

**PORTRAYAL OF THE TRIBALS IN GOPINATH MOHANTY'S
*THE ANCESTOR (DADI BUDHA)***

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Abstract

The paper attempts to explore the representations of tribal life by looking Gopinath Mohanty's *The Ancestor (Dadi Budha)* written in Oriya and translated by Arun Kumar Mohanty into English. It is a novel about the lives, customs, belief and rituals of the tribal communities and about the outer intervention that causes disintegration of tribal society disrupting and affecting tribal harmony in adverse ways. The study foregrounds the crucial way of representations which facilitates the contemplation of the concerning images of tribal life and their problems for the readers of the novel.

Keywords:- customs, belief, rituals, disintegration, tribal society.

Gopinath Mohanty (1924-93), the first Oriya recipient of prestigious Jnanpith award (1974) is considered one of the most significant novelists of twentieth century, the pictures of the primitive world that his novels depict are purely honest and sock the reader out of his/her complacency into recognition of the prevailing reality. Tribals who could not be the part of mainstream for dwelling in remote area of forest and hills and have been uncivilized for being out of the periphery of civilization; sparked as the prominent subject to his major novels.

Working as a member of state civil service in Koraput district with a predominantly tribal population, Gopinath Mohanty had the juncture to be familiar with lifestyle, culture, customs, ritual, festivals and songs and dances of these tribal people, as well as he interacted with the miserable conditions, poverty and pathetic scene of these blissful innocence tribals. He assimilated with these tribal communities, sat with them, ate and sang with them and share their sorrows and joy in numerous ways. Expressing the empathy for these tribals, Mohanty says, "They are the sons of nature, ingenious, innocent like children and faithful, honest and devoted to their master; suppressed, socially excluded and deprived from their own land and natural resources." Mohanty's concern and appreciation for tribal life and the call of the times and social consciousness inspired his literary expression. He points out in an interview:

The special advantage in my life was I had travelled and had been travelling. Big mountains, thick forests, tigers, snakes, elephants, rivers, forest malaria, dead bodies, deaths caused by accidents, combination of fear and beauty; storm, cold, heat, rain, thunderstorm, darkness, forest fire, flood water in different seasons- all these I could acquire not from books, not by hearing but from my living experience of life. I have experienced by travelling and added to my life.

(Mohanty, Pragna 35)

On the basis of his abundant pragmatic experience of the tribal life, he wrote his four distinguished novels *Dadi Budha* (1944), *Paraja* (1945), *Amrutara Santan* (1947) and *Apahanca* (1961) portraying the tribal life. Among them, first, two of the novels, *Paraja* and *Dadi Budha* have been translated into English respectively by Bikram K. Das and Arun Kumar Mohanty. *Amrutara Santan* brought the prestige of Sahitya Akademi Award in 1955.

Ancestor (*Dadi Budha*) is his first prominent novel based on tribal life that was published in 1944. 'Dadi' in Paraja language means 'grandfather' and 'Budha' also means 'grandfather' in Kondh language. If we blend the two, we are combining both the Kondh and Paraja languages. For the tribal people of this region, Dadi Budha is their eternal ancestor in form of immediate God. He is the cause of creation and destruction. So, the people of Lulla village have established him as their deity through their priests, heads and Naiks. A date palm tree is cut at man's height and on the top of it; they wrap a white cloth which looks like a turban. They cut twenty-one marks on the tree and put different colours on the marks. This is called their Dadi Budha, who is considered as the dispenser of life and death, joys and woes among paraja tribes.

Everything happens before his watchful eyes. The day passed and night came, but he remains silent to the witness of the joy and sorrow of these innocent tribals. Anyone could speak on his behalf, for he was mute. When diseases and the attack of tigers destroy the peace of villagers, Dadi Bhuda descends on Gurumai (a person who acts as the medium of a deity) and commands people to leave the village for safer place. He is the savior of the village and the community and responsible for the loss and gain of everyone. The people hold him in fear and veneration. In the morning, people pay their homage while going to the river. He can cure a sick child and can bring back a lost cow. He can cause fruits to grow in the garden. Sometimes infants die, cows are stolen. But they have no control over it. The tribals blame their fate. They sulk before Dadi Budha but still retain faith in him, because they are human beings and he is the presiding diety. Sariya Phoola and Sariya Jani both offer the garlands to Dadi Budha to get married with Thenga Jani, the son of Ram Muduli, the headman of Lulla village. But he comes under the spell of Santosh Kumari, a Christian Domb girl. They fall deeply in love and reject the discipline of tribal society and leave to Assam. Their plan is to build a dream home in a town where the rules of tribal society do not prevail. Later in the Lulla village a tiger appears and hunted villagers and people run away leaving the village. Dadi Budha who has been a protector in the time of suffering and intricacy does not come to their rescue. And the Dishari (astrologer) blamed to Thenga and Santosh Kumari for this cause.

Here, Mohanty conveys the message that man is more important than beliefs and rituals. But for the tribals, these rituals may be more valuable than human life itself. He hints that misfortune falls on the tribal village because Thenga Jani fled with Santosh Kumari, the Christian Domb girl, breaking social norms. That indicates the unbroken continuity of tribal life. It can be said that, it is the story of disintegration of a tribal community under the influence of modern civilization, presenting the different aspects of tribal life like love, marriage, communal

feasts and drinks, beliefs and worship, certain social codes, and institutions, which are shown as important. Mohanty points out that the entry of the outsiders into the tribal world signals disintegration. It is easy for the outsiders to motivate tribal people. Any movement can spread like fire in the tribal region. This is how Mohanty recorded the influence of Christianity among tribals and visualized the scientific perception among the domb tribes against irrational notion and hallucination under the influence of modernization. That is clearly shown in the conversation between Ram Moduli, the village headman and Eleo Sunna, the old man from Christian settlement at the beginning of the novel.

Ram Muduli said supporting with Dumas (spirits of dead persons) existence,

“If it is not Dumas, who is it then? It is only they who make the night, he stars, mountains, valleys and all. They alone cause the fire and rain. This is not what only believe today; it has been the belief of our forefathers these mysteries are beyond you dombs, bring your shahib here and show him the fire and ask him what is. How can Dumas not exist? So many people die what do they become?” “Our faith recognizes no such thing”, Eleo replied (Mohanty, *The Ancestor*3)

Here, Mohanty emphasizes the superstitious notion of the tribal community. It indicates that once the tribal people believes in someones/something, believe in, forever. They cannot be separated from their traditional principle and faith. For them, breaking the traditional disciplines constructed by their ancestors is to make the deity annoy, that causes different crisis.

Thus, keeping in view the concern of Gopinath Mohanty for downtrodden tribals, it can be said that he makes the present novel as a representation of a faithful record of the belief, manner, rituals and customs of the tribal community and demonstrates a moving narrative of hopes and fears of helpless tribals who are untouched by urban and modern ways of living and thinking. By dissembling the purgatorial life of the tribal community from the bale of conventional praxis, Gopinath Mohanty endeavored to mold them at new facet to shape a distinct cultural identity. He documented the forbiddingness, harshness of tribal life and inscrutable civilization in the form of reality in his novels.

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