

Integrating Traumatic Expression of Colonialism with Reference to Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja*

Amit Mondal

M.A, The Department of English
The University of Burdwan, Burdwan, India

Abstract: The paper throws light on the Koraput district of Orissa when India was under the British rule. The British Raj was not only a dominant force all over India, it also became the cause of physical as well as psychological harassment and suffering for the native tribal communities of Koraput, especially Sukru Jani and his family. In their mission colonizers were helped by some privileged persons who were from the adjoining villages of those tribals and continued the inhumane torture even in the absence of the colonizers. This paper attempts to examine traumatic experience of colonialism in the English version of Gopinath Mohanty's Oriya novel *Paraja* portraying the tragic plight and struggle for the survival of parajas as a tribe in Orissa at the hands of moneylenders who are the representative of colonizers.

Keywords: colonialism, trauma, moneylenders, tribals, paraja.

Twentieth century, the course of suffering of man is no longer that of an insignificant being powerless in the hands of fate. At the same time, man's relation to nature and society over the use of resources and restless torment as a result of its use have also become a recurrent theme in literature. Whether it the literature of Africa or that of India, the struggle for resources has been represented in them. In India English literature as well as much of that which has been translated into English treat this theme. With the rise of post-colonialism, subaltern studies, and Marxism, the subject has found greater favour among Indian writers. Colonialism expresses itself with traumatic experience very much prevalent in twentieth century African as well as Indian literature. Colonial trauma is a collective term, the specificity of which lies in its shift from the individual to a larger social entities, such as communities and nations. Contemporary literary trauma has its pluralistic approaches which sustain variable meanings of trauma. A classic example of trauma provided by Frantz Fanon is *Black Skin, White Masks* where Fanon gives an account of encountering racial fear in a white child. In Canadian literature, the female characters in Margaret Atwood's novels *The Robber Bride* (1993), and *Cat's Eye* (1988) present the traumatized past of childhood and adulthood. Among the African writings, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* beautifully portrays racism as well as the larger trauma emerging from colonization. The book inscribes a young man's struggle to achieve subjectivity in the context of colonialism. Ferdinand Oyono, another African writer whose novel *Une Vie de Boy* (1956) translated as *Houseboy* (1966), examines the traumatic experience in the hands of his colonizers before his tragic death. The colonial trauma also exposes itself in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and extends the range of trauma literature. Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja*, set at the backdrop of pre-independence India when Koraput district of Orissa came under the British occupation in 1775, includes the theme of dispossession, misplacement, slavery, segregation, and political violence which are the keys to unlock the issue of colonial trauma. At the initial stage, British Raj was only interested in the collection of land revenue and due to difficulties of communication the internal administration was left to the native rulers. Here begins the suffering and plight of the tribal communities which ultimately resulted into their madness. The study of adolescent's fertility related issues, socio-cultural aspects of tribal life and the impact of Left Cultural Movement on parajashave been already done respectively.

British colonial policies came into existence in Koraput district of Orissa in 1775. Britishers gradually started spreading their colonies in every locale in Orissa. They came here with the purpose of business and became the oppressive rulers of the native people. But subsequently the hostility between Britishers and Raja-zamindars was made. As a result of it, 'divide' and 'rule' policy was settled and the district was made an independent zamindari. The permanent settlement which marked a sea change in the agrarian relationship of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa was introduced in the district in 1803. And this brought a serious discontent among the zamindars which in turn caused confusion and tension among the tribal communities, especially in the case of parajas. The Koraput district was surrounded by dense forest and almost isolated from the plain due to lack of communication facilities. It was one of the major problems of the tribal people to earn their livelihood. But in spite of that, they had self-sufficient and self-content economy which provided adequate protection to their livelihood. It is because of the plenty of land and forest resources they were able to face difficulties and led their normal life. In fact, before the introduction of British administration there was no remarkable change in the socio-economic order of the district. Britisher's handling over the task of collecting land revenue to the native rulers due to difficulties of communication was the key-point for the miserable condition of tribals. It opened a large tract for the non-tribals to rush into this tribal belt and extract the tribal land, labour and other resources.

Along with the extension of administrative structure, the native moneylenders and traders were provided a large degree of security and economic stability which they had never enjoyed before. At this point, taking the advantage of their simplicity and ignorance, the non-tribals started exploiting the tribals through unscrupulous trade and money lending system. Being unable to pay back the loan which they were compelled to take, the tribals offered themselves as labourers and slaves in the farms of moneylenders. Such system turned the tribes into 'goti' of a few number of privileged people. The tribes were living in a state of acute poverty which was below the poverty line. The average income of an aboriginal of Koraput was almost a quarter of the

average income of an Indian. Many tribes were compelled to migrate to the Tea Garden of Assam in search of their livelihood. The forest of Koraput was the source of their income, but state's control over the forest affected the life of the tribals. The reality did not stop here, it was actually designed to enrich British Industry and cause harm to tribal communities. During pre-independence days, the moneylenders were exploiting the native tribals along with the colonizers whose ideals they were still nourishing in Orissa. And those colonizers in the disguise of Sahukar, peon, clerk, lawyers can be found in Gopinath Mohanty's novel *Paraja*. This book is the evidence of such condition of Orissa where the relationship between colonial officers and the tribes is a relationship between a master and his slave.

The English version of *Paraja* was translated by Bikram K. Das and published by Faber and Faber (U.K) and Oxford University Press (India) in 1987. Mohanty appeared as a post-independent writer of India. This novel finds the expression of vibrant life of the people of Orissa, rural as well as tribal. Mohanty explores all aspects of Oriya life, whether it the life in plains or in the hills. The parajas can feel that the exploitation is as old as the hills and the forest surrounding them. Yet, they do not forget to celebrate the joy of life; they drink, dance and sing and find joy in every drop of life. They filled their heart with the chirping of birds and sweet sound of swift-flowing streams. In his portrayal of tribal life, Mohanty can be compared to the Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe in terms of their visions which are almost identical. They experience the disintegration of the tribal communities under the impact of colonialism as an agent of disruption. The novel communicates the agony of the tribal people and sensitises the reader to millions of tortured indigenous people all over the world. Mohanty tells us the story of a paraja family headed by patriarch SukruJani whose woeful tale becomes the tale of the tribes. It is a story of misplacement, of alienation and of suffering resulting from the deep sense of being uprooted from ancestor's soil. Continuous torture from Sahukar in form of colonizer causes their mental plight and they gradually become disbalanced and stoic. Moneylender, clerk, peon, policeman, lawyer as the representative of colonizers create trauma in the life of parajas. There is a continuous threat behind the colonizer's treatment of parajas. They exploit the basic needs of parajas and destroy the normal life and turn them into maniac. At this point, the novelist focuses on the traumatic expression of colonialism in his work.

With Gopinath Mohanty, in unmasking the trauma of colonialism, we find the traumatic life of SukruJani, the protagonist of the novel, who lives in Koraput district. *Paraja*, like all his other novels, is born out of passionate social awareness verging on anger. His work can be interpreted as an evidence of social oppression and abuse which is a recurring theme in Gopinath Mohanty's fiction. Here, the portrait of a tribal family as exploited and a non-tribal moneylender as exploiter is the presentation of materialistic civilization seeking to encroach upon and engulf a primordial and elemental way of life. The translator Bikram K. Das in his introduction to *Paraja* has rightly pointed out:

"Sukru Jani is not merely a primitive tribesman ensnared by the predatory moneylender from the city; he is also quintessential man, waging heroic but futile war against a hostile universe,...the primeval consciousness of his tribal protagonist reflects perfectly the situation of the archetypal human being; their stark joys and interwoven anguish embody the complexity of the human condition" (Bikram K. Das : vi).

In the very citation of the Jnanapith Award (1974) given to the author, it was said that "in Mohanty's hand, the social is lifted to the level of the metaphysical". SukruJani lives in 'paraja street' quite isolated from the civil society and spend a peaceful life with his two sons, Mandia and Tikra and two daughters, Jili and Bili. It clearly indicates the unaffected life of tribal communities without any upper hand upon them. But it is quite strange that why a man should be arrested and fined for cutting down trees in the jungle. SukruJani thinks that forest resources are free to use like rain and sunlight. He was ignorant of the politics and brutality of the civil society. He knew nothing of soil conservation and the danger of destroying forest. Formerly, it was the Forest Guard, introduced in chapter 2, who permitted him to cut down the forest as he does; when SukruJani said to the forest guard, "It must be as you wish, great lord...you are the ruler of the realm, the officer;...you have but to command and I obey" (21). But it was the politics of the Forest Guard to victimize an innocent like SukruJani. Now he comes in touch with reality which is totally corrupted. He was shocked by the thought that he could not collect honey from the forest anymore without a licence, nor he could cut down a piasal tree for timber to build his hut. Being helpless of such condition he had to fall at the feet of the moneylender to get money designated on him to pay. Pain is transmuted into the form of cosmic laughter. Here begins the traumatic situation of SukruJani from which he could not come out till the end of the novel.

SukruJani was not surprised of the fact that visiting officials often went inside the house of tribesmen to inspect them. He thought himself enough fortunate for that and often used to say, "Is he not our protector, our father and our mother?" (29). Such innocence of SukruJani refers to the colonial situation when the ignorant tribals could not understand the purpose of colonizers who frequently inspected the natives to know their weakness and victimize them under the constant threat. This was another scheme of the colonizers to dominate the colonized, and on the other hand unearth their mental agony. Not only SukruJani, but his sons and daughters were also victimized by the Forest Guard who kept watching on Jili and Bili to sexually attract them. The novelist says:

"For the tribals live under the constant threat of official persecution, and no existence in the jungle is possible unless one learns to play hide-and seek with law. Everyone wanted to save his own skin, and lies were spoken with great moral conviction. Their natural simplicity and honesty had been corroded by a life time of fear and insecurity" (Mohanty 35).

Being ignorant SukruJani was filled with a nameless dread. DhepuChalan, a member of tribal community warned SukruJani saying that if he did not pay the fine, the officers would arrest him; they would throw him into the prison. He continues, “ But that’s not all. They would come and carry away all yours belongings. They will pull your house down” (41).SukruJani under compulsion borrowed money from SahukarRamachandraBisoi and accepted the life of ‘goti’ to pay the debt. The way SukruJani tolerates the injustice done to him by RamachandraBisoi proves his strength. Suffering and plight were also attached to the life of Mandia and Tikra who had also offered themselves as ‘gotis’ to pay their father’s debt. They had to work restlessly in the farms of Sahukar without any payment. They were not allowed to participate in their festivals while other neighbours celebrate the festival in drinking, dancing and singing. Mandia and Tikra sold ‘Mohua wine’ to earn money and went to Sahukar to pay the debt, but he threatened them saying that the money they had earned are from forest resources; so this was not their money. Instead, Sahukar took SukruJani’s land under his occupation. Nityananda Das in his essay on ‘ Tribal Situation in Orissa’ says, “Indebtedness among the tribals is a chronic malady and is not controlled” (NityanandaDas:2002: 177).KumkumYadav gives similar views commenting that “The practice of the goti among the parajas implies a fixed arrangement by which a man has to work instead of making cash payment for benefits received” (KumkumYadav : 2003 :148). Such was the policy of the colonizers now practised by Sahukar. That is another hint of colonial violence that reduces the colonized into traumatic situation to a certain level. GopinathMohanty points out that the mercenary interest of the non-tribals destroys the relation between Paraja and his land. SukruJani and his sons lament that they cannot plough their land while they worked on the land of Sahukar. SukruJani falls asleep and dreams of his land : “ He saw heavy crops of rice and mandia on those other lands...But on his land there were no crops” (145).This is not simply a nightmare to a tribesman, rather it strikes the image of colonial trauma in the sense that he has to spend each second under the threat of Sahukar’s red-eyes. The working-efficiency of his brain has been operated in such way that it can only produce ‘shattered dreams’. Under the impact of colonialism, trauma literature gets a new dimension which presents the characters like SukruJani whose beautiful dreams are shattered into pieces by Sahukar’s tyrannical attitude. Sahukar became the master of their lands, of their money, of their body and of their souls. SukruJani became a gotis who had no control over his own soul. In such painful condition he utters “Gotis, Tikra! From today we are gotis, slaves!” (54). Here lies the untold story of suffering of tribesman which nobody wants to know. The day he put the impression of his left thumb, was his last night of freedom. He could not tolerate the title of ‘goti’. His mind was so distracted under pressure:

“As a goti, he felt he had no home, no family to rejoice over; the merrymaking and singing only mocked him. All day, he sat on the flat stone in front of his hut where, in the old days he used to rest his limbs after a hard day’s work. He realized that no one could share his feelings.” (92)

The two major woman characters Jili and Bili also undergo colonial trauma. The erosion and exploitation of the parajas by the outsiders is evident in the migration of Jili and Bili as labourers at a road construction site. Left alone to fend for themselves they are led away by recruiting agents. While they earned more money than they ever imagined, they also fell easy victims to another form of exploitation by the men on the construction site. GopinathMohanty points out that “ Jili and Bili grew more lonely each day...Each looked at the other for restraint that no else would supply...” (222). In addition to this, it is not simply their isolation from the society, if we look at their heart we find that they are gradually getting isolated from themselves. However, SukruJani brings them home once he frees himself from Sahukar after mortgaging his land to the Sahukar. According to him, “ Aparaja girl works only for her father or husband” (239).The young men also dream of escaping to the tea plantation of Assam for better wages but as the Sahukar’s‘gotis’ they are unable to do so. The custom of producing ‘gotis’ during colonial period did not allow a helpless fellow to live his life with freedom. The torture and suffering went on until madness or stoicism consorted him; sometimes this led him to death. SukruJani and his sons Mandia and Tikra lost the ownership of their own lands and subsequently entered the world of temporary madness. They are violated because they are economically poor and racially inferior in comparison to the outsiders. Mandia being haunted by poverty illicitly distilled liquor and was arrested when he had nothing to hide except his empty belly and mental agony. The memory of his beloved was no longer in his consciousness. It was the extreme poverty caused by the oppression of the privileged people that creates trauma in their life. The novelist has beautifully portrayed the anguish of Mandia:

“ From the moment of his arrest, he had lain in a trauma. There was no sorrow, no pain- no time to reflect on the experience that had overtaken him...he was a young barking-deer, pursued by hunters...And still the sound pursued him : ‘kill! Kill! Don’t let him get away! Fifty rupees, or you go to jail! Shoot! Kill!’. In a panic, Mandia started running.” (103)

Trauma is also experienced in the colonial territories with the presentation of hunting metaphor very much recurrent in the twentieth century fiction. In course of the novel, Mohanty gives an account of wild life. The forest was ruled by tigers that hunt deer everyday, even man is not released from its paws. As narrated by the author, Sombari, wife of SukruJani, was dragged away one day by a man-eating tiger as she collected dry twigs in the forest. She was never found. Tiger does not pay any heed to the condition of the helpless deer while victimizing and is not conscious of the violence in this terrifying act. In the same way, Sahukar comes to the level of wild animal and hunts the innocence tribals without having any sympathy for them. He does never spend a second in the thought of what will be their aftermath after being totally exploited. The way Mandia was haunted by the officers justifies the metaphor. It is an easy task to look at the helplessness of the tribes from outside world, but if one perceives their inner world, one would find their wounded heart. A kind of unknown terror was always pursuing them. This is a clear image of colonial trauma and brutality. This complex process is also portrayed in the way Jili accepts SahukarRamachandraBisoi after being reduced to becoming his mistress and after he converts her brothers into gotis, and then manipulates to drive them away from their land. But it is true that Jili herself wanted to get a life full of happiness. She had also an urge to live her own life and revenge herself on the world for everything it had denied her. She no longer wanted to be goti. The novelist seems to understand

the mental plight of Jili when he feels "...each night as she walked back home, she felt defeated and miserable. The wind moaned in her ears and she felt something gnawing like a worm at her heart...but it only made her loneliness more vivid" (290). SukruJani and his sons have their hidden anger, but no voice of protest, it is for being absolutely rootless. Till the end of the novel SukruJani looks at fate and the possibilities of a better future in order to rationalise almost everything. The negative self- image of the tribals also expresses this complex phenomena. The dimension of protest, as we have noted earlier, remains submerged throughout excepting occasional anger expressed by the 'paraja' girls when they discuss the Forest Guard or when the 'gotis' chat about Bisoi or Tikra's angry thoughts regarding Bisoi, and his idea of running away to freedom or Jili's initial reaction on being approached by MadhuGhasi, Bisoi's pimp. Traumatized SukruJani and his sons keep faith in gods and the colonial laws, and the Sahukar's mercy weighed heavily on the paraja family till the end of the novel.

The colonial laws also create trauma in Paraja family. The tribal communities as well as the protagonist of the novel, SukruJani, live in fear of the law as they have no idea of the term of the contract between the Sahukar and the goti. The novelist explains, "He has his own rough-and-ready system of accounting a length of rope in which he ties a knot for every year of goti-hood completed by him" (123). The tribals are also horrified of the prison, and here the novelist comments, "...it is altogether beyond his comprehension for it belongs to a system in which he has no part, though he lives on its fringes" (104). Once a paraja goes to jail he is ostracized, crippling him socially as well as economically. Hence, Mandia decides to raise a loan of fifty rupees from the moneylender and becomes a goti instead of imprisonment after getting caught for distilling liquor in the forest. In chapter 52, we see how the non-tribals usurp tribal land through unscrupulous means. The novelist explains how SukruJani mortgaged his land to the Sahukar without any written argument, "...it was done by word of mouth, tribal fashion. There were no witnesses either...SukruJani ceased to be a goti...and the land passed into the Sahukar's hand" (233). For the paraja land ownership is communal and not individual as for the non-tribal, but this commercial priorities and materialistic concerns erode traditional tribal patterns and values. Having lost the land his mind and body were numb. However, in the journey of goti-hood, SukruJani managed to pay the debt, but Sahukar did not agree to give the land back to him. This was really a torture to the powerless individual representing the colonized people. Here, his situation is traumatic. "He sits alone on the veranda, smoking, and doesn't even remember to eat the mandia...and he never speaks to anyone" (281). Nandibali, husband of Bili elaborates his condition: "Yes, I know, he does seem to grow more and more forgetful. He stands there in the field staring at nothing and doesn't even notice the rain or the hail. And something I find him muttering to himself" (281). Such was the result of colonialism which led the tribals into the world of insanity. Here again at this point emerges the question of trauma. Interestingly, sometimes the outsiders, sometimes his own blood betrays SukruJani. The oppression of the outsiders can be, though difficult, tolerated at a certain level, but how can one endure the pain given by one's own beloved daughter. Jili fell into the trap spread by Sahukar and offered herself to him, for the sake of her family's suffering. After seeing Jili going to the Sahukar's hut he had been unable to sleep. His madness reached to the extreme point at which he did not know what was best to do. The novelist continues, "He thought of revenging himself on Sahukar, but the unconscious fears which he had inherited from his ancestors stopped him with arguments of undeniable logic" (310). This shows the emotional displacement of the protagonist which is considered to be part trauma.

Several instances in Mohanty's novel reveal the trauma of colonialism. In the administration of justice, the natives were at the mercy of the administrative officers who brought the image of colonizers, particularly the police officer, clerks, lawyer, peon, and the magistrate. As the narration goes, SukruJani appealed to the court against Ramachandra Bisoi for exploiting him. The petition writer and pujari who were helping him to win the case suddenly got changed. How can a penniless fellow like SukruJani survive in the midst of judicial terror even when the men he believed in seem to take the path of exploiters. He had to live in the terror of court and the stories which he heard of court only added to his fear. The novelist establishes the victory of his individuals he peoples his novels with, in their failures and disappointment. Court gives him date after date; he spends all his money to continue the case. Traumatic situation once again explores itself on the day he went to the court as per scheduled date and there he found his case dismissed. The peon said, "Your case?...But we thought you and the Sahukar had settled everything peacefully and that is why you did not turn up on the day of hearing, which was on the sixth day of this month" (365). This was the fate of SukruJani as expected; it is as if tribesman did not exist. In his isolation he was surrounded by sorrows and disappointments. The peon moreover adding something to it says, "You still owe me five rupees and I have been waiting for you" (365). This reveals man's inhumanity to man during the colonial period, particularly in the district of Orissa. "SukruJani was weeping. Tikra and Nandibali supported him by the shoulders" (366). That is not enough, the novelist further elaborates the traumatic condition of people in his portrayal of the character of the protagonist:

"...the Sahukar had tricked them and that Dharmu would punish him. SukruJani was silent. He had nothing to say. From time to time he would stop and pull at his hair with both hands until the tears came into his eyes and flowed over. They would try to comfort him, and he look at them dumbly, with a piteous expression on his face." (367)

Protagonist's response corresponds to the symptoms typically observed in patient suffering from trauma abuse. Mohanty's novel is the witness of this colonial violation. SukruJani has experienced so many things in his uneasy way of life. At the end of this experience, the protagonist takes leave of his tormentors and along with his sons flung himself at Sahukar's feet. "Mandia cried: "We are dead, we are dead Sahukar!..." SukruJani wailed: "Sahukar...give us back our bowl of rice, we beg you..." And Tikra added: "Look at our tears, Sahukar" (372). As the symbol of exploitation, Sahukar's heart did not melt away, he rather replied them in insulting manner which of course carries with it the sense of humiliation and threat. The novelist quotes Sahukar:

“Yes, Jili! And isn't there another called Bili at home still? Bring her to me. I've taken the land; I've taken one sister; and I shall take the other too. I shall take your wives; 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.” (372)

Herman emphasizes the importance of a mental process called intrusion, in which “The traumatic moment becomes encoded in an abnormal form of memory” (37). The statement is very much prevalent in this context. Sahukar in his insulting manner hurt the memory of his dead wife to the extent level; he lost absolute control over himself. Driven by a sense of anger and fear SukruJani raised his axe and brought it down on Sahukar's head. And Tikra joined in it while Mandia went on dealing blow after blow. This was the aftermath of colonial violence at the core of which lies the fact that this kind of violence is always dangerous for oppressed as well as oppressor. Subsequently, they came into consciousness and began to howl. They went to Police Station : “We have killed a man. Give us whatever punishment we deserve” (373). Now they have nothing to do; they are stoic. According to MahaswetaDevi, “ When the system fails in justice, violence is justified...the individual cannot go on suffering in silence” (MahaswetaDevi : 2001: xii). In fact, the purpose of the novelist is to create social awareness about the oppression and abuse of the parajas which make them traumatized.

However, GopinathMohanty's *Paraja* reveals the abject conditions of the tribal communities in the era of colonialism. Mohanty subscribes to a liberal humanist ideology that pleads with the oppressed. The novel highlights the agony of the tribals and of the marginalised people all over the world. SukruJani's traumatic experience in the novel shows the connection between excessive violence in land usurping and colonial brutality. The novel also echoes the existential problem of the tribal people and shows how they go cynical when society put pressure upon them. In the world of violence and exploitation, they lose their power to control themselves. His act of taking revenge and his submission to the police make his condition most pitiable. He takes revenge not for suffering as inflicted on him by Sahukar, but to save honour and honesty. The novel is the story of tribal people's endurance and submission and at the same time the story of preserving their personal pride which brings it the status of Oriya classic. Hence, the novel can be seen as a piece of protest literature. Apart from the traumatic experience of tribal people, they have their traditions, rituals and superstitions which can be interpreted in the fourth world perspective as Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Anand's *Untouchable* and Toni Morrison's *Bluest Eye* offer a critical interpretation for the tribal plights and their protest. It is more or less a sociological as well as anthropological document so far it is not merely a presentation of tribal community victimized by predatory moneylender, but it has wider connotation. The point emerges to be very significant since the social scientists of the present time have a tendency to build monolithic tribal categories while studying colonial India. However, GopinathMohanty rises above ethnocentric interests to evoke the harsh realities of traditional tribal life and proves himself as a realistic writer in his presentation of tribal community and the colonial trauma.

Acknowledgment

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