

## THE PERPETRATORS OF SOCIAL HOLOCAUST IN GOPINATHMOHANTY'S PARAJA

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The novel *Paraja* authored by Gopinath Mohanty “narrates his long association with the tribals of Southern Orissa, especially with the aboriginals of Koraput.” Mohanty wrote the novel four decades ago but social exploitation still plagues the tribal community. *Paraja* was written in 1945 and translated into English in 1987 by Bikram Das. He narrates the story of these tribals amongst whom he had spent many years as an Officer of the State Administrative Service.

*Paraja* has been discussed as a Post Colonial text a continued dominance of the western imperialism in the articles of .....it has also been viewed as a Subaltern Text. The author Bhagabat Nayak had examined the tribals as subalterns in his research article titled “Commentary on the life of the tribals.”

The author observed the tribals closely he lived with them, learnt their culture and their dialect and concluded that they were a self-sufficient civilization ruled by the ever replenishing laws of nature. This equipped him to recount the gradual social isolation created by the perpetrators of the social Holocaust. The once self-sufficient life of the tribals was completely destroyed forcing them into bonded labour, ripping identity and destroying their self worth.

Holocaust committed by the German Nazi on the Jews was aimed to subjugate and banish them from having any say on the social and economic policies. To wipe out the voice to express their will. These incidents for many years did not find a mention in the annals of history. There were no documents narrating the horrific experiences faced by the victims. The testimonies of the witness who managed to escape gave the world a glimpse of the crimes committed. In many instances the witness did not want to recount the demeaning nightmarish experiences. Many did not know how to talk and write about the experiences. Similarly, the tribals could not communicate their agony, anguish and terror faced at the hands of the powerful and moneyed. The author here steps into the conduit for these unknown stories, to lend a voice, and devises the real life characters through which he narrates the story of the *Parajas*.

*Paraja* is a fictional representation and a testament to the intense trauma faced by the helpless tribals.” Trauma is an affliction of the helpless”-Judith Herman. The paper

attempts to examine how social holocaust is orchestrated by the powerful crooks and their agents in the society. SukruJani, the protagonist is a symbol of the trials, treachery, humiliation and exploitation faced by these forest tribes. The paper also examines how the net is cast to ensnare the simple tribals generating social isolation and pushing them into a ghettosnatching away their carefree existence.

### Shaukar Traps SukruJani

The Barik, the Naik and PhaulDomb offered to help SukruJani when he fell into the trap of the Forest Gaurd. He was falsely accused of illegally felling trees since he did not give in to the unethical demands of the Forest Gaurd. SukruJani is fined three score rupees he is shattered his mind is vacant, stunned by the enormity of the event.

The three agents of the moneylenders steps in--- the village headman, the Naik and the cunning Domb. At the juncture of anguish the first rung of the exploitation machinery begins its systematic operations. They convince SukruJani to give himself up as a Goti to the money lender. They highlight the prospect to be better than serving a jail term.

Ram ChandraBisois introduced to the readers by the author in the eighth chapter of the novel; he lives in the village of Thotaguda near RaiSil. He is a family man with immense wealth and a crooked greedy mind.

Sukru knew the perils of being a bonded labourer still there was no way. They reached the Shaukar's house in Totaguda the Shaukar was already expecting them. It is not surprising since his agents facilitated the goti business. They are cogs in the machinery manufacturing trauma. Despotism is facilitated by agents to achieve their motives. In this instance the so called head of the tribe along with the Naik and the Domb acted as an agent of social exploitation, in sync with the Shaukar and his grabbing ways, they helped him extend his wealth and might. The plan to grab SukruJani's land was already afoot.

The Shaukar's eyes gleamed "(50) when he saw them, the first question the Shaukar asked Sukru was an indication of his foremost intention.

*Doesn't that rice field at the foot of the hill belong to you? Just above the stream, I mean How much do you want? Fifty rupees*

The agreement which the Shaukar drew up was a legal document with his terms and conditions. The agents who had introduced SukruJani to the moneylender as the witness (page 50). The tribal agreement when juxtaposed with the written document didn't have value in the court of law. *Sukru picked up two small bits of rope made from the bark of a creeper one end was held by his son Tikra (54)*

At the second stage of exploitation we find the Naika, Chalan and the Barik who convince SukruJani desisting him from meeting the Forest Gaurd. The Naika bribes the Forest Gaurd with five rupees and pays a fine of fifteen rupees to the Forest Officials.

Remaining thirty rupees they divide among themselves. The unsuspecting tribal is exploited by the very people of his community.

There are no qualms among the Naika, Barik and the Chalan that they had turned two human beings into slaves snatching their identity exploiting their ignorance and simplicity. Their simple trusting life was marred by the greed of the privileged sections in the society. There was no hope that these people would regain their freedom their lives had changed forever. This unalterable change resulted from them being turned into debt bound slaves “He knew everything had ended for him” (54)

### **Goti Colony vs The Shahukar’s House**

Many tracks met near the house of RamchandraBisoi many bullock carts were parked outside waiting to be loaded with grain or be unloaded or be repaired. The moneylender owned horses and bullocks. The ware house was overflowing with paddy, rice, mandia and other grains which were stored in jute bags and bamboo matting. In the inner courtyard of the house paddy, chillies, oil seeds and other crops were drying in the sun. The family quarters where the moneylender and his family resided had verandah and as stacked with bags of grains, at one corner stood huge pair of scales for measuring grain. These were the signs of prosperity and overflowing wealth. This wealth was guarded by two heavy doors studded with huge knobs of iron to keep the needy outside and the thieves away.

The Shahukar had many servants and as the author described the house had the “fragrance of money.” The owner of everything as far as the eye could see. (Granaries, rice fields’ wide stretches of land and orange orchards). This was the Shahukar’s empire and beside his empire was the houses of the deprived people on whom he had exerted his evil designs plaguing them, destroying them, systematically terrorizing and traumatizing their lives.

The huts were small and miserable, ragged, crumbling, the thatches were bald from the wind and the rain tattered rugs hung from the rafters; all grovelled in the dirt and the mud alike, men, women, children, chickens, dogs and swine. There was no difference between human existence and an animal existence. This lack of differentiation exerted the fact that the value of human life -the lives of these tribals were akin to that of animals. Their dignity was forfeited. The villages near the Shahukar’s house housed the labourers who worked for him the crying of the babies could be heard the men and woman in the family moved out of the huts at sunrise and their lives belonged to the Shahukar.

The splendour of the Shahukar’s life was supported by the intense labour of the gotis (the bonded labourers). A comparison of the lives lived by these slaves before they became slaves presents that these hardworking tribal men and women were peasants “living lives of dignity”(120), their forefathers had owned all the land which was now

forfeited to the Shahukar. This leads us to trace the causes which lured the simptribals into enslavement.

### **Causes of enslavement**

Shahukar Ram Chandra Bisoi was a trader or a money lender he was a Sundhi by caste or brewer. His name was ShahukarJanardanBisoi who had accumulated a fortune by selling liquor to the tribes.

The first distillery came up very near the village no tribal could refuse a dink after a hard days labour. They would initially buy the liquor but when they did not have money to buy liquor the moneylender would happily encourage them to borrow that money.

The moneylender would insist that they drink and borrow more money, the unsuspecting tribals would keep up the routine of borrowing money little realizing the peril of such an act. The government banned the liquor shop but by the time the action was initiated almost all land had been usurped by the Shahukar. The method employed was very simple, he would first encourage the tribals to borrow money then he would stop one man in the field and tell him: "Look here, you owe me three score of rupees for the liquor. Are you going to pay up or give me your land?"

### **Enforcers of Social Trauma: Shahukar, Police and Government Officials**

The moneylender had systematically preyed upon the simplicity of the tribals they had been victims and witness to the power which grew impoverishing them, they remained mute spectators unable to comprehend "stared mutely at these strange events", bleary-eyed and haggard. The happy carefree state of existence of the tribals ceased to exist. It was tireless work without proper nourishment diminished their vitality, sapped out their life and they sagged with age. The tribals lead a life perpetually in terror of the Shaukar they were afraid to annoy him. He terrorized them with the threat that he would set the police upon them since he had many friends at influential positions all the "great lords" and "masters" enjoyed his hospitality.

The police knew many ways to harass the tribesman with false cases and petty crimes such as "fouling the public thoroughfare" The Government Officials would claim the woman to enjoy them for a night if the tribals resisted they would trap them with false cases. This is how, they forfeited their independence and their natural way of living. The money earned by exploiting the poor tribals was enjoyed by them alike. The forest people were meant to serve them and toil for them.

### **Liquor, lending and interest: Factors to trap the tribal**

The liquor shop served as the base to entice the tribals into borrowing money and ultimately coerce them to give up their land in lieu of the borrowed money. The fear of the

Police and the Government officials were instilled in them. They were harassed by the powerful government officers and booked for petty or in false criminal crimes. He devised menacing methods to trap the helpless, one such venture was the general merchandise shop.

Lending of grain to the tribals. The agreement between the Shahukar and the tribals were that the borrowed grain had to be returned with interest after the harvesting season. A poor tribal approached the moneylender for a loan of Mandia and the Shahukar readily obliged the tribal help. Before the man left he is instructed by the Shahukar to inform his clerk that a certain quantity of mandia has been borrowed the clerk records it in a book. The clerk enters the loan in the ledger, as the poor tribal prepares to leave, again the Shahukar gives him the instruction that he should inform the Shahukar's wife as well about the loan. The poor "Kondh or Paraja" informs three other people apart from the Shahukar about the loan of one putti mandia at fifty percent interest. Each time an entry is made. The very next year the borrower repays the debt ; one putti mandia and a half mandia.

The tribal is simple and the accounting is clear, but here lies the cunning thievery of the Shahukar. He proposes that it is not enough to repay all the debt the borrower has to pay six putti. The accounting of the loan and the interest is falsely manufactured by the moneylender. The poor tribal is made to believe that he has borrowed one putti from his wife one putti from his clerk and one putti from the Shahukar's servant so that would sum up to four putti of mandia. The interest on four putti is two putti. This flawed computation of the borrowed grain puts the poor tribal in perpetual debt. The tribal is unable to repay the loaned grain. He is forced to pay the unethical loan wherein he pledges his labour as a slave; a bonded labourer is born. The huts are the symbols of the tribals economic condition a showcase of further decay ,as the life of the tribal degenerates further into the cesspool of debt and misery.

#### **Debt-bound slave: Goti**

The life of a goti is one of constant never ending bondage, a life of hunger, misery, terror, physical torture, and fear of one being framed a criminal by the Shahukar. The awe and the might of the Shahukar further deterred the tribal to question the authenticity of the contract drawn by the moneylender. The tribal relied on the "rough-and-ready system of accounting" a length of rope was held in which he tied a knot which kept an account for every year of his goti-hood. The knots indicated each year he completed of his slavery and bondage and the remaining years to regain his freedom. The civilized world did not recognize the tribals methods of accounting. The Shahukar had devised means to cheat the poor tribals, their bondage was never ending the debt incurred would increase year after year. Each tribal family in the village would somehow be indebted to the Shahukar and the author described the money lender's power to that of a spider's web, from the remotest

villages they would come seeking monetary help from the Shahukar. They would pledge their wife's ornaments, their farm produce, and some only their bodies. The money lender would refuse nothing his house swallowed up everything that entered it.

#### **Quelling of revolts by the Shahukar**

The "goti's" would be restless under immense intolerable labour, lack of food and lack of proper rest. Thoughts to quell the intolerable hunger would lead the labourer to disobey. The author provides an example of such an incident through the character of SaniaParaja. A tribal whom the moneylender had fraudulently coerced to mortgage his land. The field of maize had been confiscated and a watchman had been posted to guard the crop, the crop was excellent while the enslaved farmer of the maize crops was hungry and had nothing to eat for two days. He had stole down to the river to drink water and quell his hunger pangs but had also stretched his hand out to pluck a cob of maize to eat. SaniaParaja was caught his simple crime of eating only two cobs of maize was exaggerated, he was reported to the police, an Assistant Inspector with few constables came to the site. The irony of the situation is highlighted a helpless man being exploited by the powerful but tried and punished by those same powers.

A false case is invented against the poor tribal SaniaParaja he is convicted of having committed theft stealing a sack of maize two witness testified against him. Four month of rigorous imprisonment is pronounced.

This instance is used by the Shahukar to serve a warning to the other goti's never to defy his orders and made SaniaParaja an example to showcase his power and might. The novel Paraja vividly examines the methods used by the perpetrators of Social trauma, the enslaving of the helpless tribals unknown to the cunning ways of the money lender, the government and the enforcers of law. The tribals are worked to death they are never given any leave and rest. He would never show them any mercy when they were sick but would always want them to serve him. Ram Chandra Bisoi would terrorize and traumatize the lives of the poor tribals ripping away their identity and self respect reducing them into abject haggard beings "living skeletons with no soul" but to work on endlessly to prosper the mighty.