

Block**3****GOPINATH MOHANTY: *PARAJA***

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

In this block we shall look at an Indian novel in English translation. The novel we have taken up for study is **Gopinath Mohanty**'s *Paraja*, written originally in Odia. The novel we have dealt with so far, *The Awakening* and the novel that we will study in the next block - *Things Fall Apart* were originally written in English. This is the first novel that comes to you in English translation. In Unit 1 we are introduced to the author, his works, and the development of the Odia novel very briefly as well as a look at the outline of the story of *Paraja* (the English version). Unit 2 examines the cultural context of *Paraja* as it situates the novel in its socio – cultural and political context. Unit 3 looks at the theme and characterisation in *Paraja*, while Unit 4 looks at *Paraja* critically and places it within the larger framework of Indian English Literature. As this novel is closer to home, we hope you'll read it, and will be able to relate to it with greater ease and also be able to understand the cultural mores embedded in the text better.

Good luck with your reading!



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UNIT 1 LOCATING *PARAJA*

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
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1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit an attempt has been made to provide you with:

- A brief profile of the writer;
- The background of the Odia novel;
- The outline of the novel *Paraja* and
- A detailed critical summary of the novel followed by a glossary of terms and at the end, a recapitulation of what has been covered in this unit.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The novel *Paraja* was written originally in Odia in 1945 and later translated into English by **Bikram K Das** in 1987. The writer in his acknowledgement writes that he is “deeply indebted to Dr Bikram K Das, Professor of English in the SEAMO Regional Language Center, Singapore, for translating “*Paraja*”, as none of his fiction had ever before appeared in English. The translator writes that no translation can capture the “varied riches of **Gopinath Mohanty**’s Odia prose vigorously colloquial and forthright at one moment and sublimely effervescent and lyrical at the next.” This sad tale about the life of the aboriginal *Paraja* tribe of Koraput, Odisha is the story of many such tribes who live secluded lives. Bikram Das, the translator labels it as a sociological and anthropological documentation, and its sociological, philosophical concerns that are dealt with in *Paraja* are contemporary even though the novel was written way back in 1945. “The choice of the tribal canvas ... becomes singularly appropriate to Mohanty’s theme: the primeval consciousness of his tribal protagonists reflects perfectly the situation of the archetypal human being ...” In the citation of the *Jnanpith Award* it was said: “in Mohanty’s hands, the social is lifted to the level of the metaphysical”. Though a pessimistic novel, yet the pathos highlights existence, innocence, human endurance, and the will to wage war against a hostile world. Life is celebrated through dances and songs, festivals and rituals, marriages and relationships.

Let us now look at the biographical details of the author Gopinath Mohanty as a proper understanding of the author, his life, and his works would be crucial to a comprehensive understanding of the novel *Paraja*.

1.2 GOPINATH MOHANTY: BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

Gopinath Mohanty (1924-93) belonged to a village called Nagabali in the Cuttack District of Odisha. After his post-graduation in English Literature from Patna University he joined the Odisha Administrative Services and retired as Officer on Special Duty, Tribal Development Project. He is the recipient of the *Sahitya Akademi Award* (1955), the *Jnanpith Award* (1974), and the *Padmabhushan* (1981). He has written more than twenty novels and dozens of short stories in Odia. He is also a prolific translator of literature into Odia. His award-winning novels are *Amurtar Santan* (*Children of Immortality*), and *Mati Matala*. His other works are *Paraja*, *Dadi Budha*, *Siba Bhai*, *Apahncha* and *Harjana*. All these novels deal with various aspects of tribal life and the exploited, downtrodden people. His other novels that tread into the realm of psychology and spirituality are *Darapani*, *Mara Gahirara Chashe*, *Rahura Chhaya*, *Laya Bilaya*, and *Duie Pahara*. He is considered to be one of the most well-known novelists of Odia Literature. In the next section we shall look at the development of the Odia Novel before we move on to *Paraja*.

1.3 THE ODISIA NOVEL

The Odia Novel has been under the influence of Western literature and the literature from the neighbourhood. Bengali and British literature have played a vital role in shaping Odia literature as it is today. The Odia language and the state of Odisha had been denied independent status till 1936 and it was only after this landmark in Odia history that its literature started gaining importance.

Although authors such as, **Ramshankar Ray** and **Umesh Sarkar** made attempts at writing novels in Odia in the late 19th century the rise of the Odia novel began with the contribution made by **Fakir Mohan Senapati** (1843-1918). His trend setting novel was *Chhanana Atha Guntha* (1897). After **Fakir Mohan Senapati** however, there was no significant input by any other writer. The first Odia novel on tribals was *Bhima Bhuyan* by **Gopal Ballav Das** written in 1898 and published in 1908. The novel was based on the life of a tribal hero Bhima of the Bhuyan tribe of Keonjhar District in Odisha. It was in 1931 that **Kalindi Charan Panigrahi**'s *Matina Manisha* gained popularity as it was based on Gandhian principles and ideals. **Pratibha Ray**'s *Adhibhumi* is about the Bonda Tribals struggling for survival in free India. Thereafter, there was an upsurge in the field of the Odia novel. Gopinath Mohanty emerged as the most successful writer. His novels focused on social issues, the life and the cultural practices of the preliterate, the tribal, the pain, the suffering, the anguish and the agony of the protagonists who are either from poor or middle economic strata of society. His most popular novels are *Paraja* and *Amrutas Santan*. In the next section we shall look at the story in outline of *Paraja*.

- 1) Which literatures have influenced the Odia novel?

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- 2) What were the themes of the early Odia novels?

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- 3) Write a brief note on Gopinath Mohanty.

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1.4 **PARAJA: THE STORY IN OUTLINE**

The novel deals with the life of the Parajas, a tribe that lives in the Koraput District of Odisha. The protagonist of the novel is Sukru Jani, a widower who has two sons - Mandia and Tikra, and two daughters - Jili and Bili. Life is difficult for this simple man, as he has to work hard to make ends meet. Despite all these hardships he is happy. But his happiness is short-lived and a train of misfortune befalls him and his family. The Forest Guard takes his revenge on the family after Jili refuses his advances. The Forest Guard's hostility compels Sukru Jani to take a loan and in doing so he becomes a *goti*, as he has been implicated for felling trees illegally. Gradually, the money - lender usurps his land, and both the sons become *gotis* for the former; his daughters work on the road as labourers and there is no end to the harassment that takes place. Their (Sukru Jani and his sons'), patience gives way to anger and pent up feelings when they are duped in court. The subaltern voice that has not been heard before anywhere is raised only through the murderous act committed by the elder son who hacks the *Sahukar*, the trouble - maker. After the incident they go to the police station to surrender. Thus, it is an endless tale of woes and suffering.

The tribals of Sarsupadar are forced to resort to violence due to their abject poverty, their loneliness and alienation, the loss of their lands, and the degradation of human relationships. It is a realistic story where the protagonist Sukru Jani lives in a domain of death-in-life realities. And it becomes evident from the story that in the presence of hunger and poverty, notions of crime, sin and morality are denounced.

If we appreciate the theme of the story in totality, we realise that the answers to various questions on exploitation of the tribals by the so-called civilised world is embedded in the questions itself. The solution is in not being marginalised but in raising a voice against the exploitative, oppressive state apparatus and the social system. The novel is neither a romantic story nor a tragic tale; it has neither a revenge theme nor is it about betrayals. It is a novel about existence, about the hard realities of life that people face, about life and living; about survival and undying hope. The next section provides a detailed summary of the novel *Paraja*.

1.5 *PARAJA*: DETAILED SUMMARY

The novel consists of 114 chapters; portraying the life and culture of the Paraja tribe each more emphatically than the other. The events in the novel begin in winter and trace the misfortunes of Sukru Jani and his family through the span of a full year (till the next winter/ December). This enables the reader to live through a complete cycle of year, inclusive of its festivals, crops that are grown and harvested and other activities of the region.

Chapter 1 begins with an introduction to the mountain pass known as the '*Dharam Dooar*' – 'The Gate of Truth' at the foot of which lies the hamlet of Sarsupadar in the Eastern Ghats. The road links the towns of Koraput and Rayagada. The hamlet consists of two clusters of thatched huts - the two separate streets of the Paraja tribe and the Dombs. The chapter enhances our knowledge about the life of the Paraja tribe inclusive of their food habits, their clothes and their residential accommodation and all description spells out simplicity. In this chapter we are introduced to the protagonist Sukru Jani and his family who have been living in peace. Their needs are simple and their desires limited. Sukru Jani's wife Sombari is dead. A man-eating tiger has carried her away and thereafter the husband - Sukru Jani has been living with his sons - Mandia and Tikra, and his daughters - Jili and Bili.

Chapter 2 further broadens our vision on the life style of the Paraja. If men worked in the fields and forests, the women of the house took care of the daily household chores, whether it was cooking or washing. This chapter introduces us to the Forest Guard who loiters on the banks of the stream with a shot - gun on his shoulder. He is easily recognisable as one from the civilised world, because in those hills, where people went about half-naked, he is dressed in a shirt and shorts. In the eyes of the hill folk he is a person of high authority, for he is a forest guard and it is his job to catch people felling trees in the jungle. The chapter describes the political structure of the village with the *Naika* as the headman, *Ribini*, the Revenue Inspector, *Barik* the village watchman and the Forest Guard. Whenever the Forest Guard arrives, every villager brings offerings for him to please him so that none are on his list of offenders. He is the 'arm of law'. Sukru Jani too visits the Forest Guard to pay his obeisance. As an offering he takes two fat hens and three big jackfruits. Sukru Jani wants a favour from the

Guard, that favour is granted and this is to fell trees and to clear the jungle on the flat - topped hill where two men of the Domb caste have already cleared ten acres of land. At the same time the forest guard starts desiring Sukru Jani's daughter Jili. Jili's bosom friend Kajodi is betrothed to Mandia; and Bagla, son of Rengu Paraja is in love with Jili.

Chapter 3 opens with Sukru Jani's announcement to his family that permission to clear the forest and fell trees on the Mali Damaka Hill has been granted. Thereafter, the children leave for their dormitories that are in the centre of the village. Unmarried girls and boys sleep in their respective dormitories. The chapter also introduces us to the folk and tribal songs sung to the accompaniment of the *dungudungu*/the drums.

The next chapter pinpoints two things - one, the hard work and labour of the tribal's in eeking out their hand-to-mouth existence and two, their ignorance about environmental conservation, Sukru Jani would often think:

How vast the Forest is! And how nice it would be if all these trees could be cut down and the ground completely cleared and made ready to raise our crops. Land! That is what we want ... What beautiful lands they are! And all these forest lands can be reclaimed and crops raised on them! Why there should be forests when they mean nothing to us, and not crops? ... Sukru Jani knew nothing of soil conservation or the dangers of destroying forests... He was concerned with the present and with his small personal interests. (pp. 22-23)

Chapter 5 further highlights the authority of the Forest Guard. He bullies Jili who is both surprised and shocked but is unable to express her resentment. Her unhappiness is reflected through her eyes, her face and her behaviour. He indirectly threatens the two girls Jili and Bili by entering their house in the absence of their father.

The next chapter introduces us to yet another character in the story and in the life of these poor tribals - the headman's *goti* - Kau Paraja. It is he who carries the message of the Forest Guard to Sukru Jani, the Forest Guard who desires Jili. Her father - Sukru Jani obviously refuses the offer.

Chapter 7 depicts very clearly the exploitation of the poor, the ignorant and the illiterate in the hands of the conniving powerful few. The chapter also shows us how the so called civilised people capitalise on the simplicity and illiteracy of tribal folk. The Forest Guard returns after a month with officials who question Sukru Jani about clearing the patch of land for which permission had been sought from and granted by the Forest Guard. The Forest Guard obviously denies that he had ever given such permission. Evidence and statements are recorded and as each tribal and non tribal wishes, to save himself, falsehood is recorded with great conviction. Sukru Jani is terrified by all the paper work that is going on. The verdict is that Sukru Jani is guilty and has caused a loss of a few score of rupees to the Raja and he must pay for his crime.

Thereafter, in the next chapter the misery of the family is described. The people of the village advise Sukru Jani to raise a loan from the money - lender Ram Bisoi and in exchange become a debt bound *goti* or a bonded labourer. Sukru Jani is not ready to exchange his shelter and freedom as he has never questioned

the legality of his actions, and has not realised that he is not the owner of the land he has been tilling as his own.

The despair and misery of Sukru Jani stretches into the next chapter as well. Visions of the past and the present flash before Sukru Jani's eyes, but ultimately, he is aware that he has no choice except to go to the money – lender for help.

The tragic drama that will unfold as a result of his decision to borrow money, mortgaging himself as a *goti* or a bonded labourer to Sahukar Ramchandra Bisoi starts in Chapter 10 and continues through Chapter 11 as well. The tribal folk also seek loans from him for the bride price that the Paraja men have to pay and for buying grain etc. In Sukru Jani's case a loan of fifty rupees is raised, an agreement signed and smeared with thumb impressions; a deed of which, Sukru Jani does not understand a word. And that day spells doomsday for Sukru Jani's family.

From today we are gotis, my son; we have signed the agreement and from today we are gotis! 'His eyes filled with tears and his chest heaved with great sighs. The ageing father threw his arms round his son, broke into sobs and said: 'Gotis, Tikra! From today we are gotis, slaves!'

Chapters 12, 13, 14 and 15 inform us about the details of the bargain between the Forest Guard, the *Naika*, and the others who make a part payment to the Forest Guard with the money raised by Sukru Jani who puts himself and his sons' freedom at stake, and they distribute the rest of the money among themselves. The cloud that passes over Sukru Jani's family brings tears, sorrow and unhappiness but saves him from being sent to jail. Sukru Jani and Tikra have to work as *gotis* for the money - lender Ram Bisoi who lives eight miles away from Sarsupadar. For a debt bound labourer each day is of hard labour and the days are never ending.

Chapters 16-19, once again take us back to the life of the Paraja tribe, to the Sarsupadar village, and to Sukru Jani's family members who are left behind. Mandia Jani takes charge of the house and the fields. He intends getting married to Kajodi, his sister's friend, but for that he has to pay a bride price and he wants to offer the bride price only after the harvest. It is not only Mandia who dreams of getting married to Kajodi but also Sukru Jani who approves of this match. Then, Mandia decides to brew liquor to get the labourers to reap paddy for them, in exchange for the home brewed brew. He suggests to his sisters to collect mahua flowers, and they in return ask for combs. Subtly the author also refers to the difficult ways of life that these Paraja folk undergo. Their plight can be clearly visualised - Father and son become *gotis* for no fault of theirs; there is no labour to reap the harvest; liquor is brewed illegally; and the daughters grow chillies to sell them and earn some extra money, but, with each passing day life starts becoming more and more difficult.

Chapters 20 and 21 reveal the growing friendship between Mandia and Kajodi; and Jili and Bagla. Chapter 22 takes us to the homestead of the money - lender and we get a glimpse of the lives of the *gotis*, (it is also where Tikra works). The girls who work there look at Tikra with great admiration and interest. Tikra and the girls work and sing together. Sukru Jani asks for leave but is refused permission to go home.

The next chapter is a description of the market day at Podagod - a weekly market that takes place on Wednesdays. The day becomes a social event as women dress

up in their brightest clothes and their gaudiest beads; and the place is also meant for meeting friends and exchanging gossip.

The chapter following this is about the home coming of Sukru Jani. He has returned at the last moment for the harvest festival. He had not been allowed to return in time to harvest his fields. Chapter 25 and 26 are about the harvest festival. Despite the cold, misty morning the spirits of the people are high. The day begins early for them and the Paraja are busy with the preparations for the harvest festival. After an early meal the men go to the jungle to collect wood for the bonfire while the young women are busy cleaning and painting their houses. Some are even busy doing their laundry. Thereafter, the personal grooming and dressing starts from the best of saris to the brightest of bangles and the beautification aspect occupies the minds of the women. Everywhere in the village there is feverish fun and activity taking place, except for Sukru Jani's house. He feels he has no home, no family to either rejoice with or to even share his sorrows. For him Tikra is still a child; Mandia too young to be entrusted with the responsibility of running the household; Jili is too busy dreaming of Bagla and Bili keeps fantasising about young men. For him the house that was once in perfect order is now in complete shambles and his safe secure house has fallen apart. The festival begins at dusk and the dance and the rituals have started. The next day the 'Saltu - the Salt and Excise Department' (p 100) catches Mandia brewing and selling liquor illicitly, red-handed. The articles are seized and statements are recorded. Thus, the festival ends on an unhappy note for Sukru Jani and his family.

Mandia Jani's becoming a *goti* is narrated in the next two chapters. Mandia is tried and found guilty and is fined fifty rupees. Once again, in order to raise a loan, and to avoid being jailed, a *goti* is born. The following chapters are a sad story of the aftermath of Sukru Jani and his sons becoming *gotis*. They live a life of not only poverty but also of exploitation and abuse. Jili and Bili too face the brunt of a harsh life. Initially there is food at home but gradually the stores start running low. We have to keep in mind the fact that these are people eeking out an existence. Life is no longer beautiful for the young girls. It is mere drudgery and a burden.

Chapter 32 describes the house of Ramchandra Bisoi. His house and the description thereof are a sharp contrast to the poverty of the Parajas. There are bullock-carts in front of his house. To enter the house, one has to first pass through his warehouses stuffed with grains that are stored in either jute bags or bamboo netted containers. In the inner courtyard, oil seeds, chillies etc. are left drying in the Sun and then one reaches the rooms that he and his family occupy. The veranda is stocked with bags of grain; a weighing scale, piles of old chairs and accumulated junk. The entrance is a big wooden door with huge iron knobs. He is the owner of the fields, orchards, granaries and houses. On either side of the *Sahukar*'s empire lies the village of these tribesmen. The villages are a cluster of ragged, mud-walled huts and half blown thatched roofs, there is dust all around and the only sound that can be heard is of wailing hungry children. These huts have their own tales of woes to narrate. The *gotis* were once hard-working peasants living lives of dignity. Their ancestors had owned all the land. The first distillery came up and the money - lender started obliging the tribesmen with liquor/ alcohol even without money exchanging hands. Thereafter, after a couple of days, he would insist on the return of the accumulated debt or demand land from them in

return for the loan rendered for buying country liquor/alcohol. While the Government had managed to ban the liquor shop, it was a reform that had come in a little too late as the tribals were addicted to the intoxicating drink and had already exchanged their lands with money from the local money - lenders. Thus, grew the power and money of the money - lender. The occupants of the huts / the tribals lived in perpetual terror as the officials and the police constantly harassed them. Tales of the brutality of the money - lender did the rounds. The hired help had to perform all odd jobs and sometimes the tribal girls were also called upon to dance for the rich moneylenders.

The next ten chapters are about the Spring Festival, the activities that take place during that time, and the rituals and marriages. The days before the festival are busy days for everyone - firewood to be collected, jungles to be cleared, fields to be ploughed and fertilised by adding manure in preparation for the sowing of paddy; and women having 'n' number of jobs to be completed because once the festivities begin no one will work and all that remains to be done will be dancing, singing, drinking hunting and feasting. Everyone in the village works except Bili and Jili who are deeply engrossed in their own sorrow and their hand-to-mouth existence. No one helps them except Kau Paraja. He is ugly to look at but his talents are many. He has a wonderful memory for details and is therefore, employed as a messenger. He gradually starts dreaming of Jili as his bride.

The soothsayer calculates the day and the time of the celebration of the Spring Festival and on the auspicious day the traditional prayers, rituals and customs commence. The incantations to the gods are sung, ceremonies performed and the festival inaugurated. The night is awake and bright with festivity and dance. It is on this night that Bagla lifts Kajodi and rushes off into the jungle, a signal of their inclination to get married. Jili feels desolate, ditched and lonely. The next day the hunt for wild animals in the jungle commences. Mandia proposes to Kajodi who refuses to marry him. Chapters 45 and 49 describe the marriage customs of the Paraja tribe. Bagla and Kajodi decide to marry. The in-between chapters reflect on the sorrowful state of Sukru Jani's family. He and his sons have to return to the money - lender's house. Jili feels dejected and Bili is still very immature. In the following chapters Sukru Jani decides to mortgage his land to free themselves from the money - lender as *gotis*. Even to decide such a thing is a difficult task for Sukru Jani. The *Sahukar* shows no interest at all in his pleas.

Chapter 52 is an eye opener on how the rich and powerful usurp the land of the Parajas in particular and of most tribal people in general. The *Sahukar's* mentor is Garaja Surdara, the *Ribini* or the Revenue Inspector. Ramachandra Bisoi has modelled himself into a carbon copy of the *Ribini*. They plan to repossess the land lost to the *Kondhs* and the *Sahukar* is successful in obtaining the land through illegal machinations. Chapter 53 onwards we witness a turn of events in the lives of Sukru Jani's family members. Sukru Jani's fields lie fallow; Jili grieves over her first love and Bagla and Kajodi are in the prime of their youth and marriage. It is the neighbour Diptomani, daughter of the *Domb* Barik or village messenger who informs Jili about the new highway that is being built and that the contractor's agents are looking for labourers to hire them and that they are being paid in advances on wages. People have to live in camps. Both the sisters decide to lock up the house and leave. *She cried out: 'I don't care about what father will say! What does he care about us?' (204)*. When Sukru Jani learns about this he feels

betrayed and is thoroughly confused. Sukru Jani once again asks the *Sahukar* to mortgage his land and free one of his sons. The *Sahukar* is furious and refuses to talk about the land. Sukru Jani's house and fields lie fallow and desolate.

Chapter 60 describes the lives of the labourers on the highway. People from distant villages have come to work there. The contractor is a Kutchee (Gujarati) and the young supervisor moves around noting details. The labourers work, laugh and sing as their hands and feet move with a natural rhythm. Fires are lit in the evenings for the preparation of meals but after that the *dungudungas* become silent and the fires grow cold as the labour camp settles for the night. New acquaintances turn into friendships as the surroundings become familiar. Pay-day comes once a week and the camp is transformed into a festival. In the afternoon, the labourers gather in front of the Supervisor's hut for wages. Questions about morality or sexuality are of no importance here given the situation of the labour camp. It is a common sight to see men and women together. The Supervisor takes a fancy to Jili. Rami a resident of Champi village works for the supervisor and she takes the initiative in helping the supervisor meet his wants. Bili too follows in Jili's footsteps and the supervisor and other young men give presents to the two girls in exchange for sexual favours. The gifts are in the form of coins, saris, cakes of perfumed soap, scented oil, beads and rings. Life is full of work, dance, song and little assets.

With Chapter 63 once again the reader rolls back into the premises of the *Sahukar*, Sukru Jani, Mandia and Tikra. The *Sahukar* is clever enough to send the *Domb Barik* to survey the land and it is evaluated as valueable land. Thereafter, the *Sahukar* calls upon Sukru Jani and decides to settle the matter of Sukru Jani's land. Later the *Sahukar* inspects the land and decides to frame an oral agreement that indicates that Sukru Jani would be released but his sons would remain *gotis*. The land could be redeemed when Sukru Jani paid twenty-five rupees to the *Sahukar*, but until then it would be the *Sahuhur*'s. There are no witnesses. Sukru Jani is set free but this lonely old, helpless man's heart weighs heavy with the fact that his sons are still *gotis*. He returns to his house in the village but is at a loss as he finds his hut locked and his two daughters missing.

A few days later he decides to look for his daughters and after an endless search finds them. He wants his daughters to accompany him back to the village but they have realised that it is futile to do so as there is not enough food for them. The Supervisor offers work to Sukru Jani as well which he refuses. Jili and Bili have to pack their belongings and return with their father. Back home they help their father. Kau Paraja and their friendship grow. Chapter 72 introduces us to a new character, Nandibali Paraja who has set out to find himself a bride. He is a young orphan, with no land and owns nothing except his strong, muscular limbs. He wants a wife, but as bride price is ready to work as a *goti* for the bride's father. It is at this point of time that he meets Bili. He approaches Sukru Jani who agrees to his proposal and Nandibali becomes a new member of the family.

In the following chapter the *Sahukar*'s visit to the village is described. He has bought land and has decided to convert it into an orange orchard and has therefore, camped in the village. The *Sahukar* starts desiring Jili and then one evening Jili is rounded up by Madhu Ghasi who used to come with the *Sahukar*'s proposal and presents, and who takes her to what used to be the young men's dormitory. Jili's night outs become a regular phenomenon. In the meanwhile, Mandia and Tikra are planning to rid themselves of the *Sahukar* and they have decided to sell

liquor, earn money and repay the debt. It is Kau Paraja who discovers that Jili visits the *Sahukar*'s house and in utter frustration Kau Paraja informs Sukru Jani about it. Sukru Jani is furious and throws Jili out of his house. Jili has no place to go to and no one to turn to except the *Sahukar* and his house. The *Sahukar* cleverly proposes marriage to Jili and pays the bride price to Sukru Jani, but Sukru Jani is not ready to accept the situation. Meanwhile, Jili adjusts herself to her new house. For a few days the *Sahukar* plays the role of the infatuated lover and then decides to leave Jili behind and go back to his village. He sweet talks her into taking care of everything, making her feel important in unfamiliar surroundings i.e. at Kadamjholla where she lives with the *Sahukar*, and where she is actually lonely and unhappy. She cannot even understand the Kondh dialect. Meanwhile, Mandia and Tikra begin distilling liquor and selling it illicitly to earn money.

Chapter 103 onwards the preparation for the final blow, the catastrophe for Sukru Jani's family begins. Mandia and Tikra offer money to the *Sahukar* for their freedom and their land through their father Sukru Jani. Instead of freeing them he threatens them with the police claiming the money to be stolen. He refuses to give back their land as decided in the oral agreement. According to him the land has been mortgaged for thirty years. Nandibali suggests that they move to the court. The world of law courts is a place they have but seen from a distance and the tribesmen live in terror of the court. They walk to Koraput town. They meet the Petition Writer in the court who suggests that they get a written petition and engage a lawyer. They wait to talk to the magistrate but fail in their efforts. Then they go back to the Petition Writer who demands two rupees for the paper, five rupees for the stamp, etc. At last the petition is written and filed. He fills the simple tribal folk with confidence that they will be able to win back their land. The *Sahukar* meanwhile bribes and threatens the Paraja tribesmen of Sarsupadar. By this time Sukru Jani is drowning in self-pity and is getting tired of the misfortunes that keep befalling his family, though he tries hard to put on a brave front. He calls on the Gods:

O Dadi Budha, Soul of my first ancestor; Almighty Dharmu; Dharatini, Mother Earth: have pity on me! Do not trouble me any more, and I will sacrifice as many pigeons and fowl as you wish. (p. 355)

Sukru Jani is given the next date for the hearing of the case for when he has to bring his witnesses. Simultaneously money exchanges hands between the *Sahukar* and the petition writer as well. Sukru Jani along with his witnesses go to Koraput on the fixed date but discover to their horror and shock that the case has been dismissed as Sukru Jani had not appeared at the hearing. He is duped once again. By this time Sukru Jani is in a state of frenzy. They decide to talk to the *Sahukar*. Sukru Jani and his two sons go to the *Sahukar*'s place where Jili stays, and pleads for their land. The *Sahukar* refuses to help them. In a state of anger Mandia axes the *Sahukar* and he, his brother and father also are accomplices to this heinous crime. Jili runs away and the three go to Lachhimpur police station to admit their crime and to surrender before the police.

It is on this sad note that the tragic tale of Sukru Jani and his family end. From sustenance to bondage, from happiness to grief, the lives of Sukru Jani and many such tribal peasants are constantly eroded and become tales of suffering.

Check Your Progress2

Locating *Paraja*

- 1) Write an outline story of Paraja.

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- 2) Who are the main characters in the novel and what is their relationship?

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- 3) Write a brief character sketch of Sukru Jani.

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- 4) What is the theme of the novel?

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- 5) Do you think the novel throws light on tribal life? Support your answer.

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1.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have given you a brief outline of the Odia novel; we have introduced the author Gopinath Mohanty and his works; and provided an overview of the story of *Paraja*, and later a detailed summary of the text to familiarise you with the novel in brief. Though the novel deals with the life of the Parajas at large; yet it narrates the sad tale of exploitation, misery and despair of Sukru Jani and his family in particular. The ruthless system of oppression destroys and completely ruins many tribal peasants like Sukru Jani. The novel sensitises the reader to the lives of millions of tortured people. Please read the novel.

1.7 GLOSSARY

Paraja	: Aboriginal tribe which has its home among the rugged mountains of Koraput in Odisha.
Naika	: The headman of the village
Ribini	: The Revenue Inspector
Barik:	: The village watchman
Lord Jhakar	: The All - Pervading One (God of the tribes)
Nisani Munda	: The Earth Goddess
Goti	: Bonded labourer
Kondh, Gadaba, Jhodia	: Names of tribes
Saltu	: The Salt and Excise department
Kurayi Mahua	: Flowers
Kadamba	: Trees
Disari	: The diviner or the sooth sayer
Beju	: A human medium used by Disari for prophecy
Jani	: The village priest
Dharmu	: The Just One (God)
Basumati	: The Earth Goddess
Bagh-Debta	: The Tiger God
Kutchee	: Gujarati, a person belonging to the Kutch region of Gujarat
Sahukar	: The money - lender
Subaltern	: Of inferior rank (includes peasant workers and other group denied access to hegemonic power of the ruling classes)

1.8 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress1

- 1) Western and Bengali Literature.
- 2) The novels were largely based on the life and culture of the tribal people and sometimes on Gandhian principles and social issues.
- 3) Gopinath Mohanty was born in 1924 and is a highly acclaimed writer. His novels deal with various aspects of tribal life and the exploited down trodden people.

Check Your Progress2

- 1) The Praja are a group of tribals who were constantly exploited then and are still today and the novel deals with the destruction of the family of Sukru Jani and how out of sheer helplessness and frustration they hack a man to death.
- 2) The father Sukru Jani, his two sons Mandia and Tikra, his two daughters- Jii and Bili, the Forest Guard, the Naika Kajodia- the betrothed of Mandia, Bagla - the beloved of Jili, Ram Chandra Bisoi, and the *Sahukar* who is instrumental in destroying their lives.
- 3) Sukru Jani is an honest, God fearing man who has the misfortune of being born a tribal and illiterate at that, he is weak in terms of material possession and knowledge of the law, and is gullible as he can be misguided very easily, but he is also a man of great integrity, has great love for his family and immense self respect.
- 4) The theme of the novel is the exploitation of the tribesmen in Odisha but it could be applicable everywhere and the destruction of a way of life by the corrupting forces of material society.
- 5) The novel *Paraja* deals with the customs, the culture, the festivals and the songs and dances of the *Paraja* tribes. It also sheds light on their way of life and their thinking.

UNIT 2 *PARAJA* : SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Economic Plight of the Tribals
- 2.3 The Socio - Political Structure in the Novel
- 2.4 The Subaltern Voice
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Glossary
- 2.7 Hints to Check Your Progress

2.0 OBJECTIVES

On reading this Unit carefully you will be able to:

- Understand the socio-economic condition of the tribals
- Place the tribals in a social and political hierarchy
- Visualise the life of the tribals
- And evaluate, whether or not a tribal has any voice or any say in the socio-cultural context.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will go through a discussion that aims to highlight a few important factors about tribal life in general and about the Paraja community especially the protagonist and his family in particular. Fiction is considered to be a mirror of society, as it depicts the political, economic, socio - cultural, ethical and religious perspectives of society. This form of writing is used as a medium for the dissemination of ideas and thoughts. A socio –cultural novel is an interaction between socio -economic and political implications, and moral and cultural values. The Frenchman **Taine** said, ‘literature is the consequence of the moment, race and milieu.’ Thus, the geographical conditions, the historical moment and the social milieu influence creative writing.

Mohanty’s *Paraja* is one such text where the local geographical details, the feudal background, the economic and material resources and the unremarkable bond between man and nature are manifest in its social custom, rituals and rites and are fore - grounded effectively. The cultural phenomenon thrives on the politics, economic power structures and socio-cultural practices that give meaning to a particular society. An in-depth analysis and interpretation reveals the meaning, embedded in this phenomenon, which is the product of social forces and conventions. Culture is alive and changing rather than static and monolithic. Hence, culture is the ‘practice of everyday life’.

This unit as a whole and the block overall will help you in understanding *Paraja* as a novel on tribal life and you’ll be able to understand the text in its cultural

context. In the following section, we shall examine the economic plight of the tribals as reflected in *Paraja*.

2.2 ECONOMIC PLIGHT OF THE TRIBALS

The novel *Paraja* gives ethnographic details about poverty in the Koraput district of Odisha, especially amongst the tribals of Sarsupadar. At the onset of the story, on the very first page itself - we have a description of the hamlet – ‘thatched huts’; ‘patches of green ... sown with maize, chillies or tobacco’; ‘mandia, olsi and kandula ... staple food of these tribes.’ The description is a tell-tale narrative about the poor living conditions of the Paraja folk: single room divided into compartments with not many accessories, containers made of leaves, clothes that hang on the walls are just the loin cloths of men and cotton saris of the girls; dried bottle gourds to carry mandia gruel to the fields; and umbrellas made of dried palm leaves. They earn their living by working on their small ‘patches of green’ or as labour/*gotis* for someone/ especially the money - lender. Neither do they have high ambitions nor do they have too many desires. They are basically God-fearing people and believe in Gods and Goddesses associated with nature. They have firm faith in their own efforts. Women bathe, and wash at the stream and carry water for their homes. Their dress is mainly a sari and their jewellery consists of bead necklaces, bangles, etc.

And thus it was that in this land of hills and forests in an unmapped corner of the wide world, luckless men and women who lived on castaway mango stones and hid their nakedness in bits of rag huddled together under the torrent of misery pouring down on their heads, and wept. (p 37)

But who listens to the cries of these people or sees the tears that roll down their cheeks? To raise a loan of fifty rupees, a tribal has to become a *goti* (bonded labourer) for a life - time. It is evident that uneducated, economically poor tribals are thoroughly exploited. Chapter 32 brings up the various, horrifying aspects of bonded labour. The *gotis* live in ragged and tattered huts and men, women, children, chickens, dogs and swine grovel in the same dust. Women are exploited constantly as a result of the economic instability of the Paraja menfolk. For the *goti* it is fruitless labour as he earns no wages, is paid no salary, but has to sweat his life away in trying to work off the loan.

A clear comparison has been made between the rich and poor in Chapter 32. The chapter defines distinctly the differences between the residential palace like house of the money - lender and the miserable huts of the *gotis*. This chapter lays bare the story of how the money - lender becomes the feudal lord and master. Chapter 79 highlights the callousness of these money-minded people. When Dasru Paraja wails that his brother Sania has been carried off by the tiger, the *Sahukar* immediately thinks of his money and tells Dasru Paraja to repay the debt of his brother or he'll take him to the court and confiscate his land and ox.

Poverty is horrifying and more so when it leads to exploitation and the exploited do not feel or even realise that they are being used, exploited. Thus, Chapters 60 and 61 are a description of the life of the people living on the highway. The labourers on the highway are better off in comparison to the *gotis* and the supervisor is better off in comparison to the *Sahukar*. At least the workers are paid for their hard work and the poor people can get their daughters married into families that can pay a good bride price.

Poverty has been portrayed very clearly by Mohanty:

An entity not seen but actually felt, for everywhere he is a part of human existence. He lives in derelict houses, empty cooking pots, in heaps of tattered clothing; he lurks in the dark of the evening. He fills the minds of men with dreams, wave upon wave; he shows them new paths to follow, pricking them into wakefulness as they lie curled up in sleep by the fireside. He pushes them out of doors and slams the door shut after them. He guides men to the prison-cell or to the gallows. He inspires women to sell themselves in the market place. In him, all want and hunger are incarnated. (pp 207-08)

Poverty makes people shun all notions of morality. The demarcating line and the parameters between right and wrong vanish. For Jili, sex has no meaning as she has been forced unwillingly into it; Mandia does not want to axe the *Sahukar* but is forced to perform the heinous act of hacking him because of the illegal methods that the vile *Sahukar* has employed in refusing to return the land; the tribal villagers who betray Sukru Jani unknowingly, have been conditioned to live in terror of the officials and therefore, they do not have the strength to stand up for Sukru Jani. The journey to the courts is also an exploitative venture. The witnesses demand money, meat, liquor, tobacco etc. and all this weighs heavily on Sukru Jani. Their offerings to high officials are mainly hens, eggs, jackfruits or bananas. If on the one hand, the novel reflects the miserable condition of the tribals in the village then on the other it highlights the equally gloomy state of affairs at the road construction site. While they earn money, they (particularly the women), also fall prey to other forms of exploitation. Isolation, ignorance and a one-day-at-a-time attitude makes the migrant labourers victims of vicious romances and a materialistic life.

Thus, we see that at every step, poverty, poor economic conditions, and a lack of awareness and understanding of legal matters makes the life of these Parajas miserable. On reading the novel carefully we get the impression that we need to empower the Parajas, alleviate their poverty, and provide education, better health facilities and more job opportunities. This will gradually reduce the feudal structure and we may be in a position to change the mental attitude of the people. The socio-political structure of the novel *Paraja* will be taken up in the next section.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) How would you describe the economic conditions of the tribals?

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- 2) Do you think local geography has any impact on the people?

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- 3) Explain the political structure existing in Sarsupadar.

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- 4) What is the end result of any social structure? (Hint: Growth of a human being.)

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- 5) Do you agree that contentment within the tribals crumbles with the intrusion of non-tribal people?

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2.3 THE SOCIO-POLITICAL STRUCTURE IN THE NOVEL

The social and political structure is well defined both in the text and the Paraja community. The nexus between the village officials, the feudal masters (the moneylenders) and the government officials are well established. The only people who remain on the outer margins or the people who benefit the least are the Paraja tribesmen. They neither know the law nor are they educated enough to understand the complexities of pen and paper. They are unaware of their rights and duties. The fear of officials, paper work, prison, court is such that they shirk away on mention of any of these and are ready to undergo any punishment, any suffering rather than to hear these words. Little do they realise that their own people are a part of the nexus. The rich and clever of the village are a party to the exploitative system that operates within the larger socio-economic and socio-political structures. The *Naika* collects the rent on behalf of the Raja, delivers it to *Ribini*/ the Revenue Inspector. Every villager has to pay a plough tax to the Forest Guard who collects the tax and is the only man of law that they see or know. Then there are feudal masters like the *Sahukar* who lend money and in return ask for the services of tribal folk as bonded labourers and even usurp their

lands. For any religious matter the priests are there and for all social matters the elders of the village sit together to sort out all the problems.

The manner in which each one dresses too displays the importance of the individual's status. The *Naika* wears only a loin - cloth below the waist but in addition to that he also wears a coat, and a *puggaree*. The Forest Guard is dressed in a shirt and shorts and carries a shot-gun on his shoulders. He is known as the *Guard* or *Jaman*. Whereas, poor people like Sukru Jani spend their entire lives in a strip of cloth four fingers wide used as a loin - cloth and the women are draped in cotton saris, bead necklaces and bangles, and they oil their hair at times especially on festive occasions.

The social life of the people is the usual routine agricultural life. Most of the men work in the fields and the women take care of the household chores. On market days the women go and sell their produce like chillies etc. There is nothing like inhibition or pretence in these tribesmen and women. They all lead simple lives. Their dreams and ambitions are to lead a happy life with two square meals a day, a small piece of land to cultivate and a small thatched hut over their heads. They do not aspire for too much. Their lives are full of songs, dances and festivity. Even while they work, they sing songs in a chorus. Every evening the men play on their *dungudungas* and the women dance. Their songs are of all kinds. Religious festivals such as the Harvest festival or the Spring festival are celebrated as community festivals and each one participates reverently in it. For, it is not in the blood of these tribal people to annoy their Gods by being disrespectful in any way.

A sense of helping, sharing and caring as well as reciprocation is a reflection of the expression of their human emotions. The concern they have for each other is only restricted by the fact that each one wants his/her share of material wealth and that is the only limitation. It is Jili's neighbour Diptimoni who comes to borrow embers from the former's fire and who apprises Jili about the information divulged by Mathia the Christian preacher, that many people are migrating to Assam as a new road is being built there and that the contractor's agent is looking for labourers to hire and that the labourers will be paid advance wages. The men are to be paid three annas and women two annas. This information is like a life saving drug for the two sisters because by then their share of misery has grown considerably, as the food has all gone and their clothes have turned to rags. The only deciding factor as to whether they should join or not join the contractor's bandwagon of labourers is their own mind and behind it, now is their poverty.

Thus, we see how the economic plight of the tribals intervenes into their social set-up as well. A Paraja 'never sells his labour for wages', but here, the forced economic hardships compel him/her to sell his/her labour for wages, for loans etc. This erodes the ideas of brother-hood and camaraderie and there is decay and degeneration in tribal attitudes and values. One of the main reasons behind this phenomenon is tribal migration due to various socio-economic factors such as misfortunes and non-tribal intervention into tribal territories. The Forest Guard and the *Sahukar* are examples of the latter and Jili and Billi's shift to the highway an illustration of the former. Tribal manpower is treated as mechanical with no mind or heart, either to think or to feel. Contrarily, the tribals are deeply rooted to the socio-cultural and geographical background and it is painful and humiliating for them to be uprooted. For them their land is their life - the only means to live.

Socio-cultural, economic and political problems of tribal territories cannot be understood in isolation. These problems are interrelated and the environment also makes another undeniable contribution to this dilemma. Nature in the life of the tribals assures its true significance in worship, rituals, customs and day-to-day lives. The novel is about jungles, forests, mountains, land and crops; flora - mahua, sowing and reaping, hunting and distilling country liquor; marriage and rituals all enveloped by pastoral, idyllic, picturesque surroundings. There is not just a physical presence of the above but a spiritual bonding to it and an emotional support to the inhabitants residing in these panoramic surroundings. Thus, local geography merges with the emotional geography of the people and this helps in building the social structure of any place, any tribe, and any community. Let us look at the tribals as the subaltern in the next section.

2.4 THE SUBALTERN VOICE

The term *Subaltern* means ‘of inferior rank’, a term adopted from **Antonio Gramsci** to refer to those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes. Hegemonic notions help the ruling forces to dominate the suppressed classes by couching and cushioning their imperial power in words like social order, stability and advancement. Some of the hegemonic central methods are social discrimination, racial prejudice, gender bias, cultural differences and a split in humanistic values. Subaltern groups are fragmented and marginalised because they have either little or no access to the means of control both in social and cultural institutions. Their dissent or resistance is crushed and their voice remains unheard. The subaltern is a standard term designating a subject that has been constructed, colonised and internalised by the authoritative forces. The marginalised person does try to resist and rebel, but to what extent, is questionable and debatable.

In the novel *Paraja* we witness the Paraja or the tribals as the subalterns who are manipulated by the ruling feudal forces operating in that area. They are the marginalised people who are unable to raise their fist or voice and even if they try, their fate is as of Sukru Jani. They are doomed forever. Their resistance is meaningless. They are devoid of the basic facilities required by human beings. Sukru Jani an illiterate is roped into the nexus of moneylenders and officials for no fault of his. He asks for permission from the Forest Guard to clear a patch of land in the forest for agricultural purposes, which is duly given, but verbally. Let us not forget that in tribal cultures the oral word carries more weight. Oral tradition and orature is part and parcel of their lives. Later when Sukru Jani’s daughter Jili refuses the advances of the Forest Guard, he (Sukru Jani) is harassed and persecuted by the nexus of officials including the people of the village. He and one of his sons become bonded labourers; his other son is caught brewing liquor illegally and to pay off his fine he too has to surrender his services to the money - lender. The suffering does not end here. Jili is sexually exploited by the money - lender. Whenever Sukru Jani raises his voice in protest either for land or money, it is suppressed and with the passage of time he neither has land, nor money nor a family, Sukru Jani is, a representative of many such people who are faced with similar problems and those who, at times suffer more than him. When Sukru Jani knocks on the doors of the court, here too, because of his being uneducated and unaware of the law, is at the losing end. Money changes hands and once again he is defeated and feels horribly cheated. The constant oppression and enslavement enforced by the rich and the socially higher ups results in the apparent

action of his sons when they hack the money – lender to pieces. And at a sub-conscious level they make people hear their voices. **Lenin** had said that ‘the proletariat has nothing to lose and nothing to gain’. Sukru Jani is a figure in the novel who, does not have anything to lose in life and is aware that there is nothing much that he can achieve or gain either. So, he becomes a rebel. The voice of the subaltern is in rebellion. The speech of the marginalised is in his/her actions. The fighting spirit of these peripheral people of society is their stand against oppression.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Define the term Subaltern.

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- 2) Can the tribals be categorised as the Subaltern? Support your answers.

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- 3) How does Sukru Jani, our protagonist, represent the marginalised?

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- 4) What do you understand by ‘Voice of the Subaltern’?

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- 5) Write an elaborate account of the socio-cultural conditions existing in Sarsupadar, Koraput (Odisha).

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- 6) Examine the economic structure, as discussed by Mohanty, in any feudal system.

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- 7) List out the tribal issues that need to be taken care of even today.

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- 8) The Subaltern voice is in rebellion /revolution /reform? Elucidate your point of view.

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- 9) 'The novel Paraja is about human existence.' Explain.

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2.5 LET US SUM UP

The novel when categorised in the cultural context impels the reader to classify it as a novel about class struggle. It paints a clear picture of the economic organisation in a tribal society where the tribal man is on the lowest rung because he is uneducated, poor and powerless, and therefore, not only suffers but also is the most exploited person. Actually, he is a step higher than the tribal woman who is exploited more than even the tribal man. The interests of the dominant, rich and powerful groups are safeguarded and the marginalised suffer perpetually. Culture is a partial reflection of the economic paraphernalia because hegemony penetrates so deeply that the subordinate classes unquestioningly accept their own oppression.

The novel under study is the story of a marginalised, tribal man Sukru Jani who has lost everything - land, family, money – to the rich, powerful class and is left with a sad tale of suffering.

In this unit, an attempt has been made to define culture and along with that one needs to understand the economic pyramidal structure that exist in society. The social and political structures are interlinked to the economic organisation, and all are interactive except the peripheral being -the tribal. S/he remains at the receiving end. The novel also hints at the fact that the tyrants cannot suppress and exploit people for long and ultimately the only answer to this is rebellion and sometimes rebellion can take a gruesome turn as in the case of Sukru Jani. If his/her pleas cannot be heard then, the pleas would translate into action that would be seen by all and which would appear frightening and often very violent. Sukru Jani and his family suffer for a long time but, in the end the act of killing becomes an external manifestation of their anger, hatred, agony and the plea is now a stronger voice that says: 'Stop Exploiting!' 'Stop Harassing!' The novel is not only a tale of human emotions, struggles and suffering but is also an account of a tribal family's helplessness. A multifaceted observation of socio-cultural network reveals that tribal identity is closely related to ignorance, innocence and isolation. Poverty, deprivation and exploitation by non-tribals have sapped tribal strength and solidarity.

2.6 GLOSSARY

Culture	: The arts, customs and institutions of a nation, people or group
Feudalism	: The dominant social system in which the nobility held lands for military services and the lower orders of society worked for the nobles.
Gramsci Antonio (1891-1937)	: Italian Marxist thinker and one of the representatives of Western Marxism. His major contribution to theory is the ground-breaking work he has done on hegemony.
Hierarchy	: A system in which people are ranked one above the other according to status or authority.

Hegemony	:	Is the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all. Domination is exercised not by force but in a more subtle way.
Proletariat	:	Workers or Working-class people.
Lenin	:	(1870-1924) the chief figure in the Russian Revolution who introduced policies based on Marxist principle.
Marginal	:	On the periphery, with respect to and access to power.

2.7 HINTS TO CHECK YOYR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Read section 2.2.
They are poor, illiterate, exploited, and caught in the vicious circle of poverty.
- 2) They live close to nature – draw sustenance from the local flora and fauna.
- 3) Raja, Ribhi, Saltu, Jaman, Sahukar, tribals and the *gotis*. Power nexus between the rich and the powerful, while the poor are exploited.
- 4) Social structures are meant to empower people with education, better health facilities, job opportunities, but these rarely happen.
- 5) Yes, tribals as shown in *Paraja*, appear to be simple people with very few desires and hopes, and are hence, quite contented but, with the infusion of non-tribals such as the antagonists in the novel, they to have needs that can be fulfilled only with the aid of the former and that is their undoing.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The term subaltern means ‘of inferior rank’. (Read section 2.4)
- 2) Yes. They have often been suppressed and dominated by the non-tribals through the ages.
- 3) Read paragraph 2, section 2.4
- 4) The subaltern were/are marginalised people, implying that they are voiceless/ that they are unheard. The ‘voice of the subaltern’ refers to the resistance by these hitherto marginalised people.
- 5) Read section 2.4 carefully and then answer.
- 6) Read section 2.4 carefully and then answer.
- 7) Read section 2.4 carefully and then answer.
- 8) Read section 2.4 carefully and then answer.

UNIT 3 *PARAJA* : THEME AND PLOT

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Definition and Meaning of Theme
- 3.3 The Theme of *Paraja*
- 3.4 What is *Paraja* About?
- 3.5 Defining Plot
- 3.6 The Plot of *Paraja*
- 3.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.8 Hints to Check Your Progress

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall try to identify certain important aspects of a work of fiction. After closely analysing the unit, you should be able to understand the concept and meaning of the following things:

- theme and plot of *Paraja*
- the role theme plays in *Paraja* in determining our understanding of the novel and
- the significance of plot in *Paraja* for a satisfactory appreciation of the complex issues dealt with, in the narrative.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the earlier units, you have read in some detail about the history and development of the Odia novel. You have also learned about the writer, Gopinath Mohanty, his life and his career as a creative author in Unit 1. Unit 2 was devoted to the novel *Paraja* and gave you the story of the novel in brief. For a meaningful understanding of the novel, these expository units are crucial. But for a more nuanced and closer reading of a fictional work - one must adopt some more critical approaches. It is in this context that we shall define theme very simply and then look at the theme of *Paraja* as reflected in the novel.

3.2 DEFINITION AND MEANING OF THEME

Every work of art - literature, painting, sculpture or the performing arts such as music or drama deals with some specific fragment of human experience. We feel pleasure in reading a work of literature because in it we find the reflection of our own joys, sorrows, aspirations and dreams. Since a writer holds up a mirror to life in his/her work of artistic composition, the readers should feel that the emotions or ideas expressed in the novel, corresponds to our own. There is thus, a level of identification with the work with reference to the central idea developed in the text. It also enables the readers to participate in those experiences that they themselves may never have faced or been faced with.

However, it has to be accepted that life is a continuous process involving a multiplicity of events, episodes, people and points of view. Thus, life as a whole cannot be included in any work of art since any artistic work must have a complete and cohesive structure. It has to portray the inception, growth and development of a certain episode, incident or happening. The characters have to participate in that event, as part and parcel of a structured experience seen through the perspective of the individual author. This automatically ensures the fact that the readers must share the experience from the beginning to the end leading to the enrichment and fulfillment of character.

A work of art therefore, must be developed around a single, central idea that encompasses the philosophy and vision of the creative artist in a seminal form. By organising the work around a central idea and by giving it a carefully conceived structural design the novelist gives it an aesthetic dimension that helps the readers derive maximum aesthetic pleasure. The theme therefore, refers not merely to the subject of a literary work but rather a statement that the text seems to be making about that subject. Major novels of the English literary tradition centre round specific central concerns. For instance, **Jane Austen's** *Pride and Prejudice* is said to deal with the theme of money and marriage. **Charles Dicken's** *David Copperfield* traces the fortunes of the central character in the midst of chaotic circumstances. **Charlotte Bronte's** *Jane Eyre* portrays a woman's quest for identity in a patriarchal world. Let us examine the theme of *Paraja* next.

3.3 THE THEME OF *PARAJA*

Let us now focus our critical attention on the primary strands of narratives in *Paraja* to come to an understanding on the major preoccupation of the novel. *Paraja* is a novel that centres round the joys, aspirations, hopes and failures of the aboriginal *Paraja* tribe that has its home among the rugged mountains and forests of Koraput in Odisha. The very word 'tribe' means a social group in a traditional society consisting of linked families or communities sharing customs and beliefs. In different parts of India, varied tribes live in their own – cocooned worlds and thus, are labeled as either uncivilised or backward. Let us not forget that the definition of what is civilised too is biased and is based on the hegemonic views of the ruling forces. The White British categorised the Indian Sub-continent people as browns who had to learn the ways of the modern world through them; they stamped the Africans as blacks who were tribals, thus, savages, barbarous and uncivilised and in need of education. The Whites entered with the Bible in one hand and the gun in the other. Thus, the tentacles of colonialism spread into the cultures of colonised nations and crippled the existing system. New definitions, new meaning, new interpretations replaced the old existing order. Apparently, colonialism is no more but evidently in the form of neo-colonialism, through economic and military dominations and more emphatically through cultural colonisation, the domination and its impact persist. Imperial culture appropriates both colonial as well as postcolonial culture and identity.

In the postcolonial set up, the subaltern suffers and remains the exploited lot. These include peasants, workers and other groups including tribals who are denied power and the benefits of mainstream culture. These people remain on the margins, the periphery of both i.e. power and benefits. Thus, we see that the tribals are people who are beyond mainstream culture and prefer to reside and live their lives in remote geographical territories, in the mountains as the tribes of Kinnaur,

Lahaul and Spiti in Himachal Pradesh, in Uttarakhand, in the North Eastern states of India, in the plains of Bihar and deserts of Rajasthan, in Madhya Pradesh, Bengal, Odisha, and various parts of the southern states of our country. The tribals of different regions speak their own specific language; they believe in supernatural forces, spirits and myths, and follow their own customs and rituals. Though they may be poor educationally and economically, yet they are rich in the zest and love of life.

There is an immense body of tribal literature and many novelists have made successful attempts at depicting tribal life through their works. Most of the novels are written in the so – called regional languages or what the *Sahitya Akademi* calls ‘*Bhasha Literature*’ and then translated into English for the benefit of a wider readership. To list a few of these: **Mahashweta Devi**’s *Aranyer Adhikar* (Bengali) or *Jungle ke Davedar* (Hindi) or *Rights of the Forest* (English); “*Kunti and the Nishadi*”; **Shaani**’s *Sal Vanoon Ke Desh Mein* (Hindi) or *An Island of Sal*; **Verrier Elwin**’s *A Cloud that is Dragonish*; **Rahul Sankrityayan**’s travelogue *Kinnar Desh Mein*; **Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya**’s *Mrityunjay*. Many films too, have been made on tribal life depicting their association with the natural environment and the external modern world. Cutting across mediums, tribal dances are being popularised, art and sculpture by tribals is encouraged and clothes and jewellery are fashionable ethnic nowadays.

Gopinath Mohanty’s novel *Paraja* discusses at length the life of the Paraja tribe. Let us recall that one-fourth of the people of Odisha are tribals and one of the prominent aboriginal tribes is the Paraja tribe living among the rugged mountains and forests of Koraput district. In the near vicinity other tribes too reside and these are the *Kondh*, *Gadaba* and *Jhodia*. Thus, Paraja also refers to a conglomeration of three-four tribes who live together, celebrate festivals together, speak a similar language and share similar rituals and customs. Mohanty through his novel *Paraja* and through the protagonist of the novel -Sukru Jani narrates the story of this tribe. Sukru Jani thus, universalises not only his tribe but is also a representative of many such tribes who prefer to stay in their limited world but are being encroached upon by materialistic civilisation all because the external world wishes to gain power. Hence, the novel is an anthropological documentation as it reveals the past socio-cultural history of that place and people, and the compulsory changes that keep taking place time-to-time. Woven in between this simple turn of events of life to a complex narration of evolution, is the tale of human emotions and the theme of human endurance. The novel explores the diverse layers of their lives, primarily emphasising on their perpetual struggle with the hostile forces of both nature and society. In the course of reading the novel, we get to witness their way of life, customs and mores, festivals and religious practices, social interactions and cultural attitude. The novelist highlights in a realistic manner their exploitation at the hands of the money leaders and officers of law, the excruciating pain arising out of their yearning for love and the non fulfillment of their dreams. Their desire to live as free human beings on the land they own, to till it and live off the sweat of their labour with dignity is constantly thwarted by complex social forces.

Tribal life as depicted in the novel can be broadly categorised into two parts:

- i) The infrastructure (ii) the rituals, customs and myths.

Let us first discuss the infrastructure. Mohanty at the very onset of the novel describes vividly the hamlet of Sarsupadar in the Eastern Ghats that consists of

two clusters of thatched huts of the Paraja tribe and the Dombs. He describes the twenty-two families that live in the village. Their profession is agriculture and their staple diet is *mandia*, *olsi* and *kandula* (different kinds of millets). Men wear just loin – cloth while the women wear saris. A description of Sukru Jani's house reveals the simple lifestyle of these tribal folk. Sukru Jani's hut has a single room divided into three compartments. The central compartment is used both as a living room and as a store. The two compartments on either side are only tiny cells. The hut is a low roofed shelter. Preserved in the house are mango seeds to be crushed into powder, boiled and eaten; seeds of wild hedge – plant *bai-gaba* crushed for oil; ten measure of *mandia* kept in containers made of leaves sown together and dried bottle gourds used as flasks.

The Headman of the village known as *Naiki* collects the rent on behalf of the Raja and delivers it to the Revenue Inspector or the *Ribini*. The Forest Guard – the only arm of law collects the tax. Every villager owning a pair of bullocks has to pay a 'plough tax' for the privilege of grazing his cattle in the forest. He is the only person who is dressed in shirt and shorts. Another dignitary, a Domb – known as 'Barik', the village watchman is always present when either the Forest Guard or any other official arrives. The Headman's '*goti*' is somebody who has borrowed money and has bound himself to serve his creditor as a slave for as long as the debt remains unpaid. Tribals particularly those who are far away from the main stream 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 the Forest Guard or the Law, and is able to lie with great moral conviction. Thus, they live in constant fear and insecurity. They have an instinctive dread of paper work and documentation. They are unable to displease officials as they are aware that the so called civilised people, the powerful ones can handcuff them on some pretext or the other, and that too within no time at all. Not only this, but the whole tribe also pays a price for one man's obstinacy. The officials terrorise the poor tribals by threatening them. They handcuff the tribals and take away their belongings, pull down their houses, recover fines and basically maltreat them. Among the tribals if one is sent to prison one has to lose one's caste which is their only prized possession.

A piece of doggerel oft quoted by hill folk was:

The forest Guard's the rider,

The tribeman is the horse,

And always it's the rider who

Decides upon their course.

At the centre of the village is a hut that is the dormitory for all unmarried girls while a little way away is the men's dormitory. It has been an ancient Paraja custom for all married boys and girls to sleep in their respective dormitories. The Men – both young and old – have no education or material wealth but simply believe in the strength of their sturdy limbs, their weather – proof skin; and their sickness resistant bodies and work hard either on their lands or earn wages by carrying loads etc. The women enjoy dressing up, oiling their hair, singing songs, exchanging jokes, chatting and laughing either at the stream where they bathe or go to fetch water or when at home while busy cooking or cleaning and completing house-hold chores. They even go to the forest to collect edible roots, herbal plants and fruits etc. The temple priest is known as *Jani* and the Gods of the tribe are – *Lord Jhakar* – the All Pervading One and *Nisani Munda* the Earth Goddess.

Mohanty's infrastructure of the village of the Parajas merges with the fictional landscape. The informative account of tribal geography combines well with the detailed analysis of festival and customs as depicted in the novel. Living within a feudal system the people of the primitive/traditional world are like the Mother earth – patient and enduring, who recoil and withdraw at the slightest interference from any materialistic quarter, as they are unaware of the evil machinations of the town/city people. The protagonist of our novel *Paraja*, Sukru Jani too suffers on this account. As we have already read, his daughters Bili and Jili are ensnared in the web woven by the Forest Guard and the money – lender, and Sukru Jani's sons Mandia and Tikra also suffer on this account. In the second part we shall now discuss the customs, ritual and myths associated with the Paraja tribe as depicted in the novel.

As has already been discussed there were no taboos or restraints imposed on the younger generations in the village and though the unmarried boys and girls slept in their respective dormitories yet they met each other outside the hut and if something were to go wrong the elders would sit together in a conclave and the culprits would be penalised by being made to offer four annas worth of liquor to all the villagers; and then they would drink and dance and sing before the altar of the Earth Goddess and there the matter would end. They believed that God was a witness to their honesty and sincerity. Boys and girls had the right to elope, and in order to legalise their relationship the boy had to pay about forty rupees to the girl's father as the customary bride price. While courting, the names by which the people addressed each other – both men and women – were *Flower of the Sand*, *Fire Sand*, *Lovely Rice*, *Lovely Flowers*, *Red Sand*, etc. Thus, a Paraja marriage required a minimum of formality. As soon as a boy and girl agreed to live together as man and wife, the marriage was solemnised by tribal custom. Only the conventional ritual remained; the *Disari*, or Soothsayer, would select an auspicious day for the rites; a tiny roof woven from twigs, would be propped up on supporting sticks three feet above the ground, and pigeons and fowls would be sacrificed to the sound of drums and bugles. Then the wedding feast, (a custom that seals the marriage bond) would be given and the ceremonies would be over. There were only four months in the year when people of the Paraja tribe may marry, the months being: February, March, April and May.

Chapter 49 has a detailed description of Kajodi and Bagala's marriage. A smear of turmeric from the man's body and a smear of castor oil from his hair are rubbed on the woman and the ritual is repeated vice-versa. Symbolically, it represents the union of two people. Thereafter, the man presses the left foot of the woman with his right foot and spits three times on her face and the woman repeats it. Necklaces and rings are exchanged; ends of clothes knotted; and each takes a ritual dip in the stream. The priest offers eggs in sacrifice. After this they go to the square of the ancestral stones, offering sacrifices to God en-route. The Spirit of the ancestors is propitiated with eggs, rice and mahua wine. The bride and groom bow low in obeisance before going to their new house. Rice and turmeric paste is scattered on the heads of the couple amidst mantra chanting by the priest. A black rooster pecks at the grain of rice on the head before being sacrificed. The bride is adorned in a silver necklace, gold ear – rings and a gold nose ring before the ceremonial wedding feast starts. A Paraja girl has the right to choose any man that she likes and to cast him off and take another if she wants to. She has the right to make, break and build another home, as she likes and whenever she wills to do so.

Belonging to the forests and associated with the agricultural profession most of the festivals of the tribals people are invariably related to the harvest. During the **Spring Festival** they not only anoint scarlet powder on their face but also colour other villagers. Such a festival amongst the Paraja is very similar to the other major Indian festival of Holi. It is a time for revelry, dancing, hunting and feasting. November is called the month of the festival of lights. In December, the tribes jointly observe one of their major festivals to mark the gathering of the harvest that is followed fifteen days later, by the ritual eating of the new grain. At the time of the **Harvest Festival**, all men return to their villages to celebrate the festival with family and friends. On the morning of the festival, people wake up early, full of enthusiasm and start the day – long preparation for the evening. After an early mandia gruel meal the men go to the jungle to collect wood for the bonfire and the women daub their houses with colours – walls are painted in white and red, verandas are plastered in black and yellow and the floors inside are smeared with varied hued designs, the wooden frames of the doors and windows are painted with powdered charcoal mixed in oil. Some women are busy washing and boiling clothes with wood ash to bleach them or make them white. Thereafter, they busy themselves in dressing up. They wash and dress up in colourful saris, tuck flowers in oiled hair, wear bangles and necklaces and get ready for the evening.

At dusk the festivities begin with loud cries of ‘Thief’! ‘Thief’! The youngsters stealing from their neighbour’s houses initiate the fun, though the next day the stolen object is restored to the owner. Thereafter, there is singing and dancing. Another ritual performed during this festival at the time of the dance is that, a black rooster is killed in front of a pile of logs, and the fresh blood is allowed to drain into the soil. Then some liquor, freshly distilled from mahua flowers, is poured on the same spot and is mingled with the blood. This is the libation to the Earth Goddess, sealed with an offering of flowers. Next, the rooster dripping blood is held over a pile of wood; a few flowers are placed ceremonially on the logs, some more liquor is poured on it, and the flame is lit. A great shout goes up as the logs crack and blaze. The next day children paint their cheeks white and black, their clothes are multicoloured and with sticks in hand they go begging for alms from house to house and they are given handful of rice or mandia. The festival continues for a month.

The dates of the **Spring Festival** have to be carefully calculated by the soothsayers of all the tribes. The Kondh astrologer makes his calculations from the stars; the Paraja Disari consults his almanacs. The ‘Disari’ is all knowing for the Paraja tribemen. The God of Spring has to be invoked; the Kondhs desire the rites to be performed at the exact moment when two stars appear over Elephant Hill, while the Paraja wait for the appropriate moment that is commenced by the call of three barking deers in the forest and the village priest of ‘Jani sacrifices a barking deer at the altar; thereafter, a pigeon is sacrificed on the appearance of the two stars. During, the interval between the two sacrifices, the headman prostrates before the altar of the gods with his face to the ground, a bit of straw held between his teeth and a halter around his neck, as a mark of humility. After the invocation, the festival begins. All villagers must walk in a procession to the god’s shrine (men in one file and women in the other) and beg him to grace their festival. For them, God lives in the deep jungles, far away from human breath, walks on untrodden soils, lives in a shrine housed by bills, overgrown thick forest, and his divine neighbours are: *Basumati*, the Earth Goddess; *Jhakar*, the god for all

seasons – and *Bagh Debta*, the tiger god. The shrine is an ancient and enormous mango tree. The villagers smear the tree trunk with sacred vermilion paste, pigeon and fowl are sacrificed and offerings of liquor are poured into the soil that is then decorated with patterns drawn in coloured powders. The drummers beat furiously on their drums. Suddenly all noises cease and the priest climbs on the top of huge boulder facing the tree, raises his torch to the sky and then begins the incantation to the Gods. The parajas then shake various blossoms and tend to the mango fruits in order to make them fall to the ground in a carpet like manner. Men and women sing and dance and with this the ceremony ends. The village folk form ranks and climb up the hill once again. Later at night in the open square of the village, a bonfire is lit, erect stones representing men, flat ones representing women are placed in honour of the ancestors and the dance begins. Death ceremony too in the Paraja tribe is solemnised by placing a stone vertically for men and laying it flat for women. In a corner of the open space in the center of the village where the tribal dances and assemblies are held, sheltered by the shade of an old mango tree is a memorial to all the dead of the village.

The novel describes the lives of tribals in jungles which is basically a question of survival. Poisonous plants and ravenously hungry animals pose a constant threat to these people who have to visit the interior of forests either as herdsmen or as labourers. In *Paraja* Mohanty highlights various issues of the Paraja tribe subtly. A number of questions related to the identity and life style of tribals are raised. For a tribal, his/her life is his/her land, his/her forests, his/her natural environment. For him/her ecological issues and environmental concerns mean little, as s/he is still unaware of these issues. The novel also exposes a pertinent fact that the tribals are still being exploited in this world and because of extreme illiteracy and poverty they are forced to live in sub-human conditions. The second half of the novel discusses at length the moving away of the tribals, their migration to other states, legal difficulties, tribal rights and the question and nature of identity. The writer emphatically points at the unscrupulous means adopted by non-tribals in usurping tribal land through unfair methods. The attitudes are changing as commercialisation infiltrates into the lives of tribals. More and more tribal folk are getting displaced due to economic and legal reasons. Inequality and bonded labour has led to pain, anguish and humiliation of these simple tribal people. Their ignorance adds to their woes, making them easy victims of exploitation. Thus, the novel if, on the one hand acquaints us with life style, culture, rituals and customs of tribal folk, then, on the other it highlights the problems being faced by the tribals.

Gopinath Mohanty portrays diverse aspects of the lives of a Paraja family through a multiplicity of situations. Sukru Jani longs to plough more and more land to ensure the economic security of his family, in the pursuit of his longings, he gets enmeshed in a web of inexplicable economic rules in the hands of the moneylender, his dreams are unfulfilled and he and his sons take revenge by butchering the villainous *Sahukar*. The novelist lyrically depicts the flowering of human emotions as he shows the young men and women falling in love (Mandia Jani and Kajodi, Jili and Bagla).

Songs and dance are a vital part of the oral tradition and of tribal life. The songs in oral literature are narrative and reflective as they broaden our horizons on the traditions and folklore of that tribe and the age as well. The songs are also termed as ‘oral formulaic poetry’ that means ‘poetry that is composed and transmitted

by singers or reciters'. Its origins are pre-historic and it continues to flourish amongst population that is illiterate. Additions and deletions take place in the narrative as it is passed by word of mouth, from one generation to another orally. Despite the fact that these oral compositions have no fixed variation yet these poems or songs incorporate verbal formulas – set words, word patterns, and refrains which help to recall, repeat and readjust to changing times. The themes of the songs vary from traditional folk epic subjects like tribal heroes, love, romance and day-to-day routine chores.

Orality and literacy are interrelated and mutually interactive. Mohanty incorporates songs in his novel *Paraja* as they form an inevitable part of tribal life and culture. The songs touch upon all areas of tribal life. These songs underline the deep-rooted-ness of the tribal's relationship with his/her surroundings, rituals, customs, Gods and supernatural forces. Their simplicity is reflected through these songs and their intentions are mirrored in these orations. The songs are an inseparable part of the text and one has to understand the theoretical concerns highlighted through them. These songs correspond to the lives of the various characters of the novel and exhibit their emotions. They help to build the atmosphere of the novel. The novel makes use of love, ritual, festival, work, seasonal, and miscellaneous songs. The songs are an expression of their deepest emotions – the *rasa* and the *bhava* – love, fear, hope, hatred, anguish, pain, ecstasy, be it at work or in relationships; be it at the altar of God or at the change of seasons or celebrations of festivals.

Songs are not solely a part of the Paraja community but all over the world in tribes or in non-tribes as well, they are an expression of feelings on different occasions; an external manifestation of internal, hidden, unsaid emotions. The words voice the flow of thoughts. Let us read through these songs:

Love Songs:

*The garment of many colours which you wear,
That sari woven in Lower Maliguda,
Wash it clean again, wash it quickly
For my sake, beloved, come out in your very best,
Wear you bangles around your wrists.
Come out quickly; come, my love.
Let us romp together, let us dance
In this village of our forefathers,
That village of your mother's brother,
The village of your grandfather,
There is no shame,
There is no fear,
You have caught no fish,
You have caught no crab.*

(20)

That is the song that Bagla sings for Jili and plays on his *dungudunga*. The song set off all kinds of visions in his mind.

*O my darling jayi flower!
My Sweet malli bud!*

*Come with star-white in your dark hair;
I wait.
I know that you will come, beloved;
For you are as unfailing
As death is.*

*There are only two things I know to be true –
Your love, and the fear of death.*

*I play each day with death
And so I know that you will come –
Mingling your black hair with the dark clouds;
For the rains have come.
The sky grows dark,
My eyes are blinded by the lightning
The moon's fire is extinguished, the stars are put out.
The earth gropes in the dark.
The raindrops patter on the thatch-eaves;
The river sings and the mountains join the chorus,
And the frogs make music,
And the kadamba tree listens in ecstasy –
Its flowers bristle, like hairs standing on end.
And your coming to me in the rain
Is the bride's home-coming.
For the new bride washes the feet of her elders
In the custom of our tribe.*

You are the rain, the new bride.

The raindrops fill my heart with joy.

(135-136)

This was a love song that the Paraja men sang when the rains commenced.

Work Songs

*Daily we labour in this field of mandia
And pour our sweat on this land;
And the crops ripen and are harvested,
Are located in carts and taken away and stored.
For whom are they preserved, my love?
They are for you, darling of my heart.
For you, the maizes in my garden,
And the mandia in my fields;*

*When, drunk with home-brewed beer:
My eyes are flushed and unsteady,*

*I shall call to you, my darling,
And you must come.
But come secretly, my love,
When the moon is in the sky,
Treading softly on the shadowy patches under the trees;
For though I shall be waiting for you
I have my shame and fear,
In this village of my mother's brother,
In this village of my father's brother,
And if I am exposed
I shall run away in fear
But O, my darling,
We have turned our blood into water
And coaxed the mandia to bear fruits;
It is all for you, my beloved,
It is all for you.*

(58-59)

Festival Songs

*Let the bangles on your wrists ring together,
Let them clash, O my beloved!
Let us all join in the dance of the Clashing of the Bangles,
As it was danced by our fathers long ago.
Let his ancient village ring again with the sound of your bangles –
This Village of the Mango Fruit or village of the Blackberry,
Whatever we choose to name it. So dance, and make merry, and laugh,
Till the belly begins to ache.*

(93-94)

This song was sung when the young men and women performed the dance of the Clashing of the Bangles.

*O god of joy, god of dance and song,
God of the hunt,
Come, make us gay.
Be our guest:
Drink the liquor we have brewed for you,
Accept the fowl and chicken that we offer.
Then, when the few days of the feast are spent,
You may return to your home.
Only come, come, come.*

(144)

*O mighty god of Spring.
Awake!
Shake off your sleep.
See, the trees are heavy with flowers.
The Chaitra moon is in the sky.
We are all dressed up for the dance*

*In your honour.
And the young men and girls are waiting.
Wake up, and come!*

*It is you that the young man remembers
As he stands with his sweetheart
Under the liquor-palm tree,
Arms linked together,
You inspire their songs,
You are the light in lover's eyes.
You bring the newborn babies to our land,
Like a welcome shower of young mango fruits,
So that we may never lack strong arms
To plough our barren and rocky lands.*

*Wake up, god of the hunt!
For the trees are beginning to shed their leaves,
And there are fires in the forest
And the wild beasts are driven out of hiding.
The wild boar swarm in the sandy river-beds;
The spotted bear,
And the king – deer with big, branching horns,
Roam everywhere in the glens.
Of the wild hare also no count can be made.
Come, lead us in the hunting.
And we shall feast together.
Those who were old are dead,
But we shall not mourn them.
For such is life,
And each must go in his turn.*

*But every year, when Spring comes,
Every year, in the month of Chaitra,
Your rites will be celebrated.
In this sacred valley where you live,
And through your grace
The mango shall blossom again
The crops shall grow in our fields,
And our cattle grow fat,
And men shall prosper
In this land of forests and hills.
This is our scared pledge,
O god of sping!*

(146-48)

These were the songs sung at the time of the *Spring Festival*.

Miscellaneous Songs

Old Ballad

Old ballads in the Paraja dialect

*Now come, my darling,
Are you as strong as the walls of a stoutly built house?
Are you as strong as the veranda of the brewer's house?
Come, let me see how robust you are in your youth.* (26)

*Here today and gone tomorrow,
And money cannot buy it.* (186)

It was a song about young love. It continued.

*No one can find it,
Though many die searching.
One moment you may see it
By the winding jungle trail;
But it quickly hides again.
Money can buy everything.
But love it cannot buy.
And then the chorus again:
Here today and gone tomorrow,
And money cannot buy it.* (186)

Paraja Song

*Are you as strong as the veranda of the Sundhi's house?
Come, my girl, let me test how strong and young you are.* (281)

The writer does not explain these self-explanatory songs, but informs the reader that they are an indivisible part of the people. We understand the contextual meaning of the song and not the background or historical significance. These songs can be understood better by those who know and understand the Paraja custom and language, and are accustomed to their way of life. It is not easy for the translator to translate songs as the untranslatability factor for certain expressions and words cannot be ignored. To translate poetry, songs or music is the most difficult thing. The rhythm, the intensity and sometimes the meaning are lost in the process of translation. Yet, the translator has made his best efforts to translate these Paraja songs into English from the source language – Odia, for the benefit of a wide readership.

However, though Mohanty delineates so many interesting aspects of human relationships in the form of emotions such as ambition, revenge, love and exploitation, he does not concentrate on any single idea or notion to highlight it as the predominant theme of the novel. What do you think?

3.4 WHAT IS *PARAJA* ABOUT?

A close analysis of the novel will tell us that the predominant idea of the novel – the central one that pervades through the entire novel – is the crucial matter of human existence in the face of antagonistic social constraints. Despite their uncomplicated and zestful life, the life of the Parajas is characterised by the shadow of some unseen and inscrutable power whose wrath drives the characters relentlessly to death and destruction. Sukru Jani always dreams of a hopeful future:

He feels happy with life. It has been as he wanted it to be, and some kind and benevolent spirit has made everything bright and beautiful for him. And when he thinks of his future he has no doubt that it will be brighter still. He fancies that he can even see it in the far distance, in vivid detail. A number of houses have been built for him and his sons and his grand sons. Yes, they are all there.

But his vision is not transformed into reality. Ambition, greed and internal conflict within the tribe create insurmountable odds for Sukru Jani and his family to procure any help in their moment of crisis. The novelist powerfully depicts two facets of the Paraja community's life – firstly, Sukru Jani's aspirations for a fulfilling future that are disturbed and doomed due to the indefinable and complex process by which he and his children are transformed from free men into 'gotis' or serfs, bound to the *Sahukar* for life. Secondly, Mohanty seeks to portray the undaunted courage, outstanding resilience and never-say-die attitude of Sukru Jani and each member of his family. In spite of the influx of problems that overwhelm them at various junctures of their life, they do not give up hope.

Mandia had adjusted to the life of a goti far more easily than the others; perhaps it was because of his greater resilience. He rarely brooded like his father. The shock had worn off and he had grown buoyant again. He never bothered to count his tomorrows, for he was sure that his time would come. Optimism comes naturally to the tribesman; he is never quite cured of it. (p. 106)

The Parajas as a community and as the individual members of the community that we come across in the course of the narrative believe in the act of living life to the full. They toil hard to improve their lot, seek out love and follow their dreams. The novel constantly focuses on the joy and peace that govern the lives of the tribals through the narrative. Their buoyant optimism and undying hope, do not desert them even after they go through a series of misfortunes. On the other hand, Mohanty's protagonist Sukru Jani is not merely the primitive tribesman ensnared by the predatory moneylender from the city. He is also the quintessential man who wages a heroic but futile war against extra-cosmic and invisible powers but ultimately has to accept and adjust. He fights hard to undo the decree, but his endless struggle is of no avail. His plight reminds us of **Aeschylus**'s comment in *Agamemnon* that "as fate has willed so shall it be fulfilled".

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Besides the story of the novel, what are the important aspects in the study of a novel?

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2) What role does theme play in a novel?

3) What, according to you is the theme of Paraja?

3.5 DEFINING PLOT

A close interpretation of the theme of the novel should help us understand an author's narrative purpose and authorial vision better. It offers us a better perception of the content of the novel that we are studying. Another significant aspect of the novel that we have been acquainted with is the plot of the novel. We have already talked about plot in Block I, Unit 2 and here we reiterate the definition of plot for better understanding. Plot in the context of the novel may be defined as the schematic structure including the major events in the narrative. It is important at this point to distinguish between plot and story. Story refers to a narrative of events, ordered chronologically but a plot is much more than this. The story is the raw material from which the plot is constructed. Crafting a plot requires choosing not only the elements of a story to be included — and the order in which they are to be narrated - but also relating the events of a story to one another so that causality may be established convincingly. This cause and effect relationship between interrelated events is always taken into critical consideration by a novelist. A novelist structures his/her narrative by closely linking character and motivation into the fabric of his/her work. A story can merely arouse a sense of suspense in the readers' mind as to what happens next in the narrative. A novel demands a more careful and nuanced interpretation of psychology, motivation and human behaviour as we have to follow why a particular character behaves in a specific manner that ultimately leads to a turn

in the sequence of events. A plot is the skeletal structure that gives vital support to the very fabric of the story.

The plot as we may understand finally is the pattern of events and situations in a narrative work, as selected and arranged both to emphasise relationships - usually of cause and effect - between incidents and to elicit a particular kind of interest in the reader or audience such as surprise or suspense. In the next section, we shall discuss the plot of *Paraja*.

3.6 THE PLOT OF *PARAJA*

By now you should have read the novel *Paraja*. We shall try and trace the pattern of the plot in the novel in this section. As we have discussed earlier, causality is the most important ingredient in the plot of a novel. In short, all episodes, actions and events are closely connected with each other in a novel. One action leads to another action in a chain of interrelated events, determining the lives of the characters in the narrative. The shadow of an inscrutable power that overwhelms the life of the Parajas is not comparable to the issue of chance and coincidence as in a **Hardy** novel. In fact, Gopinath Mohanty lays the basis of the narrative structure in the desire and consequent action of the central characters of the novel thereby, leading to the intricacies of the plot.

The novel revolves around Sukru Jani, a patriarch of the Paraja tribe whose life represents the tragic degeneration of a close-knit community. The members of the Paraja tribe live their lives according to the primary laws of nature and pursue their lives without much higher ambitions. In spite of the simple and uncomplicated nature of their lives, Sukru Jani commits an error that initiates a chain of interrelated events finally culminating in the murder of the *Sahukar*. The forest guard, presented in terms of a predator is an alien to the native community, nursing lecherous desires for the young women of the tribe. In spite of his knowledge of the intrinsic evil lurking in the character of the forest guard, Sukru Jani asks for permission to fell trees in order to follow his dream of owing a piece of cleared land for agricultural purposes. He does not realise that clearing forest lands for agricultural purposes is illegal. His innocent desire for more land leads him into the trap of the forest guard most unwittingly. The guard gives his permission for clearing the land only to boldly express his sexual desires for Jili, Sukru Jani's elder daughter. Refused by both father and daughter, the guard wreaks vengeance on the family by imposing undue and heavy fines on him. The guard's manipulation compels Sukru Jani to borrow money from the *Sahukar* that finally leads him and his sons into becoming *gotis* or bonded labourers of the money lender.

The novelist traces the pitiable degradation of the family unit as the male members of the family are forced to leave the two girls without any means to look after themselves. After a period of waiting and employing all strategies of physical and emotional survival, Jili and Bili become labourers for the town contractor. Economic depravity, alienation from the tribal way of life and loss of her lover, goads Jili into becoming the mistress of the contractor. Their father, Sukru Jani persuades them to come away with him to their dilapidated house, eventually rescuing both sisters. In course of time Bili manages to find a bridegroom for herself, while, Jili becomes the concubine of the despicable *Sahukar*. Jili barter her beauty and youth in lieu of cheap luxuries and comforts given to her by

the *Sahukar*. The novel ends in the brutal act of murder, as Sukru Jani and his sons finally butcher the *Sahukar* for years of indescribable exploitation and for shattering the Paraja's sense of honour by taking the daughter of their family as his mistress.

After having traced the main events in the plot, let us try to answer a question. How is the plot of the novel helpful in highlighting the significance of the theme? The structural mosaic of the plot consists of a strategic arrangement of events and episodes and explains how the author wants his readers to assess the motives of the characters. We are led to reflect on whether Gopinath Mohanty wishes us to interpret the Parajas as powerless individuals suffering untold miseries in the hands of a few social exploiters, or does he believe in the dictum that "Character is destiny" to suggest human beings are ultimately responsible for their own individual actions? The movement of the plot suggests that we pay close attention to the development of episodes in order to establish effective connections and finally internalise the vision that the novelist conveys through the plot. The plot then may be defined as that crucial element of the narrative that holds the action together.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) How would you distinguish 'story' from 'plot'?

- 2) What strategy does the novelist adopt to transform mere actions of a story into a formal plot?

- 3) How is the theme of the novel Paraja related to its plot?

3.7 LET US SUM UP

As we have understood from the earlier sections of the unit, the two most significant aspects of a work of literature are theme and plot. The theme of a novel is the salient, central idea that emerges from a literary work's treatment of its subject matter embodying the novelist's vision of life. A plot offers the structural

foundation on which a novel is built. A well-structured plot is inextricably connected to the theme of the narrative.

3.8 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Two other aspects of the novel besides the story are theme and plot.
- 2) The theme helps the novelist give a formal shape to his/her ideas that she conveys through his/her work.
- 3) Paraja depicts the rise and fall in fortunes of a tribal patriarch, Sukru Jani and his family due to a complex network of social and economic circumstances.

Check Your progress 2

- 1) Whereas a story is a mere chronology of events, a plot is a complex mosaic of episodes linked to each other in causal relation.
- 2) The novelist organises his events in a manner that they may relate to one another in a logical sequence.
- 3) The theme of gradual degeneration of fortunes of a tribal family is delineated through a careful choice of interrelated episodes in the novel, Paraja.

UNIT 4 *PARAJA* : A NOVEL IN TRANSLATION

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 *Paraja* (English) as a Translated Novel
 - 4.2.1 Language
 - 4.2.2 Colloquialism
 - 4.2.3 Poetic Prose
 - 4.2.4 Words and Echoes
 - 4.2.5 Songs
 - 4.2.6 Considerations
- 4.3 Translation to & from Other Languages
- 4.4 The Indian Cultural Context of *Paraja*
- 4.5 *Paraja* as an Indian Tale of Survival
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 Hints to Check Your Progress

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall attempt to place *Paraja* in the tradition of the Indian novel in English. For a critical understanding of the narrative in a specific socio-cultural context, it is imperative to have an overview of the Indian novel in English. We shall then identify the Indian elements in *Paraja* within the broader context of the novel. This will be related to our reading of *Paraja* as a tale of survival, and in order to understand the author's perspective better, we shall analyse carefully Mohanty's art of characterisation. After studying this unit closely, you will be able to perceive the following:

- The status of *Paraja* as an Indian novel in English.
- The manner in which character contribute to the Indianness of the theme.
- The way in which *Paraja* transcends the limitations of its cultural context to have a universal appeal to larger crosssections of readers.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

We shall now focus our attention on a brief survey of the Indian novel in English in the post-independence period. In this regard, we have to keep in mind the significant contributions made in this area by the major trio: **Mulk Raj Anand** (1905 – 2004), **R K Narayan** (1906 – 2001), and **Raja Rao** (1908 – 2006). Mulk Raj Anand, in his novels *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) portrayed the plight of the underprivileged in Indian Society. R K Narayan depicts diverse aspects of the social order with a delicate blend of gentle irony and sympathy, quiet realism and fantasy in such representative works such as *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The Dark Room*

(1938) and other novels. Raja Rao delineates the complex processes of change that overwhelmed the social order in such sensitive works as *Kanthapura* (1938), *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) and other novels.

Post-Independence Indian English fiction retains the momentum that the novel had gained during the Gandhian age. The tradition of social realism established earlier on a sound footing by authors such as Mulk Raj Anand, R K Narayan and Raja Rao is continued by novelists like **Bhabani Bhattacharya (1906 - 88)**, **Manohar Malgonkar (1913 – 2010)** and **Khushwant Singh (1915 – 2014)**. Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* (1947), Khushwant Singh's *A Train to Pakistan* (1956) and Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), significantly portrays the post-independence, post-partition world from a sensitive perspective. A notable development in the tradition is also the emergence of an entire school of women novelists among whom the leading figures were **Ruth Pravar Jhabwala (1927 – 2013)**, **Kamala Markandya (1924 – 2004)**, **Nayantara Sahgal (1927 -)** and **Anita Desai (1937 -)**. Jhabwala's *The Nature of Passion* (1956), Kamala Markandya's *Nectar in a sieve* (1954), Nayantara Sahgal's *A Time to be Happy* (1958) and Anita Desai's *Voice in the City* (1965), among many other novels portrayed the circumscribed status of the woman, her yearning to transcend the limitations of the domestic space and her longing for an individual identity.

The novel form has developed interestingly in the hands of later writers such as **Amitabh Ghosh (1956)**, **Arun Joshi (1957-93)**, **Salman Rushdie (1947)**, **Manju Kapoor (1948)**, **Shashi Tharoor (1956)**, **Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (1956)**, **Upamanyu Chatterjee (1959)**, **Arundhati Roy (1961)**, **Anita Nair (1966)**, **Jhumpa Lahiri (1967)**, **Kiran Desai (1971)**, and more recently a whole new generation of younger writers such as **Meena Kandasamy (1984)**, and **Rashmi Bansal (1985)**. Our primary emphasis in this section was to particularly relate the developments of the Indian novel in English in the pre-independence and early phases of post-independence period with Gopinath Mohanty's novel that was written originally in Odia in 1945.

4.2 *PARAJA* (ENGLISH) AS A TRANSLATED NOVEL

We shall devote this section to an examination of *Paraja* (English) as a translated text with reference to the Odia original. Have certain things, that couldn't be translated, been left untranslated? Which are the areas where the original text has defied translation? In what ways does this text written originally in Odia pose problems for translator? What follows is a comparative assessment of both the texts keeping in view the issue of translation.

4.2.1 Language

In *Paraja*, a novel written originally in Odia, one of the most significant aspects for observation is the use of various kinds of language. The language of the preliterate contrasts with the language of the literate, colloquial language rubs shoulders with refined literary language and prose lends towards poetry. By and large the role that language plays in structuring the novel is considerable.

The language of the preliterate is totally different from that of the literate characters, and Gopinath Mohanty makes use of a number of expressions from the tribal languages; he sometimes inserts into the text a couple of sentences, a phrase, a few words and expressions taken from the tribal language. At many points he has carefully explained some of these expressions and at certain other points he leaves it to the reader's imagination, and in such situations the context provides the explanation. Imagine a sentence where half of it is in a tribal dialect and the other half in standard Odia; pitted against each other both the languages by emphasis on each other's importance and identity go a long way in enhancing the meaningful possibilities of the situation in question. These snatches of tribal language occur naturally in the text but this kind of an effect cannot possibly be brought over to the translated version. Let us look at a couple of examples from the original text and the translated one.

At almost all the points where there is an illustration from the translated text, we have taken care to provide the corresponding original sections in transliteration and underlined the words, phrases or sentences for discussion. Besides when you look at the transliterated lines, the organisation of the sentences, words, phrases, punctuations too communicate a great deal. Even if you don't understand the language, go through the lines, you will perhaps sense a certain rhythm, certain music, and through that you can decipher some meaning.

Let us look into some of these examples through which we seek to find answers to some of the queries raised in the initial section.

Here we provide you a transliterated section from Chapter -2 that, deals with the conversation between the forest guard and the tribal girl – Jili. This passage includes expression in the tribal language, colloquial Odia and standard Odia and thus, creates a text that remains intimate to the sense and sensibility the author intends to convey and the effect is dramatic. Section A2 represents the translation of Section A1. The lines have been numbered so that it is easier for you to draw parallel for discussion.

A1

- 1) Bojha uthila, bujuli uthila, Kandhore bandhuka pokaie jungle
- 2) Jaman uthila, Chhaie Leuta bela Gannat uthare Jili 'gurdi'
- 3) saga dhouthila
- 4) ...jhola se pakhe ataki rahi jaman
- 5) hankila
- 6) "Aye Nuni (Toki) Kaaen Karoole (Kona 'Karuchhu')?"
- 7) Saag – Babu –
- 8) "Deiesa? (Debuki?)
- 9) Ete saag nelu gurdi saag kona koribu babu?
- 10) Jili Hosila, Ahuri Kete toki paniki
- 11) Olheiebaku atadaru godile, Jaman bhabila
- 12) "Aaji Etiki" Se Bato dhorila.

(7-8)

- 1) As the party waded through the stream the
- 2) Forest Guard fell back and paused near the
- 3) bank; then in a bantering tone he hailed the
- 4) Girl in her own dialect and asked;
- 5) ‘What are you doing, Girl?’
- 6) ‘These are leaves for cooking, Sir’.
- 7) Jili replied.
- 8) ‘*Will you let me have some?*’ he asked,
- 9) meaningfully, Jili laughed.
- 10) ‘*Didn’t you take enough vegetables from*
- 11) *our village? What do you want wild*
- 12) *gurdi leaves for?*’, She said.
- 13) He could see other girls coming down the slope
- 14) towards the pool and realised that it was
- 15) time to go; but he felt at least he had
- 16) made a start. He turned on his heel and
- 17) went. (Chapter -2, EP 13)

In A1 look at lines 6, 7 and 8 the italicised words are in the tribal dialect, the words that you find inside the brackets beside the words in tribal language are meanings provided by the author in standard Odia. The English translation says that ‘he hailed the girl in her own dialect and asked’, and then provides the translation of these lines. Do you get the feel of the tribal language in the translation? Certainly not!

What you get is only the sense/meaning. Suddenly line ‘9’ in Odia corresponding to line ‘10’- ‘11’ and ‘12’ in English turns colloquial and when you reach lines 10,11,12 and A1 corresponding to lines ‘13’ to ‘17’ in A2, it is standard Odia and the contrasting effect that emerges does not escape your notice, but the lines in the English version fail to display the contradistinction. All the lines find a homogenised expression in the English language.

In the following passage the purpose is to show you how the author inserts snatches of colloquial language even while we find colloquial words in the same sentence. Apart from that, here it is also indicates that the translator leaves some specific expressions as they are in order to enable the readers of the target language get a feel of code mixing and also for the purpose of achieving precision.

B1

- 1) Puni pani Chhinchadi – “Kaha kotha etey bhabuchhulo,
- 2) aye Bagli!”
- 3) “Bhak!”
- 4) “Kotha Kahibu nahin?”

- 5) Jili Kohila, “Kona Kahuchhiu, aye bhauja?”
- 6) Mo garaja podichhi yanka bhauja hebaku-”
- 7) Joma tikie ichha nothibo para-”
- 8) Kajodi dimuhan jhadi jhadi kohilla,
- 9) “*Aame nichu nichu* (amora darakar nahin)
- 10) *Amora “bhato”* (bhinoie) Katha Kaha,
- 11) *Sunibaku bhola lagibo”*

(8)

B2

- 1) She splashed more water at Jili and asked:
- 2) Tell me, Mrs. Bagla, of whom you are
- 3) thinking so deeply?
- 4) “Oh, do be quiet!”
- 5) “No, tell me!”
- 6) Jili laughed and returned.
- 7) Why don’t you tell me what I can do for
- 8) you, my dear sister-in-law?
- 9) ‘Who wants to be her sister-in-law?
- 10) Kajodi muttered.
- 11) “Who indeed!” Jili said
- 12) “*Nothing could be further more from your thought*”. (EP -14)

In passage B1, look at the 9th and 10th lines. The italicised phrase and the italicised words are in tribal language and the rest of the words in the sentence are in standard Odia. Can the same effect be created in the English version of the text? As you find in this sentence, similarly all over the text you will find a number of words and phrases taken from the language of the *Parajas* incorporated in the fabric of the novel on purpose for effect. If you look at the translated lines in B2 that effect is simply not there.

We have chosen this passage in order to point out another fact- how a translator skips some of the specific expressions while trying to capture the essential meaning. If the original lines in 9 to 11 in B1 are translated literally with word for word correspondence then it would perhaps read like this. “We don’t want, don’t want, tell me about your brother-in-law, I would like to listen to that”. In the translated version it has been rendered in a single line “Nothing could be further from your thought”. The specific reference to the brother-in-law in the original lines is not there; the particular mention in the original disappears into the pervasive sense of the whole sentence in a very precise manner. It is one of the facts to be noticed however, it is not to say that this is a flaw. May we remind you that this is the manner in which in a literary translation, the translator negotiates meaning between the source and the target language. We leave it to your imagination as to how effective it would be if the original tribal words and expressions were retained in transliteration along with the literal translation of these lines under consideration.

C1

- 1) Sukru Jani Torani Pujhariku pocharila,
- 2) “*Tuie Koiluski naiien babu*, panchata Mangalabar dina
- 3) Sakshi lokankue neyie kocheriki asibaku?
- 4) “Lekhuku”
- 5) “*Aau tuie misha Koilusha Babu - ?*” (434-435)

C2

- 1) Sukru Jani turned to the Pujari
- 2) And said: ‘*Didn’t you tell us, Sir*, that we
- 3) should come here in the sixth Tuesday?’
- 4) He turned to the writer and said: *And you*
- 5) *told us the same thing*’. (365-366)

In Section C1 the italicised sentences ‘4’- ‘5’ refer to the unexplained words from the tribal language, corresponding to lines ‘2, ‘4’ and ‘5’ in Section C2, the translated version. Probably these unexplained words make an attempt towards bringing the character closer to the reader. These words seem to reduce the distance between the reader and the character though they come in flashes; put the same words not in tribal language but in standard Odia or English and the magic is probably gone.

4.2.2 Colloquialism

Colloquial language refers to words and expressions that belong to familiar speech and not to standardised or elevated speech. In dialogues between different characters in the novel you find innumerable colloquial expressions that are deeply rooted in the culture of the place, and the translator can at best make an effort towards approximation due to the lack of equivalents in the target language. If some of the colloquial words and expressions are given literal translation, then there might be misrepresentation, the import and its effect remaining in the original. To render colloquial expressions that have their roots deep in the tradition and culture of a people into other language is in fact, extremely difficult because another language means another people, another culture, and another tradition.

Here are some illustrations from the text:

D1

- 1) ‘*Uth, bhak, bhak* pala bhumi Chhadi Devi’
- 2) *Potkar qyalpamane, hoiere scholae*,daba
- 3) Pokai thilo mo upore?’ (444)

D2

- 1) The Sahukar felw into a rage kicking them
- 2) Away and roaring. ‘*get up: get out*’. I’m

- 3) To give you the land back, am I? *You rascals?*
- 4) Take me to court, would you? And what did
- 5) the court decide? Are you going or shall I
- 6) have you sent to jail?" (372)

E1

- 1) *Ja ja baya qualap* – gali kole adhikari
- 2) Agoku taninibi, dekhibu setebele – (435)

E2

- 1) 'Go you idiot.' The writer, shouted back.
- 2) If you make trouble. I'll drag you to the
- 3) magistrate and then you'll feel". (429)

F1

- 1) Sukrujani Kohilla,
- 2) "Haan ghara bhitore *oichha kuch kuchakori hanibo se.*" (429)

F2

- 1) 'Certainly,' Sukru Jani said,
- 2) He'll *hack him to pieces* inside our own house.' (361)

These are sections that provide snatches of conversation from the novel. The colloquial expressions contrast sharply with the language of the tribals on the one hand, and with standard Odia on the other. In the English rendering the translator cannot provide the features of the colloquial, but can only try to provide the meaning of these words without the colloquial dimension. Even if Odia is spoken throughout Odisha, the dialect spoken in the coastal belt is not the same as that spoken in the Western part, nor it the same in the south in the Koraput district. Therefore, it is evident that the colloquial language gives a sense of place too.

In Section D1 – line 2, the phrase '*patkargyalpamane*' has been rendered as "you rascals" whereas, the very same phrase in E1 –line 1, has been rendered as "you idiot" and this expression in slang, a feature of the colloquial language cannot possibly be translated exactly as in the original. In section D1 - line 2, the word "*Salae*" means "brother-in-law", but if the translator, renders it literally in the target language, the word would lose its sting, and so here, the translator has included it in the sense of 'you rascals'. The author switches over from the tribal language to the colloquial; from the colloquial to standard Odia; and from the standard Odia to deep poetic lines – the effect this switching (what is also called 'code switching' and 'code mixing'), creates remains untranslatable. The colloquial tongue is spoken in the tribal dialect but we cannot possibly point out that a certain conversation is going on in the colloquial language. Besides, there is also a lot of interplay of these varieties of language in the fabric of the text.

4.2.3 Poetic Prose

Gopinath Mohanty follows a lyrical style in his novel. At times it becomes difficult to distinguish the borderline between poetry and prose. In the text, we find profuse use of songs, lyrics, and incantations (mantras). In addition, the text itself is poetic in style. And the poetic segments of the novel fit into the narrative with felicity and ease while posing problems, as does the translation of poetry. At times the narrative while portraying situations and contexts turns very deep. Even in prose one feels a certain rhythm, and resonance achieved through diction, images, symbolism and metaphors. Whatever best could be taken in translation in terms of images and metaphors and symbols come to the English translation but the nuances of contrast, parallels, echoes remains in the source text, that is to say, in the Odia text.

Go through the passage that follows:

A1

Eka funkake sabu udigola, chutia mushara
Sabu dhana daulata gala. (25)

A2

In the same way, a single puff of wind can
destroy what has taken a field mouse a lifetime to amass. (36)

B1

Kintu bayasa ashe, jeteble tiki
Ghara chatia chadheiti madhay basa bandhibaku
unchhonna hue, ethu sethu kathi kuta neie pokae
Setebele prajapatira melakhola saukhin
jeevan bhala lage nahin, Kandha aape
juali khoje ... (91-92)

B2

But the time comes when every sparrow begins to build
its nest, when the butterfly grows tired of its flight,
and human shoulders ache for the yoke.

C1

Kuhudi chiri chiri dura kondha gaanra
Jodi boienfire goetae purana kondah ragini
duietara, Khudi upare Khali godia godi - (427)

C2

Through the mist came the sound of two
kondh flutes played together, the notes
chase each other through the mist (359)

While going through the textual illustration look at the images, analogies, thoughts, emotions and imagination involved in shaping the lines. When he talks of the field mouse's wealth getting blown off by a single puff of wind in A1/A2, when he tries to draw an analogy between a certain stage in human life and in the life of the butterfly, when he describes the notes of the Kondh flutes chasing each other, don't you sense poetry? Do these lines tell you something deep through poetic devices? Look at the transliterated lines and see the organisation of the words. For in poetry, the choice and organisation of the words means much. It is nothing but poetry. That is the feel of the original. Can these sharp contrasts and their subtle nuances ever be realised in a translation?

As we have pointed out even in the prose passages by Gopinath Mohanty you discover some rhythm, some music that remains one of the most important aspects of poetry. Look into these following lines, read them aloud and then look at the translation. Listen to these lines.

M1

Phaguna –

Kheta Khan Khan akashare poshe boli

Kuhudi nahin, hau hauan akashatole hau hauan kheta podichhi
jete durokukiba akhi podichhi, kudo kudo abu abuka pahadora
chulo upare nalicha nalicha nuan patra menchi menchi jungle,
dhadi dhadi denga denga sondhi gochha, jaha dura gaan bhitore
sarahada, au jungle tole tole Kasora Kheta, gochha nahin patra nahin (83)

M2

It was the month of Phaguna – that is February – and spring had arrived. The fields still bare after the harvest, gaped at the sky, which was unrelieved by even a single cloud. The hilltops were almost bald; a few vivid red leaves were beginning to sprout on the slender trees.

Make a comparison between the translated and the original just by reading and listening to the words. Do you miss anything, in the translated text? Is it the music? Or is it the rhythm? It is clear that the intentionality of the original sentences has not been achieved fully. These translated lines lose much of their communicative power and strength. In fact, it is near impossible for the translator to reconstruct the exact *import* and *effect* of the original work.

4.2.4 Words and Echoes

In the translated text you will find quite a few terms and expressions either in Odia or in the tribal language, terms like – *Goti*, *Gotinood*, *Putti*, *Sahukar*, *Dharmu*, *Dhartino*, *Garod*, *Duduma* – have been explained in the translated text in most of these cases or they can be easily understood from the context. *Dharmu* has been explained as: 'the Just One', '*Duduma*' has been explained as waterfalls, *Goti* – debt-bound slave. The meanings have been provided, though the words have been retained. Some of the phrases, expressions and allusions are peculiar to the experience of a people and in some deep way they convey a meaning and a message that may not be available in another tongue.

F1

Pruthibira Keun ajanata Konare jungle bhitare
 ‘monishachhua’, mencha menchi hole
 Koieh Koien Kandile’ antare dora
 Kaupuni, Khaibaku, mondae amba
 Koieli jaau, motha upare asaranti dukhara
 dhara. Debota hasile, monisha Kandile. (25)

F2

And thus it was that in this land of hills and
 forests in an unmapped corner of the wide world,
 luckless men and women who lived on castaway
 mango stones and hid their nakedness in bits of
 rag huddled together under the *tyranny* of misery
 pouring down on their heads, and wept. (37)

G1

Dosha jona ekathi hoie raa dhari “rabile”
 Jaha bujhanti tohinre biswas ashe. (419)

G2

When ten people join in shouting a slogan
 they begin to believe in it. While convincing
 each other they begin to convince themselves. (354)

In Section F1 we would like to draw your attention to the word – ‘monishachhua’ ‘monisha’ means human and ‘chhua’ means ‘baby’ or ‘babies’ in Odia. This is a rare combination, one normally talks about “kukurachhua”, which means puppies, or “baghachhua” which means tiger cubs; almost always the young ones of birds, beasts and animals are referred to as “Chhua” along with the name of the species, but normally nobody says “moinshachhua”, if at all human babies are referred to, then, they are simply called “Chhua”. The picture that the author provides in this context instantly evokes the images of ‘crying puppies’ huddled together as one finds them in the chill of winter. And this peculiar turn of phrase calls for echoes and suggestions beyond its surface meaning.

Similarly in passage G1, the use of the verb ‘rabile’- seems interesting. This Odia verb refers generally to the call of birds and specifically to the cawing of crows but in the given context the word has been used for *men*, thus, connecting picturesquely the habit of the crows with that of human beings. In the English version – there is no reference to the crow or no kind of association is generated from its use. It becomes a simple expression “shouting a slogan”. So in these kinds of usage too the translated text loses *something*.

4.2.5 Songs

The novel makes use of a number of songs and song-poems at different junctures. Musicality is probably the most dominant ingredient of songs and song-poems, and when they are read out in original form this aspect can be realised very distinctly but in translation, we hardly find the music. That is why the reader of the English version of the novel does miss the music of the songs used in the text. The translator would indicate as – That, that was the song they sang: and then s/he will provide the translated version of the songs; but when you go through the lines you feel, despite the best efforts of the translator – that the lines are not musical and you would probably, ask – “Where is the song?”

Many other expressions and phrases, sentences and words from the tribal languages used in the novel have not been explained at many points; in the case of songs too the author has left them unexplained at certain points. It is true that neither the sonorous expression of the incantations nor the rhythm or cadence of the bangles – clashing dance-song could be rendered in English. But when the author intends even in the original version to keep certain songs unexplained in prose translation, in standard Odia he certainly means to keep it on purpose and an attempt to render it in translation is to annihilate its very purpose.

Shelley said, “Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thoughts”, and here we present a somewhat sad song that Mandia sings for his lost beloved. In the original version, unlike other songs, this song has not been rendered in prose. The description that precedes and follows the song expresses a heaviness in the breast of Mandia – a lovelorn lover. And here is the song in transliteration. Go through it:

*Jaie Hulu bolimi molli dadu bolimi,
Baandunia juloie elution kosoien
Heendi deku tobeni begi kachu abeni,
Koien kelu rubeku sodikelu rubeni,
Maranaru bosidu dungaraku tosiru, aro gureru
Jetu anu maruli barasha juli ashuli
Andaru ho molukoien bijuliho jutukoien
Sodamari gitire nerka mari gitire.
Lipu jona lipuli lipu tara lipuli,
Jotaru ho hienti goduru ho chendili.
Sone pani jhipuli ruhlih jhipuli,
Gadu goli Kunnani jodi goli kunnani.
Janu raye rabuna sunu kedi kodommu,
Bichule ho midule nede panikadule
Jotaru ho hientie goduru ho chendillee.*

(242-43)

It is said that a song communicates even before it is understood. Having gone through the song you must have realised something of its significance. The translated text provides only one translated stanza:

*O my darling jayi flower,
slender and sweet;
my darling malli bud,
Sparkling and fragrant
your thick, black, glossy hair
Interlaced with star-white flower;
I know you will come to me:* (229-230)

So, you mark very well the evident gap between the original text and the translated one. You, perhaps, don't get the exact meaning of those words but the overall effect is overwhelming when you recite the words of the tribal song aloud.

4.2.6 Considerations

No translation is complete, and no translation is perfect in the sense that all the intentions of the original text cannot be carried over to the target language text. And it is more so with a novel like *Paraja* that makes use of the tribal language in a text written in a regional language along with colloquialisms, and Mohanty's use of deep dense poetic language makes it even more difficult. In translating this novel one of the toughest tasks lies in retaining the distinction between the varieties of language used for effect quite in keeping with the characters and their background. That apart, some other dimensions like the musicality of the songs, the deep poetic language, the turn of phrases peculiar to a people, too, pose problems for purposes of translation.

With that realisation and understanding the translator aptly remarks – “*No, translation can hope to capture the varied riches of Gopinath Mohanty's Odia prose, vigorously colloquial and forthright at one moment and sublimely effervescent and lyrical at the next. Perhaps like every translation of great literature, all that this English rendering can do is place before a wider audience something of the flavor of the original work*”. Maybe in the process of translation some of the subtleties and potentialities of the novel have been lost resulting in the erosion of its communicative power, but the objectives of the author have been met with as far as the novel reads like an English novel. The story has been told, the message and meaning have been brought home, attempts have been made to retain all the features of the original in the English rendering though the fact remains that the original narratives does all that with even more strength and power. Let us now look at translations to and from other languages next.

4.3 TRANSLATIONS TO & FROM OTHER LANGUAGES

In the multi-lingual context of India, translation has a vital role to play in bringing about an understanding among people belonging to various language areas. Unless an Odia text is translated into other Indian languages, it is bound to stay confined to the borders of *Odisha*. If a text written in a regional language is translated to a language like English then on being translated it reaches out to people and places beyond our country. One vital example that could be cited here is the fact that **Tagore's** *Gitanjali* was originally composed in Bengali. But when translated into English, it found a large audience all over the world.

You must have come across some of the translations into English from various ‘regional’ languages or ‘*bhasha*’ languages like Odia, Kannada, Bengalee, Marathi, Assamese, Tamil, Malayali, Hindi etc. On examining some of the translations from the ‘regional’/ ‘*bhasha*’ languages you will realise the resistance of the original text and the responsibility involved in the act of translation. You can also observe how a literary text belongs to the whole of humanity while belonging at the same time to a certain people, culture and language.

Find a novel in an Indian language, you know, that has been translated into English and then look into it to appreciate the translated text at hand. **Premchand**’s *Godan* could be possible choice! In the next section, we shall examine the cultural context of *Paraja*.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Outline the kinds of language used in *Paraja* (Odia). (150 words)

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- 2) How do you define colloquial language?

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- 3) Why do you think Gopinath Mohanty’s prose is poetic?

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- 4) What does a literary text lose in the process of literary translation?

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4.4 THE INDIAN CULTURAL CONTEXT OF *PARAJA*

Paraja essentially presents the plight of the aboriginal Paraja tribe in the hands of such social exploiters as the forest guard, the Sahukar and some members of the native community. What is striking about the background of the novel is the way in which the specifically Indian theme has been developed with particular reference to the social and cultural elements of its context. The novelist establishes the Indian identity of the novel in three ways – first, he provides a vivid description of the physical landscape that forms the setting of the novel –

The huts in each of the two settlements stand in parallel rows, flanked by patches of green- tiny squares of land sown with maize, chilies or tobacco and fenced in by hedges of the wild Tania shrub. Beyond the hedges are fields of mandia, olsi and kandula – different kinds of millet which form the staple food of these tribes.
(p.2)

After having evoked a realistic image of the fauna and flora of the place, **Mohanty** depicts the peculiarities of the tribal social background with a close eye for such details as inter-personal relations among tribe members, cultural practices of the community and religious beliefs of the native people, as he writes.

He sits wondering who those magical spirits might be, and which of them created the sky, the forests, the evening and the night, which spirit confers happiness and good fortune and man, and which brings storms and misery and evil days.
(p.4)

Thirdly, Mohanty also depicts the social hierarchy of the Parajs – the opposition between the Parajas and the Dombs, meticulous portrayal of the village power structure with *Naika*, the headman at the apex of power as he related everything to the Revenue Inspector, locally known as *Ribini*. Another important figure was the *Barik* or the village watchman. He shows the crucial role played by such powerful non-tribal entities as the Forest guard and the *Sahukar*.

Each element of the gender relations, the exploitation of the powerless villagers at the hands of the non-tribals and even members of their own tribe unfold in a subtle manner the cultural and social identity of every character of the tribe. Would it be right to call *Paraja* an Indian tale of survival? Let's take a look next.

4.5 *PARAJA* AS AN INDIAN TALE OF SURVIVAL

As we have discussed earlier, *Paraja* can be linked to the tradition of social novel written in the pre-Independent period in the Indian English tradition, such as Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) or Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938). These novels, like *Paraja* seem to suggest that a novel must have a social purpose. It must place before the reader a relevant issue related to the social context. Mohanty's *Paraja* exposes the oppressive nature of the social hierarchy where the *Sahukar*, the forest guard or even the contractor can be looked upon as fountainheads of exploitation in the village. The artist in Mohanty can go beyond the limitations of simplifying ideologies to touch the polymorphous truth of rural life.

Sukru Jani is caught up in a complex network of irremediable circumstances that actually begins with his asking for permission to clear a piece of land from the villainous forest guard. In course of time, his entire family is reduced to a state of abject poverty, suffering inexplicable misery and treated like pawns in a game of power. Yet, Mohanty does not diminish the traces of hope in the hearts of the innocent villagers. As long as they live, each individual survives with the hope for a better life. How does the author treat the characters in the novel? How does he deal with characterisation? The next section will try and shed some light on this important aspect of the novel under consideration.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja* is a most significant contribution to Indian English Literature. Like other social novels in the pre-independence period, *Paraja* is 'born out of passionate social awareness' Mohanty portrays uniquely, the manner in which urban, material civilisation encroaches upon and gradually destroys a primordial way of life. Mohanty however does not merely narrate a tale of suffering. On the contrary, it is tale of survival. In spite of the decline in the fortunes of Sukru Jani and his family, we as readers admire his heroic resilience and never-say-die attitude to life. The novel bears an unmistakable Indian identity as Mohanty graphically delineates each and every detail of the physical landscape and social background of the characters. Yet, the novel is not essentially culture-specific in nature as in its final reading; it transcends the barriers of time and space and has universal appeal. Sukru Jani represents the dilemma of the quintessential man, waging a heroic but futile war against social forces, like *Sisyphus* rolling up the stone against the steep slope of the hill. Ultimately Mohanty conveys his vision of life through an interesting range of complex characters. It is through a vital life of each character that we get to visualise, feel and experience the essence of Mohanty's philosophy of life.

4.6 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Read Section 4.2 entirely and then frame your answer in your own words.
- 2) Read Section 4.2.2 and then frame your answer in your own words.
- 3) Read Section 4.2.3 and then frame your answer in your own words.
- 4) Read Sections 4.2 and 4.3 and then frame your answer in your own words.

4.7 SUGGESTED READINGS & REFERENCES

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