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### **Incarceration In Gopinath Mohanty's Paraja**

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**Abstract:**

This article examines how enslavement is persisting which makes indigenous life a complicated one. Gopinath Mohanty in his work Paraja encounters the changing patterns in the life of tribes when modernization steps in. Enslavement is not something new in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it is still existing. Furthermore, it shows the relationship between master and slave and the ways the slaves are treated. From owning land of his own to becoming a goti in his land, the tribe identity undergoes a drastic change. Through this novel Paraja, one can examine how the Paraja tribe responds to slavery. Mohanty draws an unbroken storyline of exploitation, which disturbs their lifestyle. Does the tribe submit themselves or retaliate against the forces of modernity? What kind of weapon do they use against modernism? Mohanty provides an answer to these pertinent questions through the novel Paraja.

**Keywords:** Indigenous, Master-slave relationship, bonded labour, modernization, retaliate.

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**Introduction:**

In the history of mankind, an individual or a group of individuals being a slave is repeated. This began from the time of the year when the British enslaved other countries. The idea of superior and inferior is denoted by their race, class, and wealth. This paper focuses on how slavery was predominant in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even after independence. It also throws light on the pathetic life of the colonized people. Gopinath Mohanty's Paraja is taken into study to analyse the concept of concept of enslavement. Paraja is one of the tribes who lives in the district of Southern Orissa. Among the works of Mohanty Paraja stands to be phenomenal. It is the story of Sukru Jani who along with his family undergoes distress as a slave. It revolves around the place Koraput, a district in Orissa, where they reside by their own rule.

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The effect of colonization leads indigenous people to live as a slave. In India, 'bonded labour' is the major issue faced by inferior people. People working in mills, fields, factories, and construction fields are indebted to the moneylenders and higher officials. They have to be incarcerated to them until they repay their debt or till their death. Anant Pratap Singh Chauhan (2019), defines 'slavery' as a state of a person who is owned by another person. A slave is controlled by the owner for their benefit. They take all their belongings, resources and basic human rights which leaves nothing to the slave. Mohanty presents a picture of the Paraja tribes who fall in the hands of the Forest Guard. Whenever the Guard enters the village the tribes would fall on his feet to pay respect.

As he approached the Forest Guard he bowed low from the waist in a gesture of deep obeisance, touching the latter's feet with outstretched hands. Then he touched his forehead and chanted solemnly: 'I bow to you, my lord, the Garod, my master! May the soles of your shoes remain cool !'. (10)

The Forest Guard is a representation of the 'civilized world' that torments and fears the lives of Paraja. Mohanty realizes a Master/Slave relationship by using the word 'master'. Janusz Dobieszewski (2016) discusses the concept of Hegel's Master and slave as the former enjoys his life to the fullest. He depends on the enforced labour of the slave, whereas the latter is scared of death throughout his lifetime. The slave is constrained to work as labour rather than having an option.

The Forest guard takes advantage of Sukru's family which evokes anger in Sukru Jani. A few higher officials visit the forest and accuse Sukru of clearing the jungle as it is against law. He is asked to pay a fine of four scores of rupees to Raja who owns the property. Now Sukru and his family are left with no other option than to work as gotis under the money lender. Slaves are referred to as gotis in a tribal community. If he borrows money from the money-lender, they have to work under him as a slave.

He would have to work, almost as a slave, for a full year and in return would, five rupees would be written off. But since he would be paying compound interest, in effect the loan would never be repaid and his sons and his grandsons would remain slaves for all eternity. He shuddered at the very thought of exchanging his freedom for the miserable life of a debt-bound goti. (40)

Mohanty draws a realistic picture of the life of a tribe who lives as a slave in his own land. Sahukar, the money lender also made business with the innocent Paraja tribes. He is also a grain lender who lends grains for a high-interest rate. The tribes are treated as a subject for their business and economic purpose by outsiders. The Sahukar always looked upon the tribes as slaves and himself as a master who takes authority over them. Mohanty through his documentation brings the different ways of domination by the outsiders which put the tribes into complete silence.

He had no business worries because the tribesman never asked questions and never tried to cheat him. They accepted his accounts completely and delivered to him whatever sum of money or quantity of grain he demanded in repayment. ... And so he would ride slowly along, surveying his empire; for most of the poor tribals would have to come to him sooner or later, and he would become the master of their lands and their money and of their bodies and their souls. (49)

Sukru's character, exhibits the subsiding fall of his role from being a farmer to goti. It is not just a role but a matter of identity transformation. Now Sukru has no other choice but to leave his fertile land and work under Sahukar. His dreams slowly get devastated within a short period. Their fertile land will be void during the next year of harvest, because it is time for them to return to Sahukar as bounded labour. If he and his sons leave to work as bonded labourers, there will be no one to cultivate their land, which leaves them nothing.

Next year, they would be slaving for the Sahukar, harvesting mountains of rice and mandia, milking his scores and scores of cows, building new houses for him, while their own land would lie neglected, overgrown with weeds and wild grasses. (58)

Circumstances lead the family to hunger and poverty. The family that once lived happily now falls into the hands of Sahukar, a malicious villain. Pawan Kumar in his thesis *Towards the Aesthetic of Tribal Discourse: A study of the Dismantling Center-Margin Binarism in the Fiction of Mahesweta Devi and Gopinath Mohanty*, discusses:

The elite classes leave no stone to exploit the tribal people in Independent India. Due to their exploitation, the tribes are still facing a colonial plight in post-Independent India. They are still alienated from their lands. They are forced to work as a bonded slave. (39)

Many people were working under him due to their family situations. If he finds anyone arriving late, he or she will be tortured like a slave. Through this, it is evident that the tribes are subjugated physically, and economically. "Any goti who happened to arrive a little late was not only abused in foul language but was given a specially heavy load of work" (61). The tribes are always looked upon as uncivilized and treated as an animal by mainstream society. They do not get paid by the lords nor do get their wages.

Mohanty on the other side depicts the cruel manner of Sahukar, the master. He is riding his horse all over the village looking for land and gotis to build his empire. According to Suratha Kumar Malik (2020), Land alienation began during the British rule in India. It was brought for agricultural commercialization, transport enlargement, and extension of the English judicial system. Since the tribes do not have any alternative livelihood, their traditional mode of living is at risk.

Sukru Jani represents the tribal community who possess no strength even to approach the money-lender who is powerful and wealthy. The gotis worked on a hot and rainy day on the lands of Sahukar. They were shown mercy by their master.

Even in weather like this the gotis were given no rest. Working in groups on the sodden earth, they had become one with the splashing mud. Their skins were smeared with the oils of herbs and fruits which they believed would protect them from the cold; their bodies cloaked with dried palm leaves, knitted together to form a kind of waterproof covering. (227)

The innocence of the tribes paved way for Sahukar to mortgage their land without their knowledge. The land of the money-lenders flourished day by day but his land remained withered. Slowly, Sukru Jani lost his peace, family, self-respect, and now his ancestral land too. But still, the tribes find ways to keep their life happy. They were cheerful. Charlotte Baker and Jennifer Jahn in their edition *Postcolonial Slavery: An Overview of Colonialism's Legacy* defines:

Postcolonial slavery can be an instrument of oppression or a socio-economic tool used in the subjugation of citizens. In short, postcolonial slavery represents the continuing legacy and influence that a past of oppression and domination, a past of slavery and colonialism, still has on women and men from former colonies. (2)

Tax collectors, money lenders, traders, and alcohol vendors forced the tribes into indebtedness and alienated them from their land when the tribal areas were opened. Once a tribe becomes a goti to Sahukar he or she has to take care of everything that the lender owns. If anything gets lost then it is the tribe who has to shoulder the blame. Since the tribes are unable to question the authority for all the injustice done to them, the money lender takes advantage of them. They live in a forest of wild animals which is not safe during spring times.

But the gotis had to tend his herds even in the worst tiger weather. There was no escape for him, and if a single buffalo was missing from the herd the money-lender would recover its price by making him work longer without payment. (265)

Tribes, peasants, women, and dalits are the groups who are deprived of bearing power. In Mohanty's writing, one can witness the voice of these subaltern groups. He takes a vibrant role in presenting their agony and suffering, in which their voice can be heard. The gotis were not given a proper shelter to sleep. They are treated like animals who work in the fields all through the day. Dr. Radhika Kapur in her article *Bonded Labour in India* discusses the causes of this system in India:

In understanding the causes of forced labor in post-colonial agriculture in India, it may be functional to recognize the extent to which these occur out of customary or habitual relationships, or born out of forms of debt-bondage which materialized during the colonial period strengthened by marks of tradition, or otherwise have their beginning in the requirements of the capitalist agriculture. (8)

Even after years of independence, a few groups remain bonded slaves. Writers like Mahesweta Devi, Mamang Dai, Premchand, Gopinath Mohanty, and a few others have brought the life of slaves into light through their discourse. This paper answers the question of whether the tribe submit themselves to the feet of landlords or voice out their agony. In order to do that, what kind of weapon do they take to fight against modern force is also examined.

Through Mohanty's portrayal of characters, the readers can experience the pain inflicted upon the victims. Their constant cry, "Everything was gone: his wife, his money, his freedom, everything; nothing remained" (296) can be heard. Now the issue is brought to trial and the very concept of law and court creates distress in Sukru, because the tribe has not heard of it in his lifetime. Still, they come before the law by overcoming their fears. The evil Sahukar uses his power and money to bribe the Petition-writer. The poor Sukru family trusts them and waits for the hearing. In due course, he comes to know that Sahukar has cheated on them and taken away his land. He decides to go to his house to get back the ownership of the land. They pleaded with him to return his land by taking the money. But Sahukar uses abusive language to keep Sukru's family away. Finally they resort to end up his life using violence, that is the use of weapons.

The act of murdering Sahukar shows how the tribe had voiced out their anger and revenge. Resistance is the tool they use to revolt against modernity. Pushpavalli Kurella (2016) discusses that resistance brings unity to the cause for which one is fighting. Individual resistance is looked upon as an act

of revolutionary, and collective resistance unites them as a community. Tribes are conscious of their self-respect which shall drive them to any extent. Through Mohanty's effort, the world can see the injustice and cruel patterns in the life of tribes. This paper discloses how power is fallen in the wrong hands of the modern civilized society. Rather than providing a safety and nonviolent environment, the money lenders misuse the innocence of the gotis. Hence the tribes must be imparted the knowledge of several government Acts that would enable them to free themselves from bonded labour system. The Tribal society should be aware of their Constitutional rights and thereby government shall acknowledge them for being a backbone in preserving culture and environment. Apart from representing them as belonging to lower caste community, they should be credited for cultural preserving than the historians and anthropologists.

At last, their act epitomizes that they want back their freedom and land. To attain their former status, they strike back against the money-lender. The bonded labour system can be seen in many areas such as Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, and Gujarat. There are still some tribal communities who remain as bonded slaves by giving up their land to non-tribal people. Through this novel, Mohanty holds a mirror upon the humanity to reveal the cruelty and injustice inflicted on to the tribal slaves on to the global audience.

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