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**Paraja: A Study of Tribal Representation and Cultural Roots**

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**Abstract**

This paper highlights the amazing picture of the tribal people known as the Paraja tribe. The Paraja tribe is an Indigenous community primarily found in Koraput district in Odisha, India. Understanding their culture, identity, traditions, exploitations, and tribal representations involves dealing with various aspects of the social, economic, religious, historical, and cultural lives of tribes based on the principle of diversity in unity. Gopinath Mohanty said that while tribal people are victims of historical processes, they also oppose sociocultural tyranny. According to Mohanty, Paraja is a happy tale of first love for the land, the river, and the forest. The paper depicts the superstitions, rituals, and conditions of tribes and raises awareness of the brutality, inhumanity, and suffering experienced by the Paraja people.

**Keywords:** Customs, Paraja, Culture, Identity, Suffering, Civilization and exploitations.

**Introduction**

Gopinath Mohanty (1914-1991) is one of the most renowned Odiya novelists of all time. He gained the Orissa administrative service in 1938. He spent most of his time as an administrator in Koraput, trying to uplift the life of the tribals; he was awarded the prestigious Sahitya Academy and Jnanpith Awards in 1955 and 1973, respectively, for his literary achievements. "Fiction, I realized, would best suit my purpose." Mohanty draws a distinct picture of tribal life in his tribal novels like *The Ancestor* or *Dadi Budha* (1944), *Paraja* (1945), and *Amrutara Santan* (1947).

The term "tribes" describes an idea of cultural legacy and historical identity. It refers to the tribe as a distinct group of people with unique cultural characteristics and identities. This culture differs from mainstream civilization in that it is secluded and leads to a different social lifestyle. Its customs, rituals, traditions, and culture are passed down from previous generations to the current one. The Parji language, a member of the Dravidian language family, is historically spoken by the Parajas. It is essential to their cultural identity and sets them apart from nearby groups linguistically. The many customs, celebrations, and social customs that makeup Paraja culture help to establish their identity. These consist of customary songs,

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dances, and rituals connected to different life stages, including birth, marriage, and death. The traditions, rituals, language, and social structure of the Paraja tribe all play a significant role in defining their cultural identity. Their cultural identity is defined by the following important factors: Dravidian in origin, Parji is the language spoken by the Parajas. It's a tool for communication, but it also helps them maintain their own cultural identity in the context of India's linguistic diversity.

**Agriculture:**

The core of the Paraja economy is agriculture. They engage in 'pods' or 'dip' farming, which is a form of shifting cultivation (slash-and-burn agriculture) where they cultivate rice, pulses, and millets. The Parajas have traditionally worked in weaving, hunting, and gathering in addition to agriculture. The Paraja tribe's economic activities are deeply entwined with both their natural surroundings and traditional customs. The Parajas engage in the following main economic practices: The Parajas' main economic activity is agriculture. They have long engaged in shifting cultivation, sometimes referred to as "pods" or slash-and-burn farming. Small sections of forest land must be cleared for planting, the foliage must be burned to add nutrients to the soil, and crops, including vegetables, rice, lentils, and millets, must be planted. They relocate to a new plot and let the old one organically regrow after a few years. Livestock raising is another significant economic activity in addition to agriculture. Cattle, buffaloes, goats, and fowl are raised by Parajas for their meat, milk, and other products. Their economy depends heavily on livestock since they provide money, food, and draft power. For the Parajas, hunting and harvesting wild game were important economic pursuits in the past. These activities still contribute to their cultural identity and subsistence methods, even if they have declined as a result of conservation initiatives and legislative limitations. The Parajas are renowned for their age-old skill in a variety of crafts, including metalworking, weaving, ceramics, and basketry. Using ancient looms, women were especially adept at weaving textiles made of cotton and silk. Through local marketplaces and commerce, these handicrafts not only provide home necessities but also support their economic life. In the past, the Parajas engaged in significant economic activity through trade and barter, which allowed them to exchange excess agricultural output, forest products, and handicrafts with other villages. Some Parajas have ventured into wage labor, small-scale commercial ventures, and government work in recent years. This transformation is a reflection of larger shifts in the economy as well as desires for better living and educational options. The Parajas' economic methods are confronted with obstacles, including limited land, deteriorating environmental conditions, and shifting market dynamics. In order to preserve their cultural traditions and the ecological balance, efforts are being made to boost income options, improve market accessibility, and support sustainable agriculture.

Mountains, rivers, and woods are among the natural features that the Parajas have long revered. They follow customs and have their own animistic beliefs about the spirits and deities they believe to be present in these natural settings. Hinduism has also impacted Paraja religious customs over time, leading to the emergence of

syncretic rites and beliefs. The Parajas, like many other indigenous tribes, struggle with issues of land rights and encroachment on their ancestral lands. Improvements to the educational and medical infrastructure of Paraja settlements are constantly being made, frequently with the goal of striking a balance between contemporary growth and the preservation of their unique history.

Understanding Paraja's religious beliefs provides insights into their worldview, ecological ethics, and cultural resilience. It highlights their reverence for nature, community solidarity, and ongoing efforts to maintain spiritual practices in harmony with modern influences. The indigenous people of Paraja have a shared cuisine. For example, the novel's protagonist, Sukru Jani, enjoys consuming alcohol and eating meat. When Sukru Jani felt fatigued, he drank a lot of alcohol. Tikra and Mandia are skilled in fishing, hunting, small game, and other activities. While Jili and Bili love eating meat with their father and brother, they abstain from eating beef since it is frowned upon in their tribe. They finally consume smaller millets such as powdered tamarind, maize, mango, kernel, kanga, and Khosla. Sukru Jani traveled to the forest with his family to gather forest products for their beautiful home. Complete defense of tribal areas based on farming, fishing, hunting, and production of livestock. The clothing requirement for tribe members is fairly simple: they must wear only a little piece of rags to cover their half-naked bodies when they become 7 or 8 years old. Due to the differences between Paraja culture and modern society, it is simple to identify Paraja people by their clothing code.

Gopinath Mohanty describes the Paraja tribal people's love of adorning with a variety of decorations. Paraja uses various metals such as brass, aluminum, silver, and other basic materials to create her decorations. A few tribesmen from Paraja are wealthy enough to purchase gold. Jili has always wanted to wear gold jewelry, such as chains, colored necklaces, and a variety of finger rings and bangles. Tribal women love getting tattoos to accentuate their charm and attractiveness.

They wear various types of jewels on their heads, ears, and noses because they are conscious of beauty. For example, Somberi, the wife of Sukru Jani, wore ear and nose rings. It shows what married ladies are expected to do. Married ladies wrapped the fingers of the toys with silver rings. The institution of juvenile dormitories in traditional society is managed by Paraja society, which is its unique characteristic.

#### **System of Young Marriage:**

In the tribal civilization that Gopinath Mohanty depicts, elders have established separate dormitories for young boys and girls. These dorms are located in the village center and are reserved for them. They should express their emotions, as well as their skills—such as dancing and singing—and their plans for the future there. Through the songs, they want to convey their love. I adore Mandia, Kajodi. This is the community of Paraja's very distinct future. Another unusual tradition in the Paraja community is that, because they are single, Mandia and Tikira are not permitted to

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sleep at their parents' house; instead, they go to the guys' dorms, which are situated in the middle of the village. Additionally, Jili and Bili moved into their dorms. Even though they are away from their parents' homes, they must spend the night with their friends, whom they know very well. They never go above what they can handle. Mandia, Tikra, Jili, and Bili are aware of the consequences of making a mistake of this nature. This is a very special method in the Paraja Community. If there is any type of incident, the villagers gather together and punish each other with four Annas worth of wine. After drinking the alcohol, they dance and sing in front of the Earth Goddess.

According to Vidyarthi L.P. and Rai B. K.'s book "Tribal Culture of India," "one of the dominant characteristics of their culture is the folk songs, music, and dance of the tribal people," which is a composite whole. The Parajas are a familial unit. Everyone contributes firewood to light the festive bonfire. They think that the darkness and suffering in their lives will be broken by the light. For example, they heard shouts of "Thief! Thieves!" during the night. This was the real indication that the festival was about to start when some young guys broke into the neighbor's house and stole pots, vegetable baskets, and other items. This was taking place at night. The next day, the young men gave the owner back what they had taken and had to sell it for the least amount of money. Every villager congregates in one spot to watch the celebration of the festival and dance. The single females from Kajodi, Jili, and Bili are prepared with bracelets, flowers, and other decorations to take part in the dance. Married people, however, are only permitted to watch the dance while sipping alcohol all evening. The young boys and girls began to sing and dance while playing their instruments. The songs of the Parajas express their joys and sorrows. They sing songs about their history, customs, culture, and ancestors' lives. This suggests that oral histories, songs, and rituals are excellent sources of information about the tribes. The chief Men of the several communities have a mutual understanding. For instance, the village chiefs assisted the chief of the Naika tribe in setting up a community assembly. They choose a lucky day and hour for each town to celebrate the spring celebration. As a result, the spring celebrations continue in successive sections of the communities. People dance to the rhythmic drumming and sing throughout the celebrations while the priest repeats prayers to the deity of spring. Parajas observes spring celebrations in March. Mandia, Jili, Bili, and Tikra prepared ahead of time for the event. No work, no sorrow, no concerns, and no issues throughout the celebration. Just have fun during the festival. For the occasion, Sukru Jani kept everything, including grains, rice, and paddy. To celebrate the celebration and eat and drink, everyone congregates at one location.

Most significantly, they hold a hunting competition celebration during the spring festival. Paraja's young lads enjoy going hunting for two or three days. The men headed into the forest, knowing that if they didn't come back with hunting gear, they would have to deal with their wives' taunts. The women hung their garments from a rope with their clothes knotted. They would be forced to crawl beneath the

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garment if someone failed to kill. They would throw dungballs and other dirt at him. When they return with anything, they will be received with garlands, cheers, and dancing. Mandia and Bagla, for example, went hunting in the jungle as part of this never-ending program. Every holiday is celebrated in the Paraja community with singing, dancing, and drinking. Males consume "Mahaua" wine, while females prefer Mandiya lager. Tribal people, particularly in Paraja, have distinctive customs and festivals. For example, Holy is a well-known celebration among the Banjara tribal culture. On the day of the celebration, they clean the house and put on new clothes.

### **System of Marriage:**

According to Gopinath Mohanty, weddings are crucial to the growth of the Paraja tribal group. As a result, they accepted both adult and monogamous marriages. The negotiation arranges marriages. They also practiced obtaining marriages through exchanges, elopements, consent, service, and other means. In the tribal group of Paraja, marriages between elder daughters and younger daughters are desired. Sometimes, they don't follow this custom. Cross-Cousin Marriage System: Cross-cousin weddings were arranged in the Paraja tribal society. They say the daughters of uncles or aunts get married. Men in the Paraja society are allowed to wed widows. Divorce, widower weddings, and widows are accepted in the Paraja society. We typically have a dowry system. But bride prices were customary in this culture. That can take the shape of money or presents like clothing, rice, goats, chickens, and alcohol. Divorce is acceptable in cases of extramarital affairs, misbehavior, cruelty, and interpersonal disputes. Traditional community chiefs oversee divorce cases. They agreed to have a divorce if the matter is not resolved. Upon divorce, requesting authorization yields a copper coin. The tribes of Paraja allowed weddings in various forms. The groom must pay the bride price if they choose to arrange for an arranged marriage. The bride's price is irrelevant if she and the groom are eloping. Such a form of marriage is likewise accepted by the community. The Paraja tribes have certain particular customs and ceremonies.

According to Gopinath Mohanty, Sukru Jani had high expectations for Jili and Bili. Since they will provide a large bride price, which will alter his destiny, it suggests that the origin of the tribal society is the girl kid. The family is not burdened by them. The groom turns into a Goti for life if he doesn't pay the bride fee on time. This indicates unmarried girls are an asset to their families.

Gopinath Mohanty portrays Sukru Jani's present condition. He had a lot of hopes that his daughters to bring a bride price. Later, all his debts were paid. Later, his land would be redeemed. After some time, his sons were also released. Sukru Jani always encourages Jili and Bili to sleep in the young woman's dormitory and join the singing and dancing. He advised them to dress well and be active. In the Paraja community, child marriages are common. They believed when girls reached 11 years, they should marry; otherwise, teenage girls that to unmarried girls are unsafe in the tribal family. Another reason is poverty. For instance, Sukru Jani leads a simple life. He gets rid of that poverty. In his fantasy, all of his difficulties would disappear once

his daughter was married and received her bride price. It demonstrates how girls are a constant contribution to the tribe. However, they are ignorant of the girls' cleanliness and health.

**Goti System:**

Gopinath Mohanty illustrates an additional circumstance in which a groom becomes a Goti to the family if he is unable to pay the bride price. For example, Nandibali wishes to wed Bili but cannot afford the bride fee. His goal is to become Sukru Jani's Goti. Bili conversed with him later. Another event is Mandia's desire to wed Kajodi but her poverty. He will forfeit the Kajodi if he fails to pay the bride price on time. Therefore, he has to get quick money—for example, by illicitly brewing Mahua liquor—and receive it as soon as possible. Jili's life and Bangla's had another incident like this. Both of them desired marriage, but Bagla was worried about the cost of a wife. According to the tribal community's customs, Jili is adamant that she marry Bagla between the months of February, March, or April; if not, she must wait another year to get married. They only got married in the months of February, March, April, and May, which makes their system special. Bagla is afraid of Goti. He must pay the bride price in the form of Goti if he wants to get married in his father-in-law's home. He was then able to wed Jili. Thus, he and Jili eloped. Elopement and capture weddings are accepted in the tribal society. It lowers the cost of the bride. At last, they present the feast to the villagers. Here's another type of tradition. They took out loans from landlords in case they chose to pay the bride price. They later got married. They put a lot of effort into paying off the debt after marriage. In the village of Paraja, things are as they are. He or she would have to pay the girl's father 40 rupees, which is the traditional bride's price if they had eloped. This type of tradition is unique. Kajodi assisted Bagla in meeting at night. When hunting, the Bagla catches the Kajodi. He spends the night discussing their thoughts, opinions, and feelings. We refer to that as capture marriage.

The young females fall prey to other lecherous individuals. If they can't get married when the moment is appropriate. The forest guard, for example, tries to entice the Jili. He sent the local headman, Kau-Paraj, to persuade Jili to grant his sensual want. Sukru Jani turned down his proposal. The forest ranger then kept a watch on Jili. Within the tribal culture, this leads to early marriages. Tikra, the uneducated son of Sukru Jani, desired a loan from Sahukar. He bowed fifty rupees. He waived 5% annual compound interest even though Sukru Jani and Tikra only received payment of 5 rupees for their services.

Sukru Jani cultivates his farms on hill slopes and valleys using spring water as he lives close to Perineal Hill. Many tribal residents of the village have the belief that both permanent and shifting farming would result in a greater yield of crops. The Parajas produce a range of crops, including vegetables, and are particularly active in January harvesting rice and media, among other agricultural products. They would be chopped and gathered later. The land is thoroughly and methodically farmed, with manuring, planting, weeding, reaping, and harvesting all completed. The people

cooperate with one another in the fields and live like a family throughout the harvest season. Sukru Jani battled for his aspirations by defending the land. Sukru Jani expanded the land by using environmentally friendly methods. To increase the size of his property, he trims thorns, shrubs, and bushes. He had an argument about land extension with the Forest Guard. The Forest Guard and moneylenders are torturing tribal customs, rituals, and traditions. Torture for the sake of customs. In the tribal culture, one with more land is highly respected. He was quite intimate and attached to the land. Additionally, he taught his kids that although we may leave the land tomorrow, it will always exist and that the Earth is their mother. Women are never permitted to work outside. Modern people began to move into cities when they joined the Paraja society. Sahukar made Sukru Jani, Mandiya, and Tikra his goties. Hunger and poverty force Jili and Bili to give up their goal. They decided to live their lives as contractors. The hardest affected group is women.

**Culture:**

One such novel is Mohanty's *Paraja*, which skillfully foregrounds the social customs, rituals, and rites of the area while also capturing the economic and material resources, the feudal past, and the apparent relationship between man and nature. The politics, sociocultural practices, and economic power structures that give a given society its meaning are the foundations upon which the cultural phenomena grow. The significance that is inherent in this phenomenon—which is the result of societal influences and conventions—is revealed via a thorough examination and interpretation. Instead of being static and unchanging, culture is dynamic and ever-changing. Culture is, therefore, the "practice of everyday life."

The book *Paraja* provides anthropological information regarding poverty in Odisha's Koraput area, particularly among the Sarsupadar tribal people. The hamlet is described as having "thatched huts," "patches of green... sown with maize, chilies, or tobacco," and "mandia, olsi, and kandula... staple food of these tribes" near the beginning of the novel, on the first page itself. The description provides a clear picture of the substandard living conditions of the Paraja people: a single room with few accessories divided into compartments, containers made of leaves, clothes hanging on the walls consisting solely of men's loin cloths and women's cotton saris, dried bottle gourds used to transport media gruel to the fields, and umbrellas made of dried palm leaves. They labor on their little "patches of green" or serve as laborers or goblins for others, most notably moneylenders, to make a livelihood. They don't have an excessive amount of wants or lofty goals. They believe in gods and goddesses connected to the natural world and are essentially god-fearing people. They firmly believe in their own abilities. Women bring water for their homes and take baths and laundry at the stream. Their jewelry is made up of bracelets, necklaces, and other beads, and their main garment is a sari. And so it came to pass that, in this country of hills and forests in an uncharted region of the vast earth, unfortunate men and women who lived on abandoned mango stones and covered up their nudity with rag fragments huddled together beneath the unbearable downpour of suffering and sobbed.

Poverty is terrible, especially when it results in exploitation, especially when the victims of exploitation are unaware that they are being taken advantage of. Consequently, the lives of those who reside on the roadway are described in Chapters 60 and 61. The workers on the roadway have it better than the goats, and the supervisor has it better than 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.

Mohanty has given us a very clear picture of poverty: it is an invisible force that permeates all aspects of human existence. He hides in the shadows of the nighttime and dwells in abandoned homes, empty cooking pots, and mounds of ragged clothing. Wave after wave of dreams ishes over men's brains; he opens their eyes to new possibilities, startling them out of their dreamy slumber as they cuddle up by the hearth. He shoves them out the door and shuts it behind them. He leads men to the gallows or the jail cell. He encourages women to promote themselves to others. All hunger and desire are embodied in him. People who are impoverished reject any moral ideas. The boundaries between what is right and wrong disappear. Jili views sex as meaningless because she was coerced into having it; Mandia does not want to kill Sahukar but must perform the horrible act of hacking him due to the evil man's illegal tactics in refusing to return the land; the tribal villagers who unintentionally betray Sukru Jani have been conditioned to live in constant fear of the officials and, as a result, lack the strength to defend Sukru Jani. Traveling to court is another fraudulent endeavor. Witnesses want cash, meat, alcohol, cigarettes, and other items. Their principal gifts to dignitaries are chickens, eggs, bananas, or jackfruit. If the story depicts the terrible circumstances faced by the Indigenous people in the hamlet, it also emphasizes the equally dire situation at the road-building site. Even while they are financially successful, they—especially the women—also become victims of other types of exploitation. Migrant workers become victims of cruel romances and a materialistic lifestyle due to their isolation, ignorance, and one-day-at-a-time mentality.

Both the Paraja community and the book have clear definitions of the social and political structures. There is a well-established relationship between the government authorities, the moneylenders who act as feudal masters, and the local officials. The Paraja tribesmen are the only ones who continue to live on the periphery or who gain the least. They lack the education necessary to comprehend the intricacies of pen and paper, and they are ignorant of the law. They don't know their responsibilities and rights. They are willing to endure any form of punishment or agony rather than to hear these words because they are so afraid of bureaucrats, paperwork, jail, and the legal system. They have no idea that their own people are connected to the nexus. The wealthy and intelligent residents of the hamlet participate in the exploitative system that functions within the greater social, political, and economic frameworks. On behalf of the Raja, the Naika gathers rent and presents it to Ribini, the Revenue Inspector. The Forest Guard is the only man of law that the

villagers know or see, and they are required to pay a plow fee to them. There are also feudal lords, such as the Sahukar, who lend money in exchange for the tribal people's employment as bonded laborers and even the usurpation of their territory. Priests are available for any religious issue, and the village elders gather together to resolve social issues as well. The importance of each person's rank is also shown in the way they dress. In addition to his loin cloth, which is worn below the waist, the Naika also dons a coat and a puggaree. The Forest Guard has a shotgun slung over his shoulders and is attired in a shirt and shorts. He goes by the name Jaman or the Guard. On the other hand, Sukru Jani and other impoverished individuals live their entire lives in a four-fingered piece of fabric that serves as a loin cloth. The ladies wear cotton saris, bangles, and beaded necklaces and occasionally oil their hair, especially during festival occasions. The people's social lives consist of their typical, everyday lives as farmers. The majority of males labor in the fields, while women handle home duties. The ladies go out and sell their goods, such as chilies, on market days. These tribesmen and women are devoid of any restraint or pretension. Everybody there lives a modest life. 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.

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