lifetime. The *gotis* used to be his all-time servants, working with a small quantity of food and in high risk areas and he exploits them to his heart's content.

The landlord is not only sadistic and heartless but also deceitful who takes advantage of tribesman's ignorance. On their face he exhibits as if he maintains very clean accounts but his pleonexia surfaces up when he enters the loan of a tribesman in three to four ledgers for minting more money. Sometimes when he used to get bored, he would demand for tribal girls. His appetite is so strong that his "house swallowed everything up, and nothing that entered ever came out again; and the house grew and bulged" (123). The consequence is that "he would become master of their lands and of their money and of their bodies and their souls" (49).

Tribal people lived a contented and peaceful life, having no tension and worries. They have their own culture, traditions and values. They are more civilized than us. They respect women, who share equal status with men. It is their custom to pay bride price to the parents of bride, for which the men could do anything. But everything gets deteriorated due to the intervention of corrupt Government officials and other non- tribals, "And as we know, there are government officials who come to our villages and take our women and keep them and throw them out again when they're tired of them. We know nothing about those men, but we let them have our women" (318).

Even in new generation, their relationship with their lands is also not the same. Their emotions have changed. They can easily think of disposing off their lands. Their morals have also come down. They cheat other tribesman whom they

earlier considered as their brothers. “While Sukru Jni awaited his emissaries, to know the outcome of their mission, the rest of the money was being divided between them” (55-56).

The women for whom their self-respect was important than everything else “A girl from the hills does not mind a little flirtation, but there is always a limit to such trifling; the stranger has gone beyond the limit” but now they are forced into a situation that for their survival, they are even ready to sell themselves (26). For their survival, these people can do anything; breaking law by making liquor, migrating to Assam tea plantations, which is against their own rules or going with some groups and taking up to crime. They could see no other way possible. They are not habitual offenders but they are thrown into/doomed to be offenders.

The question arises “Can the Subaltern Speak?” or in other words, can they raise their voice against the exploitation? The answer lies in the development rhetoric of the state. No they can not, rather they are not allowed. They are always spoken for either by activist cum writer or journalist or the state itself. Even in the law courts nobody listens to their problems. There too the rich and powerful manipulate the things to serve their own selfish motives and agenda and take undue advantage of the lopsided rules of laws and of tribesman’s ignorance. These innocent people are made fools. “The clerk looked at the register of cases and read out; ‘Sukru Jani versus Ramachandra Bisoi?’ He looked at Sukru Jani and said; ‘The date was fixed for the sixth day of the month. Why didn’t you turn up? Your case has been dismissed as you were absent. You may go.’”(365). Eventually no case is decided in their favour. “What a lot of money wasted! Nandibali remarked to Tikra. I knew this would happen! What chance has a poor man against a rich man? And now the old man’s back is broken- he’ll never get over this” (367). K. C. Baiju also writes that “Unstructured interviews with the tribal households revealed that the cumbersome office procedures, delay in processing, official red-tape, exploitation by tribal leaders and others (middlemen) have created the indifference” (19). They tried their best to cope with all the atrocities inflicted upon them. But there is always a limit of everything and unable to tolerate adverse conditions, they revolted. “Fate! Mandia shouted angrily. I don’t believe in it! There is no justice! I don’t want to hear about your Dharmu! Keep calm o yourselves; we don’t need these things” (Mohanty 368).

Tribesmen never work for anyone else for monetary gains. If they work, it is just with a feeling of brotherhood. But now their condition has deteriorated so much that they have started to work as *gotis* for the landlords. Not only this, the women for small wages and food, work on the construction sites, where their exploitation has no limit. They are tempted to this vicious circle and eventually fall prey to it, “Everyone knew the Sahukar- everyone, that is, except Jilli. She never guessed that the spider’s web, which had been woven for her was also meant for other butterflies” (310). Behera and Basar also state that similar to other parts of India, the slogan of all round and comprehensive development by the government, for these submissive people, remains truly, a flimsy and meaningless rhetoric and a political gizmo (233-53).

3. CONCLUSION:

The money-lender and the officials in place of having humanistic approach towards the illiterate, helpless, and poor tribals, have added to their woes through their unjust policies. These people now are getting aware to understand their corrupt practices which are responsible for debasing them. This all is an attack on their culture and way of life that poses a serious threat to their survival.

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