

SOCIAL REALISM: THE STARK REALITY STYLE, CLINCHED IN GOPINATH MOHANTY'S CELEBRATED NOVEL *PARAJA*

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ABSTRACT

One of the dominating styles of post World War II era writing is 'Social Realism' invented during the 'Great Depression' in the American continent and entire Europe in contrast to Romantic Idealism. The artists and writers did not restrict themselves to beauty, pulchritude charm and serendipity and create narrative of Romantic Idealism but accepted stark reality and included in their narrative the ugliness of devastation caused due to World Wars I and II, the vast unemployment, mass poverty, widespread hunger, ubiquitous dirt, filth and fall in human values. The elites in colonial era shunned from Social Realism since it was not palatable to their tastes of decency, elegance, and adorableness. In Asia and the Caribbean, the writings of a group of authors displayed, bared stark realities of life. Social realism was seen in the audiovisual art like cinema, literature, painting, and music. Though elite disliked and shunned realism the common readers form the middle-class and the subaltern class liked realism. In his novel, *Paraja* author Gopinath Mohanty narrates everything from poverty, illiteracy, want, insult and humiliation including taking of woman in the borrower's home. Thus, an abysmal fall in human values is narrated without inhibition.

KEYWORDS: Stark Reality, Hunger, Filth & Fall in Human Values

INTRODUCTION

Social Realism dominated the colonial and postcolonial period after World War II as a literary movement in Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America. The authors who create a narrative in this style do not hide any discernible ugliness, filth, immorality, humiliation, and injustice and candidly include naked reality.

In novel *Paraja* which was written by Gopinath Mohanty in 1945 unabashedly describes the moral downfall of the Indian society. The intersection of the society like tribal and nontribal, governing bureaucracy and governed subaltern people, non converted tribal people and converted tribal people throughout this intersectionality, the moral downfall is visible. In *Paraja* novel's chapter 4 page 21 the forest guard around the fields and forest in the proximity of hamlet Sarsupadar shamelessly asks protagonist Sukru Jani thus "I have given you what you wanted an old man; next time I come back will you give me what I shall ask?" Not cracking the hidden demand of Sukru's daughter by forest guard for one night, Sukru replies in innocence and in the most humble way "God be my witness". In fact, Sukru had asked forest guard to permit him to remove some forest trees and expand his farm size to which forest guard had given a nod. In fact, it is not a permission by the guard but only turning a blind eye to Sukru's tree felling for which he is demanding Sukru's virgin daughter for the night. Such incidents are not imagined ones but real that is why I emphatically claim that there is Social Realism in *Paraja*. The timeline of the novel is 1945. Even after 73 years, the fear of forest guards and forest rangers

¹ Mohanty Gopinath *Paraja* Oxford University Press Mumbai 1989 p-21 -21

continue in the minds of forest dwellers. Marathi Newspaper Loksatta² of Express Group carried out a news that four persons who posed as Forest Department Officers and Forest Guard and raped a tribal girl on 14 June 2015, were sentenced to 20-year prison term in August 2018. Had rapists been really the Forest Department staff the rape would have not been registered at all. Such is the banality in any forest in India.

Inter-sectionality within tribal people of Odisha shows that they are no more innocent and nature's own sons and daughters as generally people believe. Their innocence and fair thinking have been corrupted by contact with urban people. In chapter 6 one tribal in Sarsupadar hamlet by name Kau Paraja is sent by Forest Guard to fetch the daughter of Sukru for the night, Kau Paraja advises Sukru to send the daughter without grumbling and warns consequences will be bad if the daughter is not sent. Upon hearing this Sukru gets infuriated and asks "why to pick my daughter Jili when others are only too willing?" He further adds Dombs would feel flattered if the forest guard asked for their women. For two rupees he could have all the girls he wanted. They could come running from Philemon's house, Johan's house and Alisander's house He spits pout venom against Dombs because the Domb tribe people converted to Christianity. The social realism is that the Paraja and Domb in a hamlet cannot tolerate each other. Gopinath Mohanty catches the thread that there is the chasm between the two tribes and just because they are not united they cannot fight against oppression.

Gopinath Mohanty also tells the world of his readers that the tribal women are in a vulnerable position. The forest guard can take as many women every night as per the strength of his libido and lust. I lament the fact that even in 2018 the condition of forest dweller tribal families is precarious.

Another social realism is that subaltern people did not have access to the loan facility from any bank as back as in 1944. The timeline of the novel *Paraja* is 1945. The tragedy of the protagonist of *Paraja* is that the forest guard made him believe that he was fined Rs.50 for felling tree. The price of gold in the year 19443 was just Rs. 52/- That means the fine was equivalent to ten grams of gold. In today's price level the fine was Rs.30 thousand In 1945 the value of Rs. 50 considering inflation was equal to today's Rs.50 thousand. Sukru was illiterate, lived in a hamlet in a deep forest. It is not even possible that he might have heard of a bank let alone think of borrowing from one. In the novel, *Silent Lips and Murmuring Hearts* (Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi) the tribal protagonist women of Arunachal Pradesh had not heard of a shop⁴ nor they had seen one. They knew barter economy and weekly bazaar where some more knowledgeable folks sell beads and other tribal ornaments and had never seen or heard of a shop where merchandise and items of civilized daily need are sold. Banks were situated only at district headquarters not even in taluka headquarter and the banks would not accept rural farmland as collateral security. Human bondage for a loan to rich man even without a single rupee of collateral security but poor tribal and Dalit people cannot get microfinance for their dire needs and are caught in the trap of private money lenders and get devastated. At least one in 10 workers in contemporary India continues to work in conditions of labor un-freedoms, called bonded labor. Bonded workers toil for extremely low wages and exploitatively long hours against usurious debt advances, but are blocked by force from changing their employers in search of better work conditions. Social scientist Jan B Breman⁵, who has studied bonded labor in India for many decades, estimates that this system, a form of labor employment akin to modern slavery, is the fate of at least 10 per cent of India's workforce.

² Loksatta 22 August 2018

³ <https://www.google.com/search?q=gold+price+in+india+in+1945&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&client=firefox-b>

⁴ Thongchi Yeshe Dorjee. *Silent Lips and Murmuring Hearts* Sahitya Akademi New Delhi p-90

⁵ Mander Harsh Barefoot Magazine The Hindu 12 July 2014

Though in *Paraja* Gopinath Mohanty painted a gloomy picture and the book was read by many top bureaucrats, academicians, and politicians, the problem of human bondage for borrowing loans system and bonded labor system in factories, tea gardens and farms did not end. On the contrary, the problem has aggravated. Gopinath Mohanty has drawn the attention of the entire nation to the human bondage in Odisha. The poverty, landlessness and lack of industrialization has forced the subaltern and precariat people of Odisha to migrate to more prosperous states of India where they do not usually land in cozy jobs in those places but instead become bonded for long periods in brick kilns clandestine unregistered factories in the cities like Bengaluru, Mumbai, Pune, Surat, Ahmedabad, Chandigarh etc. Odisha's migrant bonded labors as many as 31 were rescued from a brick kiln in Bangluru⁶ in Karnataka state. The unfortunate fellows who were held in bondage were from Naupada and Nabrangpur districts of Odisha.

CONCLUSIONS

Social Realism in the novel *Paraja* has crossed temporal boundaries and it is now seen everywhere in the State of Odisha even in 2014-2018. Odisha State Human Rights Commission (OHRC) has ordered Odisha Government to identify bonded laborers in the state of Odisha and to spend reasonable funds on their rehabilitation in the entire state.

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⁶ Pradhan Hemant *Times News Network* 27 May 2017

