



STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL IN GOPINATH MOHANTY'S "TADAPA," AND "THE ANTS" AND *THE ANCESTOR*.

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ABSTRACT

Fiction is an effective genre to highlight social protest and to promote desirable change. Through the creative medium of fiction immediate socio-ecological problems are highlighted to relate literature to real life. The continuous struggle of the tribals is being documented to bring forth the deprivation, degradation of tribal life and environment. Author's deep sympathy with tribal people makes him highlight the lopsided developmental projects in the wake of modernization. The direct outcome of all this is to save the primitive life and culture of tribal people. The fervent resistance against social, economic, cultural and political exploitation was the brainchild of subaltern group of historians in the 1980s. The present paper aims to highlight the voice of the subordinated i.e tribals as a subordinated group in the works of Gopinath Mohanty's "Tadapa" , "The Ants" and novella *The Ancestor*. Through the works undertaken for study Gopinath Mohanty pertinently highlights the tribal people right to survive in the present age of globalization and privatization.

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In India 427 scheduled tribes are there and out of these 62 are in Odisha, "Orissa can be proud of her wealth in the form of tribal people because she stands first among all the states in the size of the scheduled tribes population which constitutes about 24.07 % of the total population of the state and 14.2 % of the tribal population of India" (Ray xii). The distinct cultural life of tribals stands on the principle of unity in diversity, the very basic theme of Indian national life. It takes into account an inter-disciplinary approach of anthropologists, ethnographers, sociologists and other social scientists.

Gopinath Mohanty chronicles the endless plight of tribals and oppressed milieu, who endeavour a marathon struggle against adverse situations.

Mohanty is taken to be an authority as the strength of his tribal narratives has its source in reality, he has deep faith in humanity and hence concentrates on the plight of the aboriginals and offers an extensive detail on their life style, and the consequent suffering that they endure through neglected living. His long association with the tribals of Southern Odisha, especially with the aboriginals of Koraput, has given him an impetus to reveal their customs, traditions, superstitions and their plights as well. He sincerely attempts to bring out their trials and tribulations to survive against the adverse situations; sometimes against natural calamities and sometimes against man-made despondencies. His inordinate talent lies in presenting tribals' quintessential struggle against all

oppression and exploitation and at the same time in restructuring their ways of living without accepting defeat; it is their commitment and tenacity to struggle which makes them worthy of admiration.

The short stories, "Tadapa" and "The Ants," have been chosen with a view to highlight the mindset of the tribals. These stories reflect Mohanty's great love for the tribals, his deep sensitivity to their struggle for existence, their pride and predicament and the impact of new waves of political transformation sweeping through rural India which eventually influenced the tribals immensely. The short story, "Tadapa", has been gleaned from the collection of short stories *The Bed of Arrows*. Mohanty questions the futility of bringing light of civilization to the life and culture of people who are inherently superior to the so called civilized and developed cultures. The story explores the problem of land alienation and deprivation which has increased in magnitude and complexity with the migration of non-tribal peasant farmers. The tribal has an innate sense of honesty and morality, he trusts one and all with the result that "wily colonizers" exploit his goodness and cheat him through devious means to usurp his land. The communication, network of roads have facilitated the influx of non-tribal invaders resulting in "internal colonization." Largely the tribals have to depend upon the whims and fancies of the local forest officials who manipulate and distort the actual land records adding fuel to the fire of discontentment among the tribals. For a tribal, the land is the mother-goddess, the life giver and sustainer, in short the embodiment of life itself. The educated and civilized society on their encounter with the Dongria tribal youth, Tadapa, are made to ponder about the presence of unique incomprehensible tribal values of goodness and simplicity. Neglecting agriculture at the cost of urbanization and undermining the values of humanity, the story holds mirror to lopsided development projects in the name of tribal development. The forested slope of Niyamgiri hills is the abode of Dongria Kondhs who have inhabited this place since eternity. The Dongria Kondhs call themselves Jharnia meaning those who live by the Jharana (streams).

Hundreds of perennial streams flow from Niyamgiri hill and there are hundreds of Dongria villages by the streams. The Dongrias are considered to be the protectors of these streams, hills and jungles by the people of nearby plains.

Apparently there is no trace of civilization here as there was "no dispensary, no post office, no shops, no police station, no well or tank and not even a tiled roof, let alone a regular building" (59). They are one of the Scheduled Tribes, notified by the government as primitive tribal groups, and thus have special protection. The total population, according to 2001 census, is 7952 and they are regarded as an endangered tribe with pristine and distinct language and culture. The Kondhs and the Dombs are the main tribals who maintain their distinct culture amidst modernity. The unique naming ceremony of Kondhs is rooted in their past traditions established under the Mahapuru's blessings where a name is chosen while reciting mantras and throwing rice grains one after another into a pot and the choice of words is finalized on the name of which the grain stands erect in the pot. Mohanty has effectively thrown light on their social system of having a unique self-sufficient life style.

The menfolk wore a loin cloth which was embroidered by the women in their small looms. The women wrapped a six-foot saree round their waist and when they stepped out fully covered themselves with it. The menfolk's clothes were always dirty, the hair on their head unkempt. The men wore rings on his nose and shells and small beads in the ears. The portion of the head just above his forehead was shaved clean and the hair was made into a knot around a comb. He wore chains of colourful beads around his neck, a pick axe on the shoulder, six inch long knife was tucked at the waist and he held a sturdy stick made of local wood embroidered in part. The women wore garlands of thin glass beads of any colours and other ornaments of brass and alloy. (60)

It is pertinent to point out that their tribal values are an outcome of their unique association with nature. Centuries of isolation has made them what they are today. They are pristine in the sense as Madhusudan, the interpreter says, "They (Dongria Kondhs) won't have anything to do with injustice or falsehood. They are totally committed to their duties but they won't change their habits. They won't brush their teeth or perform ablution or go to school or give up drinking. Any advice in this regard would fall on deaf ears" (61). What is noteworthy in this regard is that the non-tribal outsider's aim simply is not to change them for their good, although apparently they have their plans for improving their life-style by making them more civilized, their true aim has neo-colonist/imperialist designs, as Hari Pani, the local officer reverberates, "When forests open up, civilization enters those who come from outside to serve them - and you need plenty of them - need housing, drinking water and other facilities. All this must begin coming up together with an investment of twenty or twenty five lakhs: dispensary, piggery, orchards and some factories. And fortunately if some mineral deposit could be discovered then another Rourkela could be started and it won't take long for people to change" (61). The last line in the above quote contains the genesis of problems for the tribals. All efforts to ameliorate their condition and lifestyle springs from the greed and self interests of the outside world in the resources of the forests. What has happened to the tribals as a result of outside influence shows the inadequate and non-judicial interference in the tribal belts. The Dongria Kondhs are proud of their economic independence and freedom from want. They attribute their well being and contentment to the Niyamgiri hills and their bounty. They see any change in their ecology as a potential threat to their very culture. They worship and protect Niyamgiri mountain and consider themselves the royal descendents of the mountain god.

According to a study, about 2 billion people, worldwide, consume alcoholic drinks which can have immediate and long term consequences on health and social life. The Dongrias have total dependence on

liquor largely due to their physical proximity to nature. They wear (especially men) inadequate clothes and body needs the warmth of liquor. In addition to this, endless festivities, rituals and worships provide occasion for liquor consumption. They have liquor made of Salapa tree sometimes and more often they buy Mahua wine and thus spend almost all earnings on it, and this is one of the reasons of their poverty also. According to WHO survey, alcohol consumption can have adverse socio-economic effects on the individual drinker, the drinkers' immediate environment and society as a whole. Indeed, individuals other than drinkers can be affected, for example, by traffic accidents or violence. It has an impact on society on the whole in terms of resources required for criminal justice, health care and other social institutions.

"Tadapa" brings forth the erased and peculiar traits of the neglected tribals. A peculiar trait of Dongrias is their mindset which is always content and blissful. They have an unflinching faith in the ancestral and natural spirits but also believe in the eternity and oneness of the soul. There is no difference between human being, animal, trees or any other natural agent because the supreme soul expresses itself in every natural form. They have developed the idea, that is, although the forms are manifold the soul cannot be compartmentalized. It seems to be synonymous with the platonic concept of "unity of being." The world is a family to them and nature is the supreme power. They are very much in peace with their own soul and it is this fact which makes Tadapa say that he is not afraid of wild animals, galore in the woods, as, "They are like our brothers. No fear from them" (67). It is questionable that the non tribals are narrow in the acceptance of others when it comes to loving unconditionally, and here we have the primitive tribals for whom loving and accepting others unconditionally is a normal feature of life. In fact Tadapa, the Dongria youth, is astonished at the non-tribal way of marriage and love, he says, "In an area where there is no *dhangdi-bent*, people must be animals or are not human ... Only when two persons come to know each other through songs and dances, laughter and play

that they could build a proper relationship" (65-66). This remark by Tadapa is apt and pertinent because marriage should be a union of souls with choice and not just a compromise or compulsion. The Dongrias are free from inhibitions of sex and love and both boys and girls - the dhangda and the dhangdi - are allowed to choose and spend time together with approved social sanction. Songs and dances become the base for their hearts to choose their life partners and later marriages are solemnized. This particular custom of choosing their bride is called *dhangdi-bent*.

To the outsiders the value system may seem strange or outrageous but the reality is that it is rooted in the simplicity of heart and honesty of soul. Dongria lifestyle since times immemorial is due to their untouched existence, they are superstitious and ignorant, they have a fear of the unknown, and they have acceptance for everyone - the nature which sustains them, the beasts of jungle whom they consider brothers despite being a threat to their life. They have learnt and accepted life without any questions of judgment. Probably this is the reason for their bliss which is ever flowing in their heart in spite of the fact that they live in the midst of disease, danger and inconveniences. The attempt to bring progress and modernity in their lives is marked by a number of practical problems:

Opening schools or shops, building roads, allowing an alien set up in their midst will somehow adversely affect them. The idea of bringing light of progress may not be controlled by them as with them will come the inevitable change which is largely ill-devised as liquor may earn more but the saving habit would take ages to develop. The exploiter would go on devising strategies; maybe instead of the crops and produce of his orchards, now straight to go to the liquor would be liquid cash. His goodness and simplicity would be lost in the process of his contact with the outsiders. The trouble with such contacts with the exploiter was that the vulnerable first picked up all the undesirable qualities of the exploiter. He would become

an opportunist, would no longer repay loans and purchase with cash from the market and on credit from the government shops. He would fall repeatedly into the traps of new exploitation. His present simplicity and honesty were perhaps due only to ignorance and superstition and not born out of any conviction or any ingrained idealism ... We need a strategy that would preserve his innate goodness and prevent the sprouting of the evil aspects of change. But I don't know how to go about it. (62-63)

The things important in civilized society can be categorized under the titles of wealth, security, and success, whereas in tribal culture the important things are traditions and beliefs, and their success lies in survival, both their own survival, and the survival of their culture.

The Dongria tribals have deep faith in living in the present moment. Tadapa asks for money from the group as a matter of right and accepts the research group as his own parents. He firmly believes that a child should never hesitate to ask from his parents anything anytime. But it is strange that he casually drops money and continues with his blissful life, for, "It is enough for him to get whatever he needed at a given time. Money is like pebbles in his eyes" (68). This aspect of tribal life offers a contrast to twentieth century rat race where there is a tendency towards commercialization and commodification of life with the result that greed and corruption have become rampant order of the day. This in turn has led to potentially greater exploitation of the disenfranchised (here Dongria Kondhs) and greater pressure on vulnerable natural resources. Vedanta, an MNC, has been trying to mine Niyamgiri's bauxite since 2003, the company built a refinery at the foot of the hills and started on the conveyor belt that would bring bauxite out of the hills. The Kondh villagers removed from their homes for the refinery have suffered threats and intimidation. They have lost both their land and their means of supporting themselves. To the Dongria, Niyam Dongar hill is the seat of their god; to the Vedanta it is \$ 2 billion of bauxite. The Dongria tribals

believe that Vedanta has come here to destroy the Dongria, they do not have any right to touch the mountains, "even if they behead us, we will not allow them to do this." Like other displaced tribal people worldwide, they would also lose their present good health, their self sufficiency and their expert knowledge of the hills, forests and farming system that they have nurtured for long. The tribal society is characterized by their adaptability to the forest environment, with the advent of modernization and numerous development interventions, the traditions, beliefs and social norms are changing drastically.

Thus the distinctive identity of Dongria Kondhs is evident in their marriage rites, in their customary practices and in their respect for environment. The exchange of ideas and debates among government officials and academicians regarding the manner in which the illiterate, uncivilized tribals can be brought within the ambit of civilization are also concerned about the preservation of the Dongrias' goodness and simplicity which runs the risk of contamination in its contact with the outside world. The story is a critique of civilizing mission of government and subverts the value of money which is hallmark of the civilization. This short story deploys and exploits the stereotype of the native as someone who is very fond of liquor, has no interest in civilization, is like a child at the mercy of his/her benefactors, the educated superiors who are not only capable of analyzing the Dongrias and their problems, but are also equipped to prescribe the much needed, the much awaited solutions. Mohanty here presents a mysterious land with illiterate and uncivilized people and feels that it is not our privilege but moral responsibility to try to find out what is good for them. Thus, the forces of modernity serve as the social, historical and cultural intertext for this short story as they were for many of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century literary texts.

"The Ants" reflects Kondh tribals struggle for existence and is a reflection on man's eternal battle against hunger and death. The most profound reality of life is acceptance of all be it hunger that strikes the tiny ants who carry mouthfuls of food in their struggle

for survival or man's struggle against innumerable threats. It is a story of young non-tribal officer, Ramesh, who is driven by frenzy to reach at the top in whatever he does but finally bows down to the realization that success, measured in terms of man-made parameters, cannot make one happy and this realization sees his conversion from a tough officer to a humane one.

The Kondh tribals inhabiting the dark and dense forests have changed drastically due to deforestation and as the forests vanished the tigers rampaged the villages forcing them to take refuge in the interior regions. They wear just loin cloth and their life is content with birth, death, reproduction and love. Their enemy is just hunger and everybody else for them is brothers who walk with their feet, work with their hand, and belong to common earth under the sky. The Kondhs are content with celebrating life, the young dhangdas and dhangdis singing the Chaitra festival. The groups of Kondhs can be seen in the Kaspawalsa road, exchanging jokes and singing as they are bound by common fate of struggle and contentment.

The custom of bride price among the Kondhs depends on individual capacity and it is this advantage of money which makes Binu (Kondh), a peon, to win third wife, Gori, whom he had snatched away from another tribal who could not pay the extra bride price to her parents. The exposure to urbanization has brought about a negative impact as money is becoming the sole criteria for marriage. It is to be noted that this system of bride price has deviated from its original aim, it was to honour girl's parents with economic support at the time of marriage, money has changed the values and now it is a status symbol, though it is no surety for a marriage's success as the wife has the freedom to leave the husband if she is not happy in marriage. This aspect gives women in tribal communities greater freedom to live their life in their own way. Another aspect dealt with is the smuggling of rice from the tribal areas which is a great offence. For tribals like Binu and others it is a natural struggle and not an encroachment.

He [Binu] had himself succeeded in smuggling out hundred mounds of rice at exorbitant rates. He believed that in a society which left everybody to fend for himself, pulling other's legs, trying to cheat others and thriving at other's expense was only natural and right. Breaking rules for one's own selfish ends – of course not without the fear of being caught – was nothing unnatural. (18)

It has been observed that this tendency of cheating and hoarding among tribals is not a matter of choice or routine, in fact it is a compulsion for them as they see it as a means of thriving and surviving, a natural instinct of all human beings. In the civilized society everything is divided into good and bad according to their market value thus promoting the culture of selfishness and self-aggrandizement.

There exists an unparalleled compassion in Kondh women who offer outsiders not just food but also their tender love and unconditional acceptance, especially, as they have no ulterior motives. This fact is amply clear from the incident of Kondh-Dora woman's talk which leaves an indelible mark on Ramesh as he listens to her persuasion, "At this late hour, my dear son, how can you go away without some food? Would your mother have let you do so? Don't you have mothers and sisters in this village?"(20). This old woman is driven by love, the essential reality of a mother, on the other hand is Ramesh whose all acts are motivated by desire for commendation, recognition and success, but he too is touched by love which knows no caste, colour or creed.

The laws are incomprehensible realities for the Kondhs as living in the midst of dense forests makes them meaningless and the ideals of justice appear artificial and shallow. The life of Kondhs is governed by one factor and that is unwritten laws for unconventional modes of living and living the deeper realities of life. Stealing a pumpkin is natural and justified for them, although it meant going to jail repeatedly. For them the greatest fear is that of hunger and this is same all over the world – "Pressures of wants at home, oppression of life outside" (25). They cannot comprehend why cutting trees, distilling

liquor is a crime or to sit when tired after a long day's trek carrying heavy luggage is not a natural behaviour without much fuss. "What fools these fellows were to try to catch people for selling rice across a border! Hunger was same for everybody and whoever needed rice had a right to buy it wherever he could. How could that be a crime?" (22). Poor people suffer from chronic hunger because of their low income and inability to buy food even for survival. According to Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze hunger is intolerable in a way it could not have been in the past, because it is so unnecessary and unwarranted in the modern world (qtd. in Mohapatra 2).

Their life is in penury and deprivation as they are just bones and skin with caves of eyes but still they continue to look deep down the life-force which is love as reflected in their eyes' glitter. Rightly, Mohanty says, "For man was like the *Dalua* paddy; more the water, more the plant grew. Yaw's on the cheeks and smile on the leprous face. Straining all life-force a rose had blossomed even though its petals were crooked and worm-eaten. It may wither and fall. Yet it smiled" (23). They can see deeper realities like unending stream invoking life in midst of terrible vision of death. They focus more on inner self which has no beginning and no end, their history is eternal and their expedition is for survival governed by a desire to live. Their language, though strange, still presents a picture of pleasing primeval. Their songs expressing their unending story of misfortunes with its rhythmic symphony touch the soul. Ramesh, an administrative officer, is enchanted and presumes in his heart that all songs are love songs due to their capacity of touching the soul. It is this simplicity of life which makes Ramesh a champion for curbing the evil of rice smuggling; finally, forgiving these rice smugglers not as criminals but people with human needs.

Gopinath Mohanty, though not a subaltern by caste or class, is a writer who powerfully exposes the forces and agents of tribal suppression. Mohanty happens to be the first writer in India to represent the voice of the tribals and their conditions during colonization in the novella *Dadi Budha*, translated in English as *The Ancestor*. The author canvasses the

living history of tribal community and the way of its disintegration in the civilizing mission of colonial modernity in Odisha. The tribal life is deeply rooted in indigenous eco-ethics, traditions and beliefs which exist in antipathy to modernity. This impact of modernity has influenced their culture to some extent but the key tenets of their tradition remain unaffected. Despite an attack on the native indigenous system as unscientific and regressive by disparagement and devaluation, they preserve their mythological history, religious culture, spiritual practices and eco-agricultural values. This belief system renders them contentment, joy and strength, and reinforces unity of life at one level and constitutes their cultural identity on the other.

Dadi Budha, the date palm tree, is a representative of both the ancestor's spirit and the natural spirit. Thenga Jani, son of Ram Chandra Muduli, the headmen of Lulla village, is betrothed to a beautiful girl, Saria Daan, from the same village. He comes under the spell of Santosh Kumari, a Christian Domb girl, and the two fall deeply in love with each other and they reject the discipline of the tribal society. They decide to run away to Assam to work on a tea estate; they plan to build their dream home in a town where the rules of the tribal society are not operative. Here the life of tribal community is visualized against a cosmic background. The despair of Ram Chandra Muduli, the plight of Thenga's mother after her only son leaves the village with the Domb girl, the declaration of the *Dishari* that Thenga and Santosh are evil dumas, the terror caused by the tiger and the rise of a village at another site signify the unbroken continuity of life. The tribal people of Lulla village accord the status of supreme spirit and presiding deity to the palm tree. Their innocent belief makes the palm tree alongwith the termite mound the spiritual entity of their tribal faith. They have the belief that nature, mankind, the spiritual and ancestral worlds are interrelated. The tribals through rituals and celebrations appease Dadi Budha as it brings forth stability and order, good health and harvest, and in case of failure of all these there is a discord at a large scale. Dadi Budha is a benign deity, the eternal

ancestor, a God who is calm and steadfast, a mightiest spirit, the cause and creator of all phenomena and responsible for the prosperity and misery of everyone. The Parajas of Lulla not only worship the date palm tree as embodiment of ancestral spirit but also believe in natural objects - animals, birds, the river Muran, the hill - as embodiments of divine spirit. They never forget the gift of their mother earth and the importance of nature in their lives. They associate themselves not only with the biological mothers, fathers, but also with the ancestors that are the rivers, mountains, trees, and the changing season also. They believe that crops used as food for the tribals are the sacred gift of nature and they worship mother nature as a deity who brings nature's bounty to human world.

Dadi Budha and its mound is a symbol of ancestral spirit, worshipped with unflinching faith to get the wishes fulfilled as "no one was ever disappointed" (10) by the supreme soul. Ram Jani, the headman, and his wife, Hari Jani, pray before the deity to successfully perform their parental responsibilities of the marriages of their children. For seeking the blessings of the deity, Thenga Jani sits silently before the deity to get his dream of marrying Santosh Kumari fulfilled and Santosh Kumari bows down her head before the deity to be successful in their mission to Assam. The headman after his son's secret elopement makes silent communication by "silencing all his thought" (52) seeks solace from the deity in the silent hour of night. Likewise other people worship and perform rituals to overcome personal and communal crises.

The novella also presents the changing times and emergence of Christian faith with the establishment of a Church in the village. Although conversion to Christianity is a rarity but the followers of Dadi Budha are opposed to the new faith. In fact, deep inside their hearts there is immense faith and reverence and it is due to this reason that the Doms decide to inhabit the new forest of Gadi Pabli hill leaving their abode of centuries behind when Shyam *gurumai* speaks Dadi Budha's wish to leave this village infested with tiger dumas and blessed them to prosper in the foot of Gadi Pabli hill.

The village has at its centre the dormitories, the *dhangda* hall and the *dhangdi* hall for the young men and women where they keep awake all night and pour their love through various songs accompanied by the sound of *dungadunga*. Young Thenga Jani sleeps in this dormitory and plays his *dungadunga*. It is an institution which gives an opportunity to young tribals to know the essence of their tribal customs. It is indeed a democratic institution for promoting and carrying culture of the tribals. The marriage custom is praiseworthy as it takes into account the girl's wish and her acquiescence for marriage. The headman on the occasion of his son's engagement with Saria Daan asks for her consent:

We are the Paraja people; our minds are nobody's slave; if you wish, you can give your consent and, if not, you can refuse now, and I'll immediately return all his gifts. Be frank.
(39)

Marriage is not simply an arrangement between two individuals but it has community sanction and a moment of celebration for the whole village. Alongwith the customary bride price marriage, there exists another form of marriage preferably suitable for poorest of the poor, called *udulia*. According to this custom, the boy after getting girl's consent kidnaps her and covers her mouth with a piece of cloth to prevent her from screaming and brings his would-be bride to his house and gives a small feast to a few. There is no elaborate ceremony, no music, no drum, no canopy, nothing of the sort. The girl's father searches for his daughter and finally by accepting a minimal bride price in front of the panchayat marriage is solemnized.

Christianity has its growth in the vicinity of Koraput through government's missionaries who roam from village to village and deliver the holy message for which they are paid. These missionaries under the patronage of British colonial power gradually and steadily launched a cultural invasion on racially different tribes through proselytization. They successfully used religion as a mechanism to expand the hegemony of church among the indigenous people of the area. Their zealous attempt to denunciate the

socio-religious faith of the tribal people had the sole purpose to manipulate the imposition of the Christian tradition of west in central India. In due course of time they succeeded to a considerable extent in imposing their modes, concepts and images on these indigenous tribes, creating a quagmire in the homogenous tribal society. Thus contrary to the myth that the missionaries came to the area with caring and sharing philosophy, they were caring only for those who changed their socio-religious loyalty. The new converts in village Lulla mainly were the poorest of the poor as the new religion, alongwith faith, offered them equality of status. The new converts include Dombs who still have reverence for their tribal religion and live life in their own way. "Santosh Kumari had grown up in such a world. She had heard the country gods ridiculed in the Christian assembly and described as evil spirits. But in the privacy of their homes, in lonely places, the converts prayed to Dadi Budha for strength and courage" (33). Their existence is in conformity with Dadi Budha as Reverend Soloman, they show their compassion by holding a prayer for the headman to bring solace to his troubled heart. For these tribals the final abode of peace is Dadi Budha who ultimately is the reason for prosperity and misery of everyone. They do not complain even when their prayers are not heard as they believe that problems do not come to an end in a single day, and they have full confidence in Dadi Budha who is like an innocent boy who stares at everybody, keeps a vigil over the village and is feared and respected by all. All festivals are celebrated in his honour and trumpets are blown on the mound to proclaim his glory.

The people of Lulla have the only desire and drive to enrich the land and the community. Land is an important instrument of ownership and it is a symbol of social status and is essential for their spiritual development. Losing their land means a loss of contact with the earth and a loss of identity. Land is not only an asset with economic and financial value but also an indispensable part of their belief systems. The fascinating and fertile land inspires the tribal people to engage themselves in toils, to enrich the productivity of the land, from which they may derive

good health, tranquil happiness and peaceful enjoyment. They lead a life of self sufficiency with harvesting rice, alsu, suan, ragi and castor and collecting valuable products from jungle. The modern amenities are the only criteria of happiness in the urban world; the tribal world offers a contrast to this world because the warm sun, the delicate moon and stellar constellation of night, sweet breeze, the green paddy fields, the hills and rivers, surrounded by trees and creepers give them the required joy. Instead of being busy in satisfying unlimited desires and hoarding for future luxury as is done by the so called modern man, they live in the present and a stomach full of rice and ragi gruel, barrel of home-brewed wine is sufficient for immense joy and celebration. It does not necessarily mean that they are complacent and incapable, rather their limited desires to acquire or achieve make them happy without causing harm to others (both human and nature).

The impact of modernity and glamour of city life is clearly discernible among the tribals, especially, in Domb tribals, manifested in the character of Santosh Kumari whose visit to the town of Koraput has initiated an unquenchable thirst for rest houses in dark rainy nights, varieties of sarees, coloured blouses - parrot prints, star prints, tiger prints. Her mind is lost in wide roads, vehicles, and trucks loaded with tribal boys and girls bursting with laughter. For her the forests are like a desert, only a drowsy forest, with just rocks and trees and fields where people never come out of their houses being content with rice, sweet potatoes and spinach. It is this influence of modernity which makes her subvert the customary norms of their community and marry Thenga, a Paraja, and finally run from traditional life.

With the patronage of British imperial power the Christian missionaries succeeded in creating a dominant group within the tribal community through allurements and some philanthropic and social activities and gradually alienated the converts from the rest of their community members and forced them to accept the cultural tradition of the west at the cost of forgetting their respective socio-cultural tradition. In the process of such social transformation, however,

Christianity left a deep rooted negative impact on the life and mind of the tribal people. Contrary to the collective outlook of tribal society, individual approach to life became prominent, particularly among the converts. Community ownership of land and forest, which was the traditional means for subsistence, was lost due to commercialisation and barter economy was replaced by the market economy of the west.

In Paraja culture, festivals and seasons go hand in hand with celebrations as the essential part of the tribal festivals or rituals and are perhaps the metaphorical extension or enactment of the festivities in nature. Rituals with rigorous penance are meant to eliminate evil spirits and to overcome hard times whereas the festivals are meant to celebrate joy of good times. Most of the festivals are pertaining to various agricultural, ecological, conventional and spiritual practices. The ritualistic celebration includes worship and sacrifice before the deity, followed by dancing, drinking of home brewed wine, feasting etc. It indicates triumph or the restoration of new energy as well as the supplication of the spiritual force to restore source of positive energies to the world. These are also the acts of propitiation to appease the divine beings as well as the evil spirits for happy and prosperous life and good fortune. In the course of time, Ram Muduli, the headman, performs rituals before the deity to drive out the "ominous shadow" (47) of the evil spirit (duma), so as to come out of his mental agony and the village to be free from the affliction and diseases. An elimination of evil duma is believed to bring good time for his family as well as the village. For Paraja people, every celebration is dedicated to the ancestral deity (Dadi Budha) as mark of their reverence for Him.

The tribal knowledge system that the tribal people have retained with them for centuries forms the guiding principles for tribal existence in harmony with the universal order. Their knowledge is primarily concerned with time, space, health, medicine, scriptures, etc, which plays vital role in human life. *The Ancestor* firstly presents the Paraja people's knowledge about time on which all performance practices (including agriculture, worship etc.), of the

people are based. To them time is abstract or metaphysical which can only be felt or realized but not seen. The day is divided into *praharas, danda, lita* etc. according to the response of senses to the natural phenomena like places of the sun, the stars, the moon, sounds of different animals and so on and so forth. These concepts are different from hours, minutes and seconds presented by the mechanical system of clock.

The Parajas divide time into two categories - good or auspicious time and bad time; good times are those when the stars and planets are in right places; bad times are when the planets are not in harmony with the universal system. "By the help of *dishari*, the Parajas determine the auspicious time for their rituals like the beginning of cultivation, harvest, festivals, etc. They also predict the approach of various seasons and weather, machination of evil spirits (*dumas*) by studying the planets that helps them in getting good harvest" (Mohanty 3). They are of the belief that "prosperity depends on proper astrological calculation and meticulous study of nature's calendar; miscalculation leads to chaos, scarcity, disease, death etc" (59-62).

The idea of abstract time further leads to the absence of written history because the past cannot be presented within a mechanical system as mentioned, "no one had written their history ... the pointed and flat stones remained as their only memorials" (27). It is conspicuous that memory is the only mode to immortalize a person and the events by storing them in a systematic pattern according to their occurrence. A physical body which is placed in the world to commemorate the particular person or event boosts tribal memory for centuries. It is true that memory, an age old practice has been made possible by the indigenous Indian people. The great sages unmistakably remember the whole of the Vedas and pass them to the next generations to immortalize the divine words. If scientific and practical knowledge is the only criterion to judge the world, then it is difficult to plunge into the tribal world, for their world is based on certain systems that science may not be able to explore (beyond the prudence of science). Their mythological history, religious culture, spiritual

practices, eco-agricultural values, knowledge of natural phenomena, of health and medicine inspire them to be content in the world. In other words, their eco-cultural practices are the modalities to preserve their nature and culture.

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