

Chapter 4

Of the Land, for the Land, and by the Land: A Study of a South Asian Indigenous Tribe, Paraja

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ABSTRACT

Land is a promising asset that acts as a stimulus for indigenous people to act and respond within their natural limits. The natives enjoy great kinship with the land. They deem the land as one with the human-kind: a living, breathing, and thinking being. They believe that they live under the constant protection of the green produce of the land and they ought to protect it in return as it plays a key role in determining the possibility of survival of the tribal community. Any attempt at enforced displacement, tribal eviction, land encroachment, land diversion, or land alienation leads to disintegration of the tribal community. Trespassers trying to dispossess the aboriginals of their land not only impact the indigenous ethnic formations but also affect the ecological balance. The chapter provides an incisive sociological scrutiny to trace the origin of the pressing crisis of tribal land alienation, by adopting Gopinath Mohanty's Paraja as a case study, to understand its catastrophic repercussions on the forest communities and the natural habitat.

INTRODUCTION

Land is a promising asset that acts as a stimulus for indigenous people to act and respond within their natural limits. Indigenous peoples enjoy great kinship with the land. They deem the land as one with the humankind: a living, breathing and thinking being. They believe they live under the constant protection of the green produce of the land and they ought to protect it in return as it plays a key role in determining the possibility of survival of the tribal community. Any attempt at enforced displacement, tribal eviction, land encroachment, land diversion or land alienation leads to disintegration of the tribal community.

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Trespassers who attempt to dispossess the aboriginals of their land not only impact the indigenous ethnic formations but also affect the ecological balance.

This chapter provides an incisive historical, literary, and sociological critique to trace the origin of the pressing crisis of tribal land alienation by adopting Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja* as a case study to understand the catastrophic repercussions on the forest communities and the natural habitat. Further, the chapter presents a literary sociological critique for how the Paraja family respond to the atrocities of the power-brokers in the wake of the colonial impact in India. The chapter entails the tragic events and the ensuing changes owing to internal colonialism leading to land encroachment and land alienation in the life of Sukru Jani who valued a spirit of optimism. The chapter author argues the disintegration and displacement of the tribe and the virtual dispossession of the land as a component of the environment are interrelated and brought to effect by the dystopic force of internal colonialism.

BACKGROUND

Land plays a vital role in the life of the indigenous communities. It has social, cultural, economic importance for the natives. It is the food and fodder of the natives. It adds more than just a utilitarian value to the life of the forest communities. It has multiple facets. As a metaphor, it blurs the interconnections between human and non-human objects. As a symbol, it compresses the temporal and spatial distances. As a being, it is both masculine and feminine in character. As the Mother Earth, it is a giver, nourisher and protector of all beings while as a father, it takes care of the economic concerns of the individual. As an invisible spirit, it is full of wonder and mystery. As a metaphysical transcendent, it spiritually elevates the soul and fills the mind with romantic visions. It endows the indigenous group with a feeling of belongingness so much so that the forest dwellers sense of self is not separate from the land (Chopra, 2016).

Behura (1982) rightly opines that “land is the base for apprehending tribal people’s identity, culture, religious ethos and personhood, because the peculiarity and uniqueness of native culture and tradition lies in the centrality of land to which natives are emotionally and culturally attached” (p. 1). It is the perpetual dependency on the land that enable the natives to live life as autonomous beings. Given the fact that the people of the hills and the jungles attachment to the land forms an axis of their collective identity forging an ethno-historical and ethno-cultural significance, it becomes imperative to explore the question of human agency generated by colonial intervention, exploitation and inequality. To advance the research, the critical review shall utilize Blauner’s (1969) theory of internal colonialism to understand its impact on the Paraja, a south Asian indigenous tribe of Orissa.

The concept of internal colonialism is also reported to have roots in the Eurocentric practice of colonialism. It is experienced in nations that have formerly been a part of the colonialist regime. Marquard was the first to use the terminology of internal colonialism As a Mexican sociologist, Pablo Gonzalez Casanova, observes “with the disappearance of the direct domination of foreigners over natives, the notion of domination and exploitation of natives by natives emerged” (as cited in Chaloult & Chaloult, 1979, p. 85). It highlights the subordination “of rural populations by the urban elites where Anglicized India exploits rural Bharat. The Anglicized urban elites act as ‘clienteles classes’ of the colonial state” (Dey, 2019, p. 249). These are constant reminders of the gap between the rich and the poor, the oppressor and the oppressed. They resist decolonialization. They try all means and ways to suppress the voice of the margins. They work in the guise of the custodians and protectors of law and order. They dehumanize the voiceless and the powerless to establish their rule within. The colony is not only established geo-

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