

Use of Language in Two Novels based on Indigenous Life: *Paraja* and *Yaruingam*

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Abstract : *Paraja* (1945) and *Yaruingam* (1960) are two of the most well-acclaimed novels based on indigenous life written by two Jnanpith award-winning authors, Gopinath Mohanty (1914-1991) from Odisha and Birendranath Kumar Bhattacharyya (1924-1997) from Assam. *Paraja* was originally written in the Odia language and *Yaruingam* in the Assamese language. Both the novels are translated into several Indian languages as well as into English. The two novels deal with two different tribal communities, i.e. the *Paraja* of Odisha and the *Tangkhul Naga* of Manipur. Both the writers have used language in the novels in such a way that it reflects not only the expertise of the authors but also gives a glimpse of the indigenous lives too. The present article aims at analysing the language used by the two authors in the novels.

Key Words: Language, Novel, Odia, *Paraja*, *Tangkhul Naga*, *Parji*, *Desia*, Assamese.

The tribe *Paraja* and their way of life has been depicted in the novel *Paraja* by Gopinath Mohanty (1914-1991). Similarly, the tribe *Tangkhul Naga* and their indigenous life has been depicted in *Yaruingam* by Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya (1924-1997).

The *Parajas* are mostly bilingual. One language they speak in their family and while talking to others in the community, and the other while talking to the neighbouring Odia people. The language spoken by the *Parajas* is 'Parji', a language belonging to the Dravidian language family, which is mostly used in their own society and within the family. While talking to people from the neighbouring communities they use *Desia*, a dialect of Odia, known as the *lingua franca* of Koraput district. They compose verses both in the language *Parji*, and in the dialect, *Desia*. It is interesting to note that the selection of language varies and goes extempore looking at the persons it is addressed.

Tangkhul Nagas are bilingual. Being the inhabitants of Manipur, they speak Meitei (Meiteilon) or Manipuri, the *lingua franca* of the state, along with their own language *Tangkhul*. The language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese branch of the greater Chino-Tibetan language family. For writing purpose, the *Tangkhuls* use the Roman script. *Tangkhul* language has many varieties or dialects which are spoken in different villages. To the extent that, each *Tangkhul* village has its own village dialect named after the village. The comprehensibility of the dialects among the *Tangkhuls* depends on the distance between the villages. One particular village dialect cannot be understood easily by other villagers, if the villages are located at distant places and far away from each other. Ukhrul, as the head quarter of the *Tangkhuls*, is considered as the centre of education, commerce, literature and administration. Because of this reason, the variety of *Tangkhul* that is spoken in Ukhrul, is considered as the 'standard dialect' and almost all the *Tangkhuls* know that variety. The villagers of different villages use their own village *tui* (language) named after their village to converse among themselves. They use the Ukhrul variety to communicate with the *Tangkhuls* from other *Tangkhul* villages and Meiteilon or Manipuri while interacting with the other community people.¹

Gopinath Mohanty, the author of *Paraja*, while creating a text on tribal life, has given utmost attention in the use of language. The use of such linguistic skill is only seen when one reads the original text in Odia. Three types of linguistic uses are seen throughout the text. The characters confront three different situations: (i) inside the community, (ii) with the neighbouring caste people, who live very close to them, (iii) while interacting with the Odia population

¹ Arokianathan, S. Introduction. *Tangkhul-English-Hindi Dictionary*, 1995, pp. XI-XII

during their visit to other places or at the time of the outsiders' visit to a Paraja village. Thus, three different linguistic modes are used in the text wherever necessary. In some places, the author has exclusively used the Parji, in most of the cases *Desia*, and in few cases Odia language has been used. Whenever the characters find difficulty in expressing their concerns, in a language in which they are not familiar, the interpreter has been used. For instance, the court situation which is out of the reach of the innocent Paraja people or while talking to the so called government officials, the interpreter or the middlemen have been used. Parji and *Desia* have been extensively used in the text when the author presents the scene of their socio-cultural and religious life. Similarly, *Desia* has been used in their economic life, while dealing with others and more particularly the weekly market they visit. At many places, Paraja or *Desia* folksongs and folk expressions are used. In order to give an accurate picture of the socio-cultural life of the Paraja, the author has used their language in the form of dialogue between two characters, while chanting *mantra* or praying God in different religious occasions and in the folksongs sung in festive occasions. Few such examples of folksongs from different linguistic usages are given below:

1. Remembering his beloved the Paraja youths sing in their Parji language:

"ālo bāngi chudāin danichingi kosāin
maranuru durichu-- torānuru dasiri
ālo raja gudāde, dani rāni kachede
āchā manā mānede, bala chagā chagede" ²

2. Use of *Desia* 'dialect':

"iti dekhle riti nā i
se taka dile mile nāi" ³

3. Use of Odia language in a folk song, equating rain with Jili, who would visit the boy's dormitory for the sake of her lover, Bagla.

"mora barasara git-
dempha upara maliphula pari sundari je
kālia benire jhili Jhili Jai phula
phula beas hoi beni dohalai āsiba
āsiba mu jane" ⁴

4. Use of the language of the Kondhs in a Kondh folk song:

"jeike māl nilas jeike māl talas
sun gundā dulāne he...
jei sambar godire jei Bandar pānire
sun gund dulāne he... " ⁵

All these expressions and songs are carefully chosen by the author as he had heard them from the community and have been used effectively in the text. Reading of the original text is useful in knowing the contents of such expressions, which is not to be found in its translation available in English or in any other language. Hence, folksongs cited in the translated text do not always match the original expressions. However, the translated materials are used in this discussion for mutual convenience. Gopinath Mohanty has used a good number of Parji words in the original text, and in the English version, used in this research, translated by Bikram K. Das, lots of such words are found used by the translator as they are found in the original. A list of such words and their tentative meanings is presented here.

Parji words	Meanings
<i>Bagh debta</i>	The tiger god who rules the tigers that devour men and cattle
<i>bai-gaba</i>	A wild hedge plant
<i>Basumati</i>	The Earth goddess

² Mohanty, Gopinath. *Paraja*, 1991, p. 148.

³ *ibid.* p. 187.

⁴ Mohanty, Gopinath. *Paraja*, 1991, p. 122.

⁵ *ibid.* p. 411.

<i>Beju/Bejuni</i>	A medium of the diviner <i>Disari</i> . <i>Beju</i> (Or <i>Bejuni</i> , the female) is possessed by some ancestral spirit or tribal god or goddess and temporarily acquires supernatural power of prophecy. God, goddess and spirit speak through <i>Beju</i> 's lips and only <i>Disari</i> can interpret what they say.
<i>bena</i>	A kind of long tailed grass with white blossoms
<i>chenga</i>	A sort of fish with big heads and smooth scaled bodies
<i>Chaitra</i>	Name of a month and the name of the festival (<i>Chaitra parab</i>) that falls during that month
<i>Dadibudha</i>	Referred to the Paraja ancestors
<i>dhandra</i>	Boy
<i>dhangdi</i>	Girl
<i>Dharmu</i>	The creator, the supreme God of the Parajas
<i>Dharatini</i>	The Earth goddess, the Mother Earth
<i>dhatiki</i>	A bright red flower
<i>Disari</i>	Paraja all-knowing diviner or sooth-sayer who can communicate with the spirits of ancestors and predict the future
<i>dungudunga</i>	A musical instruments with string
<i>goti</i>	Bonded labour
<i>Jaman</i>	Guard
<i>Jani</i>	Village priest, also the priest caste and the surname used by them
<i>jayi</i>	A flower
<i>Jhakar</i>	The Paraja god who is believed to be the 'all providing' and he is the god for all seasons
<i>jhodi</i>	A tree
<i>jholla/kania jholla</i>	Bride-price
<i>kau</i>	Crow
<i>kandula</i>	A kind of millet
<i>kochila</i>	A tree
<i>kundururu</i>	A creeper gourd
<i>kurayi</i>	A flower with strong fragrance. Paraja people make cheroot with its twig
<i>mahakala</i>	A creeper with big coral coloured fruits
<i>mahua</i>	A sickly sweet flower that the Parajas use in distilling traditional rice beer
<i>mandia</i>	A kind of millet
<i>Naika</i>	The headman of a village
<i>Nisani munda</i>	The Earth goddess
<i>niyali</i>	A wild flower
<i>olsi</i>	A crop with golden-yellow flowers
<i>piasal</i>	A tree known for good timber
<i>putti</i>	An unit of measurement
<i>Sahukar</i>	An honourific term for a money-lender
<i>salap</i>	The liquor palm tree
<i>suan</i>	A millet
<i>Sundhi</i>	The brewer caste
<i>siali</i>	A creeper used as ropes while making a traditional Paraja houses
<i>tania</i>	A wild shrub

Nowhere in *Yaruingam*, has the author Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya used the local language of the Tangkhul Nagas through conversation among the characters. Even though all the major characters of the novel are Tangkhul Nagas, they are not described as talking to each other in their Tangkhul *tui* (language). But the author uses a good number of Tangkhul words while creating a typical Tangkhul Naga socio-cultural background. His characters use particular kinship terms, such as, *ame*, *anee*, *awo*, *ava* etc. according to the kin relationships. From the use of those kinship terms, a vague picture of the kinship system in Tangkhul society could be assumed. He also uses meaningful Tangkhul names while naming the characters of the novel.

One interesting feature of any primitive tribal language is the absence of honorific terms. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya has taken utmost care in not using any honorific term whenever the characters address among themselves, and even to the outsiders like Jivan, irrespective of different age-group. The grammatical structures of the sentences also change spontaneously because of the use of the non-honorific terms which could be known only through the reading of the original text in Assamese. But, sometimes addressing with kinship terms and using some words such as *oja* and *aapa* shows the respectable positions of the elders in the society. For instance, Ngazek, the veteran clan chief is always referred as Oja Ngazek, *aap*, Ngazek *kai* or *ame*. Otherwise all the characters use only the non-honorific pronoun 'toi' out of ways of addressing used in second person in Assamese. The other two are 'tumi' and 'apuni', where the latter is the most honorific, which are not at all found except in two chapters. (Chapter XV and Chapter XVI) The setting of these two chapters is Calcutta and the characters here are non-Tangkhul characters except Rishang. So the change in the language is obvious. Rishang is the only character in the text that uses honorific term 'apuni' while talking to Dr. Brook and 'tumi' while talking to Jivan.

The different uses of word and sentence structure could not be found in the translated versions of the novel in English. But the author, who is the translator of the English version⁶ himself, has used enormous Tangkhul words as it is used in the original. Besides, he has put a Tangkhul Naga folk song in the translated texts which not found in the original. The folk song in Tangkhul language is cited below:

"O Katang kara kamlo
Papaiwon seiharwon wonya
Iya raosei ji kei
Iya semya semvaya."⁷

The song stands as the only example of Tangkhul language in *Yaruingam*. But, as mentioned earlier, there is a long list of different words of Tangkhul language used in the text. The list of the words is given below with their meanings.

Tangkhul Naga words	Meanings in English
<i>Ame</i>	Brother
<i>Anee</i>	Aunt
<i>Ava</i>	Mother
<i>Awunga</i>	Village chief
<i>Awo</i>	Uncle
<i>dao</i>	Sword or knife of different size and shape
<i>genna</i>	Taboo
<i>hajisakhi</i>	Sister's husband, brother-in-law
<i>hanga</i>	Village council
<i>hok-sa</i>	Pork
<i>kachon</i>	Traditional red and black coloured Tangkhul shawl
<i>kaha</i>	Honey bee
<i>kairaophi</i>	A kind of garment

⁶ Two versions of *Yaruingam*, translated into English, by the author himself, are found with slight differences and with two different names as *Yaruingam* and *Love in the Time of Insurgency*. The first one is published by Christian Literature centre (Guwahati) in 1984, which is the first translation of *Yaruingam* and the second one is published by Katha (New Delhi) in 2005 with some changes nine years after the demise of Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya in 1997. Both the translated versions along with the original one are studied and used extensively in this thesis.

⁷ Bhattacharyya, Birendra Kumar. trans. *Love in the Time of Insurgency*, 2005, p. 29.

<i>kajing-karei</i>	Heaven
<i>Kameo</i>	The god of the evil
<i>kang</i>	A traditional game played with the round seeds of Horse-Chestnut
<i>kasatheinai</i>	A sauce made of red chillies, mashed potatoes, dried fish and salt
<i>kashai</i>	The band used over the head to carry the bamboo basket
<i>kathi-kasam</i>	The feast given on the tenth day of <i>thisam-phanit</i> festival, the death festival
<i>kazeiram</i>	Heaven
<i>khamay</i>	Kiss
<i>khangai</i>	An open ground
<i>khulakpa</i>	Village chief
<i>Kokto</i>	The ruler of death or the king of <i>kazeiram</i> , the place after death
<i>lai</i>	Inauspicious thing that causes illness etc.
<i>lamboo</i>	A Meitei (Manipuri) person
<i>layangfa keying</i>	Courtyard, sitting place in front of a house
<i>liphon</i>	A low table made of bamboo and cane, usually used as dining table
<i>maiba</i>	A village faith healer
<i>Makhu</i>	Name of a month (June)
<i>mangla tha</i>	A festival
<i>naomayara</i>	Son, an affectionate address for a boy
<i>naongalva</i>	Daughter, an affectionate address for a girl
<i>ngalalong</i>	Girl's dormitory
<i>shang</i>	Clan
<i>Shang miyang</i>	A giant described in Tangkhul folk tale
<i>sherra</i>	Village priest
<i>sopkai</i>	A sort of bamboo basket
<i>thila-kapo</i>	A person who performs rituals, as the representative of the deceased, in the funeral rites.
<i>Varivara</i>	God, the creator
<i>yaruingam</i>	People's rule
<i>yu/zu</i>	Traditional rice-beer of the Tangkhuls

Both the lists provided in the present article can give an idea of the use of indigenous words from the two languages, Parji and Tangkhul Naga, in the two novels under discussion.

Gopinath Mohanty and Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya successfully used Indigenous languages in their novels. The language used in the words, sentences and in the quoted songs adds more authenticity to the depiction of indigenous life.

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