



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**Literature**

**PARAJA: AN ANAMNESIS OF SUBALTERN RESISTANCE**

**KEY WORDS:** Resistance, subaltern resistance, James Scott, retaliatory violence, existential crisis.

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**ABSTRACT**

The present issue critically analyses Gopinath Mohanty's novel *Paraja* (1945) in the light of James Scott's book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* which is deemed a great success in exploring the conundrum of unequal power relations in a society where the binary system of active givers (volunteers) and the passive receivers (local population) hints a priori an unequal relationship. These power relations define how two or more different parties interact with each other and its due reflection on human behavior in the intellectual world. The book *Paraja* examines the reflection of people's position in their actions in social life. Furthermore, by following Scott's concept of public and hidden transcripts, I attempt to analyze and examine their behavioral motives and identify the factors that direct and energize their behaviors. Scott's previously stated book sounds engrossing, and its advantage can be availed, especially in examining dominance and resistance and generating new interest in the liberative reading of the novel *Paraja* from a different angle that authorizes cultural and political forms of domination. The present paper will draw upon the preceding work of Scott primarily in exploring critical issues in the interpretation of the novel and how the book may be suggestive and stimulating for new explorations.

In *Paraja*, Mohanty broadly construes the emotions that subalterns involuntarily reflect in some extraordinary situations stem from hidden urges. Within this conceptual framework, the novel *Paraja* is analyzed to lay bare the antagonism, aggression, and resistance portrayed in the novel in which the oppressed react through violent means. The novel anatomizes the hegemonic structure of the society, which is held responsible for the exclusion and displacement of the subalterns from the socio-economic organization of the society, intending to deny their *agency* and silence their voices in colonial politics. The present paper explores the proletariat's resistance to the social forces represented by the modern state, colonialism, and capitalism, which deliriously affect their existence, pulling off varying degrees of success. Mohanty's novel is about the tribal peasants of the Koraput region of Odisha. The latter was in a quandary, struggling to survive against the powerholders, voicing their contretemps with the functionaries, sequentially precipitating resistance and a strong sense of moral outrage. Other than Scott's conventional notion of collective rebellion, we come across several examples of everyday forms of resistance; a concept later contrived by Scott in his additional works, which shed light on peasants' intention and consolidate its relevance to the present novel and its applicability. (Singh, 2017)

**James C. Scott's notion of Resistance**

Scott's *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (Scott, 1990) is no doubt "A splendid study, surely one of the most important that has appeared on the whole matter of power and resistance." (Natalie Zemon Davis), distinctly states that the clash between the powerful and the powerless creates a delusive perception- the powerful subtly asserting their dominance and false reverence of the powerless. The abhorrence of the proletariats is sensed when they hide their inward contempt but pretend admiration and are restrained from speaking their minds in the face of the dominant, whereas the dominant or the powerful keep the practices and goals of their rule hidden and never let them openly avowed. Using terms such as public and hidden transcripts, Scott offers an insightful discussion of the role played by both- the powerful and the powerless- publicly and off stage.

Scott discusses a well-established idea that the powerless, even when they are infuriated by the preponderant influence of capitalism or its consequences, do not display their annoyance dreading negative sanctions. This idea is perpetuated in the first part of *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, but the same idea is called to question in the second part, which propounds that when autonomous spaces

or self-managed spaces; those spaces where there is an intention to constitute a non-capitalist, collective form of politics, identity, and citizenship, which are created through a combination of resistance and creation, challenging and questioning the prevailing laws and social norms, the powerless use them to construct their cultural solidarity and dissent. These may escalate the probability that the long-suppressed anger, simmering within, experienced but not expressed, explodes strenuously in the face of the oppressors to unleash their wrath. (Flam, 2004)

Scott broaches an interconnection between an autonomous subordinate culture, solidarity, and resistance. He states that the deep-rooted fear, ignominy, annoyance, and anger of the repressed one day will detonate in the face of the powerholder: '...habits of prudence and deception can no longer contain the anger [one] has rehearsed... That the anger will find a passage out is not in doubt', the only question is whether this anger will surface in safe, anonymous, and disguised forms or explode as 'the dangerous but gratifying full blast' ( Scott, 1990) (Flam, 2004) In actuality, the emotions that are experienced daily, or anger that's been withheld and not expressed, yet having no choice but to suppress, accounts for their sudden outburst, and when that occurs, the *hidden transcripts of subordinates* no longer remain hidden, they are brought to the surface. When these ultimately 'speak the truth', the subordinates feel a strong sense of relief, contentment, and exhilaration after the sudden surge and outburst. (Flam, 2004)

Hence, Scott put forward two different discernible protest reactions to a system of absolutism. On the one hand, Scott believes that the fear of negative sanctions or coercive measures may be the reason behind carrying out cautious, camouflaged, and defended – apparently rageless – forms of anonymous protest. On the other hand, he holds exploding anger responsible for open 'full blast', more satisfying as well as more dangerous forms of protest. The present paper represents a re-examination of the notion of resistance or hegemonic paradigm as elaborated by James Scott, which argues that in the systems of domination, autonomous spaces and the cultures of dissent are automatically opening the way for an explosion of anger and 'full blast' forms of protest which is discernible in the novel *Paraja*.

**Literature Analysis**

Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja* (Odia: 1945, English Translation: 1987) talks about those who have remained disconnected from mainstream Indian society: the social pariahs, the landless, the deprived, the dispossessed, and the tribals. The

novel is about a paraja family who has suffered an enormous personal tragedy with their failed attempts to ameliorate their living standards. It provides a vivid illustration of the tribal people resisting the dominance of the high caste culture, expressing their disagreement towards hegemonic despotism, modernity, and diverse forms of pseudo-modern organizations such as the court, police, and the government thrust upon them. (Safvan, 2017) The indigenous people struggle against the 'outsiders', the conflict between the 'tribals' and the 'non-tribals', and at a deeper level, the slow strangulation process ushered by the bureaucrats and the moneylenders destroying the traditional lives of the aborigines – lay the foundation for the novel *Paraja*. (Kumar, 2017)

In the influential book *Weapons of the Weak: everyday forms of resistance* (Scott, 1985), Scott proposes the idea that: "Oppression and resistance are in constant flux, and that by focusing on visible historic 'events' such as organized rebellions or collective action we can easily miss subtle but powerful forms of 'everyday resistance'." Scott patently spectates the peasant and the slave societies and their respective ways of responding to domination. Rather than conceiving 'resistance as an organization', he perceives less visible, everyday forms of resistance such as 'foot-dragging, evasion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, and sabotage'. (Scott, 1985) This theoretical concept provides grounds to examine Mohanty's novel *Paraja* which bears some evidence of the suppressed cry of the subjugated, their living experiences of injustice, lawlessness, and atrocities, the condescending attitude of the opulent toward them, and consequently, the powerless' protest against the system of domination, sharply retorting with anger and infringing the humiliation, sham, disingenuous cynicism, and hypocrisy impinging on their social lives. We find several instances of everyday forms of resistance in the concerned novel, and various incidents of the novel elucidate this fact. (Ray, 2017)

1. When Sukru Jani and Tikra are unjustly forced to serve as *gotis* or fall prey to debt slavery or debt servitude, the village *Sahukar* compels them to pay off a debt with work to avoid the legal proceedings against the forbearers. The *Forest Guard*, who only murmured his assent to *Sukru Jani* to clear the jungle but at the next moment accused the latter of causing a loss of four score of rupees to the *Raja* when his randy and lecherous attitude toward *Jili* was opposed.
2. When *Mandia* is constrained to work as a *goti* like his father and brother to circumvent confinement since his involvement in the illicit distillation of liquor is noticed by the petty Govt. officials.
3. When *Jili* in spite of her dogged persistence in keeping the wolf from the door, is impelled to become a mistress of the supervisor, and later on, she becomes the *Sahukar's* mistress too.
4. When *Sukru Jani* mortgages his land to assert his freedom, care for his daughters, alleviate all of their sufferings, and fulfill their needs.

All these narratives convey a plaintive cry, an air of despondency, a strong sense of desolation, a moral outrage, and insouciance. The emotions are experienced daily and are clearly expressed in these lines: "They closed the door on the world outside and in the darkness of their dingy shelter father, sons and daughters hung from each other's necks and sobbed aloud while the mandia gruel remained untouched in the gourd-shell flasks ... 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". (Mohanty, 1987, p. 37)

Their plight is clearly visualized – father and son became *gotis*

for no fault of theirs; when a loan of fifty rupees is raised, an agreement is signed and splashed with thumb impressions; a deed which *Sukru Jani* was unaware of, and that day spells doomsday for *Sukru Jani's* family, and all that money brought nothing but sadness and misery, and tragedy: "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 aging father threw his arms around his son, broke into sobs and said: 'Gotis, Tikra! From today we are gotis, slaves!'" (Mohanty, 1987, p. 54)

One can understand the 'indignation', 'dismay' and the 'rage' in the eyes of *Sukru Jani* when *Kau paraja* tells him about the *Forest Guard's* prurient interest in *Jili*, which makes *Sukru Jani* blurt out angrily: "You will get what you deserve, you rascal," he shrieked. "I'll break every bone in your body. Just wait, and I'll skin you alive, you scum!" (Mohanty, 1987, p. 29) He further added: "Go and tell him that our Paraja women are not for sale. He can have our chickens and our millets, but nothing more." (Mohanty, 1987, p. 30)

*Sukru Jani's* desperation is perceptible while trying to protect his eldest daughter's dignity and physical and mental integrity. On the other hand, in choked desolation, *Jili* holds out against *Bagla's* repudiation of her proposal. She was completely devastated. "Life at home was without pattern or meaning to *Jili*. Her father seemed to live only for his land, his work, and his thoughts. *Bili* was totally wrapped up in her love for *Nandibali*. There was nothing for *Jili* to share, and she felt that nobody wanted her.... *Jili* sat alone near the hearth after the fire had gone cold, with her cheek resting on her palm, thinking of nothing except her own loneliness. She felt herself growing old without having received anything from life; she had gathered nothing, saved nothing, and there was no one to call her own... What was there so wrong about the suggestion which *Madhu Ghasi* was making to her? Why must she feel lonely and miserable?... She must cut the ropes and free herself. She had a right to be happy like anybody else." (Mohanty, 1987, p. 288) Thus, *Bagla's* rejection made her up to compromise, and she becomes the *Sahukar's* mistress which ruptures the family and the kinship ties once and for all. Similarly, when *Kajodi* left *Mandia* in the lurch, nothing seemed to matter him: "Let it all go – the land, our home, everything! Let the *Sahukar* have it all! His happiness had ended, for *Kajodi* would never be his". (Mohanty, 1987, p. 230)

In the aftermath of *Sukru Jani* and his sons becoming *gotis*; they lived in perpetual terror of the *Sahukar*, the other officials, and police who constantly harassed them. The tale of the inhumanity of the *Sahukar* did the rounds. *Ramachandra Bisoi* (the *sahukar*), a social climber, was originally a *Sundhi* or a brewer by caste, switches to moneylending business, and over time, he becomes a *Zamindar*, a position of increased status or power. His upward social mobility transformed him into a perpetrator, and the registers of exploitation are manifold. This led to the foundation of a vicious and unsparing exploitative structure as the comradeship which the *Sahukar* shares with the colonial officials in general and *Garaja Sundara*, the Revenue Inspector, or *Ribini* in particular: 'his cordial relation with the officialdom paid him rich dividends. The *Forest Guard* or the *Garod/Jaman* acts as the typical *Sarkari* official who is not only assigned with the duty of collecting the newly-introduced 'plough tax' but also capable of prosecuting the tribals for clearing a patch of the jungle or collecting honey from the forest without a license. Thus, this convergence of *Zamindari* exploitation led to the subjugation of the parajas to the triune Godhead of *Sarkari* (governmental), *Sahukari* (money-lending), and *Zamindari* (landlord) (Singh, 2017).

#### Retaliatory violence as conflict resolution

Scott's previous comments concerning the notion of resistance certainly hint at a breeding resentment born out of colonial dispensation, and this malignity finds expression through everyday forms of resistance in Mohanty's *Paraja*.

As resentment is quite intriguing because of its secretive qualities, its by-products include vengefulness, outrage, wrath, scorn, and punishment. Therefore, resistance merely becomes a product or rather a function of necessity. (Singh, 2017)

"A tribesman's life is so hemmed in that he seems to be in danger of breaking the law each time he sets foot outside his home. And so he does what he regards as necessary and if he is caught he looks at you as if to say: 'Very well, I'm beaten again. Do what you like with me.'" (Mohanty, 1987, p. 330)

However, *Sukru Jani* decides to meet the situation head-on when his 'right to subsistence' (Scott, 1997) faced denial. The *Sahukar* rebuffs to clear up *Sukru Jani's* land issue as it has already been mortgaged for a term of thirty years. Yet, the bondsmen appealed to the court of law, constituting colonial modernity, which sounded preposterous, but the enactment continued in the name of justice. These outward circumstances play a major role in triggering or exacerbating an existential crisis, a core conflict that takes place on an inner level, leading to negative consequences and a strong sense of moral outrage over anything that would be rational. And that is well articulated through *Mandia's* words:

'We are peasants and we've only one way of keeping ourselves alive – by tilling the soil.' (Mohanty, 1987, p. 368) The impending threat of starvation magnifies: "The land was our bowl of rice, father. What shall we eat now?" (Mohanty, 1987, p. 371). In an attempt to assuage their grief, they decide to make an earnest appeal to the *Sahukar*, who, in exchange, exults over their adversities which results in an outburst of anger, in a fit of pique, and extreme moral outrage, *Mandia* axes the *Sahukar* whereas *Tikra*, and *Sukru Jani* become *Mandia's* aider and abettor in the murder:

"In a flash he raised his axe and brought it down on the *Sahukar's* head. Immediately the other two joined in. The *Sahukar* fell like an axed tree, and *Mandia* went on dealing blow after blow.....It was only when the blood spurted into their faces and eyes that they came to their senses.....*Sukru Jani* exclaimed: 'Oh!' *Mandia* looked at his father; and father and sons put their arms around each other and wept, their tears mingling with the blood." (Mohanty, 1987, p. 373)

This heinous crime was neither premeditated nor predisposed, and yet the hatred, annoyance, and wrath are quite palpable. In other words, anger and revenge necessitate instrumental or expressive retaliation for actual wrong, resulting in manslaughter, which is rendered the culmination of moral outrage in *Paraja*. Eventually, it becomes Hobson's choice for the *Paraja* patriarchs.

**CONCLUSION**

Mohanty's *Paraja* announces indubitably that anger and its expression as legitimate. This paper emphasizes the fact that a mixture of long-simmering anger or indignation, audacity, endurance, and hope materializes the emergence of this type of open protest, which led to bloody confrontations with the power-holders. *Paraja* constantly reminds us of the perplexing realities which remain obscured and unnoticeable behind the veneer of modernity and civilization so that every time the legality, morality, and normality of the subaltern are violated and transgressed, resistance solely becomes a Hobson's choice. (Singh, 2017)

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