Chapter 5

*Tribal India in Indian Fiction in Translation-I*

*Tribals as Children of Nature: Gopinath Mohanty*

This chapter begins with a discussion of the dominant cultural factors that conditioned Oriya fiction in the early 20th century, especially the forces that enabled the theme of marginality to be written about, and then places Gopinath Mohanty in the context of the fiction-writing tradition in Orissa; and finally it discusses in detail some of his important novels on tribal themes in order to understand his representation of the tribal people.

With the taking over of Orissa by the British from the Mahratthas in 1903, a number of changes appeared in the socio-cultural life of the people. The British administration strengthened the feudal system. The feudal class acted as the mediator between the British and the people. The feudal lords collected taxes for the British. They were exploitative in their dealings with the common people. Though they were loyal to their British masters, they were very unkind to the common people. There were revolts against feudal exploitation such as the Paika revolt. But these were suppressed, though the suppression did not last long. The rise of the common people against their oppressors was strengthened with ideas supporting their cause which came from different corners of the world. The ideology of communism was one such
influence. In 1901 Queen Victoria passed away, and with her death the rich and feudal lords lost their power, possessions, and patronage. This gave rise to the emergent labour class. The labour class became powerful. The British were ruling Orissa through local landlords. So, with the weakening of British power, the landlords also became weak in terms of exercising their power. As a result, the common people gained some confidence to articulate themselves. At this juncture, people’s revolts such as the October Revolution of 1917, and the World Peace Congress (October 6, 1935) were events that provided inspiration for the writers and leaders who supported the common people. In this connection, Brahmananda Singh writes: “Bhagabati Panigrahi, the veteran Communist leader who attended the Peace Congress in Paris, organized a week-long Seminar in Orissa after he came back from the World Peace Congress. He called it the Nabayuga Sahitya Sansad” (55). Freedom of thought and liberalism were the key concepts here. Six months later in 1936, the All India Progressive Writers Association held its meeting in Lucknow and there was an urge for purposeful writing. In his inaugural address at the All India Progressive Writers Conference, Munshi Premchand “insisted on the need for socially purposeful writing. Lamenting the soporific quality that dominated the then current writing in Hindi and Urdu, he pleaded for a literature that would generate dynamism, struggle and uneasiness (gati, sangharsha aur bechani)” (Mukherjee 145). He said: “By progress we refer to that condition which creates in us strength and vigour, which makes us aware of our misery, which enables us to analyse the internal and external factors that have reduced us to the present state of inertia, and which attempts to remedy them” (qtd. in Mukherjee 146). There was also an urge to focus attention on
neglected sections of our society. Munshi Premchand himself wrote novels and many short stories on the lives of ordinary people. Peasants, labourers, widows and other marginalized sections of the society formed important characters in his novels and short stories. Along with Premchand, other novelists, such as K. A. Abbas, Mulk Raj Anand, and Thakazhi S. Pillai also wrote on the life of the marginalized. Gopinath Mohanty, a student of literature in his formative years was undeniably influenced by these ideas. Mahatma Gandhi's call for social justice was another influence on Mohanty. Throbbing with these ideas, he made bold to represent tribals in his novels and stories, which was a daring and unusual step in the field of Oriya fiction. Explaining how he came to write on the tribals, he points out:

The plight of the simple, innocent, but exploited poor tribals moved me deeply. At the same time I felt a compelling curiosity to study them and their culture as they seemed to represent for me an ancient stage of human civilization with much that was of sterling worth, least inhibited, and least sophisticated. The more I saw them, the more I liked them. I mixed with them, and I picked up their dialects.

(Mohanty, “Himself”8)

Mohanty's concern and appreciation for tribal life and culture gave birth to a whole corpus of literature on them. Mohanty has as many as five novels based on different tribes. It is worth discussing them in chronological order in order to understand how Mohanty's perception of tribal people was shaped over a period of time. But before that, it is pertinent here to look at the life and concerns of Mohanty's writings.
Gopinath Mohanty was born in a village called Nagbali near Cuttack on 20th April 1914. He was the ninth and the youngest child in the family. His elder brother Kanhucharan Mohanty was also a novelist. Gopinath’s father Suryamani Mohanty worked for the Maharaja of Sonepur. Gopinath stayed with his father and had his schooling at Sonepur. This was his first exposure to the Western and Southern parts of Orissa where most of his novels on the tribals are set. He completed his schooling there. There is an anecdote as to how he dreamt of writing Oriya classics. Once Gopinath’s niece Shanti teased him saying: “Do you have novels in Oriya like that of Bankim Chandra and Rabindranath?”(Singh 13). Gopinath was hurt by this charge and asked his father to get some good Oriya novels for him. His father got a few novels of Fakir Mohan Senapati. But they were not enough for Gopinath and he wanted more. His father seemed to have said “whatever existed, I have got them for you. If you want more, you can write and add”(13). From this, a dream to write took shape in his mind.

In 1926 Mohanty left Sonepur and took admission in Patna High School in the Bangla section. He read the Bangla classics and was inspired by the Bengal Renaissance. He also read a number of Hindi and English writers, and then decided to write a number of novels and short stories to bring Oriya literature to the fore. He started writing when he was in the ninth standard. He stood first in an essay
competition in Patna High School in 1927, and then he developed interest in literary studies. He passed his matriculation in 1930 and took admission in Ravenshaw College, Cuttack. During his college days, he used to edit two handwritten magazines called *Urmi* (‘wave’) and *Jagarana* (‘awareness’) and a magazine in English called *Desklark*. During this period he was also associated with editing other magazines such as *Adhunik*, and *Yugabartha*. He secured an M. A. in English literature and was inspired by the writings of Samuel Richardson, Virginia Woolf, F.R. Leavis and G.K. Chesterton. Gopinath passed his M.A. in the first division. He had a desire to join the Indian Civil Service, but this did not materialize. Then finally he joined the State Administrative Service as a Sub Deputy Magistrate in 1938 in Jajpur district. As a Magistrate, he helped people at the time of floods and other natural calamities. Mohanty pursued his interest in literature even as an administrator. He knew what was lacking in the Oriya novel and thought about ways of infusing freshness into it. He knew that Oriya literature was mostly in the genre of poetry, and that there was a lack of prose writings, particularly fictional prose. Fakir Mohan used the colloquial language, but in him there was lack of finer shades. Mohanty felt an urge to merge the dialects that were prevalent in different parts of Orissa with the ‘standard’ Oriya language. Apart from this, there were other influences on him as well. These may be discussed briefly.

The call of the times and social consciousness inspired his expression. As an administrator, he lived in several tribal regions and was involved with various developmental projects. Thus he observed from close quarters the language and
culture of the neglected people and the way they were exploited. He points out in an interview:

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

(Mohanty, Pragna 35)

Mohanty wrote as many as fifteen novels between 1938 and 1974. He was given the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1955 for his novel Amrutara Santana (1949) or Sons of the Immortal and also the Jnanpith Award in 1974 for his Mati Matala (1946) or The Clay.

At the start of his career as a Deputy Magistrate at Jajpur he used to help in rescue operations for the flood-affected people. Then he came to work in the tribal regions where he got materials for many of his novels. Mohanty was also influenced by the political movements that emerged in different parts of the world. There were movements in 1789 in France and in 1917 in Russia to overthrow the old values and to establish People’s Revolution. In South Africa there was a prolonged struggle to overthrow colonial rule and to establish human dignity, social identity and economic rights. The aim of these movements was to bring the oppressed people to the mainstream. Literature and art also highlighted the life and culture of common
people. This concern for the life and culture of the marginalized was reflected in Indian literature as well. Writers such as Munshi Premchand, Fakir Mohan Senapati, Thakazhi S. Pillai and others made efforts to highlight the life of the common people. Mohanty wrote his novels in the realistic mode following in the footsteps of Fakir Mohan Senapati. However, realism can never be anything but an approximation of the reality. The writer's background and his ideology do play an important role in the making of the novel. In this regard Raymond Williams says:

We know now that we literally create the world we see, and that it is a human creation—a discovery of how we live in the material world we inhabit—is necessarily dynamic and active. Reality, in our terms, is that which human beings make common, by work of language. Thus in the very acts of perception and communication, this practical interaction of what is personally seen, interpreted and organized and what can be socially reorganized, known and formed is richly and subtly manifested. (288)

Gopinath Mohanty took the bold step of including the life of tribal people in the domain of his novels. Before Mohanty, the Oriya novel was more or less confined to the coastal region. With Mohanty's novels, the range of Oriya fiction was enlarged and became more inclusive. Bibhuti Patnaik rightly points out that Gopinath Mohanty could be called the appropriate representative of Oriya fiction because his writings represent the whole of Orissa. This aspect of his writing makes Mohanty different from his contemporaries. Mayadhar Mansingh, the noted literary historian describes
him as a "path-breaker" (268). It is really surprising to note that though tribal people constitute about 25% of the total population, and have made contributions to the history, art, literature and culture of the state, they have been ignored by earlier writers. Only a couple of them have written about the tribal people. Gopala Ballabha Das's *Bhima Bhuiyan* (1908) and Kanhu Charana Mohanty's *Bana Gahana Tale* (1944) are two instances in this regard. The following section attempts a brief survey of these novels.

III

Gopala Ballabha Das’s *Bhima Bhuiyan* (1908), which is the third Oriya novel—the first and second being Umesh Chandra Sarkar’s *Padmamali* (1888) and Ram Sankar Ray’s *Bibashini* (1891)—was on a tribal character Bhima Bhuiyan. However, it was not as powerful as Mohanty’s fiction. The tribal theme found visibility only after Gopinath Mohanty’s novels on tribal people appeared. With Gopinath Mohanty, the theme gained greater visibility in Oriya literary circles, but a quick consideration of *Bhima Bhuiyan* is worthwhile. It is a different type of novel. The writer writing in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century had a different notion about the tribal people. It is worth discussing Das’s views on the tribal people and his representation of the tribals.

Gopala Ballabha Das was the younger brother of Madhusudan Das. Madhusudan Das, also known as ‘Madhu Babu,’ was instrumental in the formation of
Orissa state. He was one of the pioneers of Oriya language and literature. He is called ‘Utkala Gouraba’ or the Pride of Orissa. Gopala Ballabha Das himself was a notable writer. He was born in 1860 in Satyabhamapur, Cuttack. He was an administrator. He spent some years in the Princely State of Keonjhar. The Prince of the state was a minor, so Das was appointed the Superintendent of the State. Here he came into contact with the Bhuiyan tribe of the state and was inspired to write a novel about them. ‘Bhuiyan’ is the name of a tribal community predominantly inhabiting the Keonjhar region. The king of Keonjhar used to select Sardars from this tribe. The Bhuiyans were respected by other people. It is a fact that they have joined the mainstream now and don’t identify themselves as tribals, but during British rule, the Bhuiyans were termed as loyal subjects. There was a tradition that at the time of the coronation of the prince, the Bhuiyans would carry him on their shoulders and place him on the throne and then alone would the coronation take place. After this the king would tie turbans on the heads of the Sardars.

As the story unfolds, we find that Sadhu Sardar has two sons—Banasura and Bhima. They are well built and good-natured. They are good archers and enterprising. They have a good reputation in the entire region. Chinamali is a beautiful Bhuiyan girl of the same region. She is beautiful and of good nature. Banasura and Bhima are attracted towards Chinamali. Finally it is decided that Banasura would be marrying Chinamali. Once the Minister Chhamu Patnaik comes to Sadhu’s village and asks Sadhu to let his son Bhima come with him to the palace to work for the king. Sadhu is very happy to go and stay in the palace. After some days, Sadhu and his elder son—
Banasura are brought to the palace as prisoners for some reason. Bhima is very sad to see his father and elder brother as prisoners. Some time later, the king falls ill. So, nobody is allowed to enter the palace. Doctors are called, but no one is able to cure him. When Bhima comes to know about it, he volunteers to get an old man who can cure the king. The old man cures the king and the latter regains his health. The king’s daughter, who is very upset about her father’s health, is pleased with Bhima. She develops a kind of love for him which he reciprocates. Bhima is also pleased with the Princess. The king after his recovery wants to honour the old man who has cured him. He asks him to bring him to the palace. Bhima brings the old man. People who are present there see that the old man is none else but Bhima’s father who is a prisoner and has to be hanged. They inform the king about it. The king asks the three of them (Bhima, Bhima’s brother and father) to decide who is to be hanged. But they are not able to decide. Meanwhile the Princess comes and requests the king to release all three of them. The king does so and all three of them are free. Then the festive season comes. Every one is busy merrymaking. The king meets his daughter. He comes to know that she has been upset for some reason. One of her maids informs the king that the Princess wants Bhima to be honoured and decorated with turbans, etc. She also desires that Bhima should go out of the palace, and she adds that she likes to visit Brindavan. The king asks Bhima to be present and tells him that since there is no war he can decide what to do. Bhima says that he would like to go back to his father and brother. The Princess asks him to remove the ‘Ranjit-turban’ from his head. When he removes it, the Princess puts her jewel on Bhima’s forehead and offers herself as his wife. Everyone including the king is happy.
The novel was written much before social realism became a trend in Oriya fiction, a trend ushered by Fakir Mohan Senapati. Hence it does not bear any strong features of socially conscious writing. The tribals are depicted here as people living happy and jolly lives as subjects of the King, and not as citizens. As we read the novel, we feel that we are reading a fairy tale narrated by the author. The novel is narrated by the author, and we hardly find characters engaged in dialogue. It is to be noted that in Bhima Bhuiyan male characters are given a prominent place. There are no significant tribal women characters. The author does not employ the idiom of the Bhuiyan tribe in order to make it realistic. He uses polished and pure Oriya. He even makes the tribals speak in refined Oriya. Madhusudan Das for example congratulated his brother on using "pure and elegant diction redolent of the homely sweetness of Oriya undefiled as also of the dignity of classical speech, and above all, the supremely wise spirit of reverence and clarity [...]"(Das iv). This may be called a fairy tale romance, but not a novel, a precious tale, genteel and proper, but not a realistic depiction of the larger and profounder aspects of tribal life.

Kanhu Charan Mohanty (Gopinath Mohanty’s brother), another significant novelist in Oriya also wrote a novel based on the tribal theme. The novel Bana Gahana Tale (1944) which can be rendered as On the Foothill of Thick Mountains was written around the same time as Gopinath Mohanty wrote his novels on the tribals. However, Kanhu Charan’s novel has not drawn much critical attention as compared to Gopinath’s. The reason might be that Kanhu Charan had only one novel
on the tribals though he wrote many significant ones on other themes. Gopinath on the other hand has as many as five novels and a wealth of material on tribal life, culture and language. He also devoted a long span of his life to their service.

The novel *Bana Gahana Tale* is set in a Kondh village in the Koraput region. Magta is Milika Naik’s son. He is proud because his father is the Naik or headman of Kinam village. He loves Suna. Suna is Jani’s daughter. However, Suna loves Baya, who is a poor young boy but has a good character. He has lost his father. Lata loves Magta. But Magta is not liked by a ‘Domb’ called Buddhi because the latter is ill-treated by Magta. Budhi comes from a low caste family, and is very revengeful. When Magta tries to court Suna, Budhi tells Magta’s father that his son should not marry Suna. On the other hand he advises him to get his son married to Lata. Though Lata is interested in Magta, the latter is not willing to marry Lata but wants Suna to be his wife. Suna on the other hand is interested in Baya. Baya is poor but wants to marry Suna who is higher in status. After much discussion both Baya and Suna decide to run away from the village and build a house in the forest. Budhi, who has been listening to their plan, advises them not to run away leaving their ancestral homes. He also says that if Baya obeys the former, he can marry Suna and can become a Jani. Then Budhi asks Baya to come with him to accompany him in stealing from Banamali Sahukar’s house. Baya gets some money and ornaments from stealing. Baya and Suna run away. Budhia also runs away fast. Then they see a number of people coming towards them. Among them are the Munsi Babu (Sub-Inspector of Police), a Constable, Jani, Naika, Disari, Magta, Budhi, Sukru, Chaitu
and Banamali Sahukar. Banamali Sahukar says that the ornaments worn by Suna belong to him. Suna says that all of them were given by Baya and Baya says that all of them were stolen and given to him by Budhi. Suna gives back all the ornaments and Baya is arrested. The villagers ask Magta to marry Suna. Suna is married to Magta, but she is not happy. She is often beaten up by Magta when he comes home drunk. Suna is blessed with a child. One day she is sitting on the verandah. Lata comes to meet Suna. Then Baya comes back from jail and comes to meet Suna and take revenge on Magta. Suna tells Magta that if he waits for her at a particular spot, she would tell him something. Baya waits for Suna. Suna gives her child to Lata and goes to meet Magta. She says that she has come back to live with him, and both of them run away. Lata has to live with Magta and the child. Anyway, the child belongs to Magta.

The novel can be read at three levels. It is about the love relationships between Baya, Suna, Magta and about social practices prevailing in their community. The author highlights the practice of choosing one’s life partner and getting social sanction later. This the author finds strange as it does not prevail in his own society. The novel also lays bare newly introduced institutions such as the judicial system which are corrupt in nature. This narrative, like Bhima Bhuiyan is a tale of love and is melodramatic in nature, and deals with tribal life at a superficial level. It is Gopinath Mohanty’s novels on the tribals that give testimony to the writer’s efforts to combine involvement with the tribal people and artistic endeavour.
Gopinath Mohanty’s first novel on tribal life is *Dadi Budha* (1944). It has been translated as *The Ancestor*. ‘Dadi’ in Paraja language means ‘grandfather’ and ‘Budha’ also means ‘grandfather’ in Kondh language. If we combine the two, we are combining both the Kondh and Paraja languages. For the tribal people of this region, Dadi Budha is the ultimate primal ancestor. He is the cause of creation and destruction. So, the people of Lulla village have established him as their deity through their priests, heads and Naiks. A date palm tree is cut and on the top of it, they wrap a white cloth which looks like a turban. They cut twenty-one marks on the tree and put different colours on the marks. This is their Dadi Budha, the presiding deity of the village. Dadi Budha is their immediate God.

Dadi Budha observes the moving human beings in silence and does not do any harm. But the primitive tribe can see a lot of energy in that mute, static tree. He is the saviour of the village and the community. He is responsible for the loss and gain of everyone. The people hold him in fear and veneration. In the morning people pay their respect while going to the river. He can cure a sick child and can restore a lost cow. He can cause fruits to grow in the garden. He is the eternal deity. Sometimes infants die, cows are stolen. But they have no control over it. The tribals blame their fate. They sulk before Dadi Budha but still retain faith in him, because they are human beings and he is the presiding deity.
Saria Dan and Sariaphool both offer flowers to get Thenga Jani. But Thenga Jani runs away to Assam with Santosh Kumari, a Domb girl. Thenga’s father gets some consolation in Dadi Budha. It was also because of Dadi Budha that Sunduri Paraja’s son gets cured. His power is supreme, but it works in mysterious ways. Later in the Lulla village a tiger appears. This, of course, is a common event. People run away leaving the village. Dadi Budha who has been a support in the time of suffering and difficulties does not come to their rescue. There has been an anthill near the Dadi Budha. The anthill covers Dadi Buddha and they merge together.

Here, Mohanty conveys the message that man is more important than beliefs and rituals. As a writer in the humanist tradition, Mohanty believed that man is the centre of all activities. As the saint poet Chandidas would say:

> Listen, O brother.
> Man is the greatest truth.
> Nothing beyond.

(qtd.in Mehta, *A River* vii)

Here because of the humanist ideology of the novelist, he undermines the tribal beliefs and rituals. But for the tribals these rituals may be very significant. These can even be more important than human life itself. This also indicates Mohanty’s concerns for the disintegration of tribal harmony. He hints that misfortune falls on the tribal village because Thenga Jani fled with Santosh Kumari, the Christian Domb girl, breaking social norms.
Though *The Ancestor* has a simple story line, it presents different aspects of tribal life like love, sex, marriage, communal feasts and drinks, beliefs and worship, certain social codes, and institutions, which are shown as important. This novel has been compared with Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) by Arun K. Mohanty who finds a number of similarities between them. According to him both the novels deal with social realities. In both cases personal tragedy is interfaced with public tragedy. The Ibo community in *Things Fall Apart* and the tribals of Lulla village in *The Ancestor* are affected by outside influences. As a result they disintegrate. However, there is a major difference between the two novels. Achebe belongs to the community he writes about, whereas Mohanty is an outsider writing about tribal life. It remains a big question whether an outsider viewing the impact of external influences on the tribal society can itself be taken as interference. Here Mohanty’s view as an outsider comes out prominently. He believes that tribal culture should not be affected by outside culture. As a government official he believed that government machinery should take up the responsibility of developing the standard of tribal life. As a socialist, he saw some kind of conspiracy in the religion of the then rulers. He comments on their preaching and adds:

The formless heavenly God carried the burden of all our sins—that’s fine. That was a piece of good news. He could forgive all of us. He would bear the burden on his shoulders. However one led one’s life, all sins could be wiped off in his blood some day or other. (Mohanty, *The Ancestor* 32)
Mohanty found this ridiculous. Tribals who have been exploited throughout their lives are assured by the preachers that their sins will be forgiven. Mohanty perhaps felt that what the tribals really wanted was not sermons or absolution from original sin, but justice and basic needs. Because the missionaries ignored the basic problems, he ridicules them in several places. The activities of the missionaries may sound ridiculous to Mohanty, but it is important to consider their contributions to the underprivileged in matters of healthcare and education. It is also important to see what leads the tribals to take up another faith. Mohanty’s perspectives on the tribals as an outsider becomes more evident when we discuss his famous novel *Paraja*. Written in 1943 and published in Oriya in 1946, *Paraja* has a larger canvas. Apart from tribal faiths and customs, this novel depicts the tragedy of a tribal family which becomes dehumanized because of exploitation and oppression. It is based on the ‘Paraja’ tribe living in Patangi and Jaypur Taluk of Koraput district.

Sukru Jani lives in a jungle village called Sarsupadar with his two sons (Tikra and Mandia) and two daughters (Jili and Bili). Their only support is a piece of land near the river and it is like gold. They love it very much. Sukru’s wife has died ten years earlier, killed by a tiger. Sukru lives a happy life with his sons and daughters. He dreams that Mandia will marry Kajodi and Jili will marry Bagla. But his world is shattered all of a sudden once the forest guard sees Jili bathing in the river. He is attracted by her beauty and wants to seduce her. He sends Kau Paraja to get Jili for him for a night. When Kau tries to convey this to Sukru, the latter is very angry. For him, dignity is more important than anything else. Mohanty writes: “Sukru Jani let
out a roar like an infuriated animal. 'You’ll 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, Paraja 29). When Kau Paraja tries to explain the power that the
forest guard has and the consequence of disobeying him, Sukru reacts angrily: “What
nonsense is this? [...] Yes, I know your Forest Guard is so powerful he can crush all
of us. But why must that sal tree pick my poor Jili [...]?”(30). Sukru beats up Kau
Paraja and sends him back. There is a contrast here between the so-called civilized
man’s desire and his deceptive nature and the innocence of the tribal. The forest
guard out of revenge levels false charges against Sukru Jani for cutting down trees
and levies a fine, non-payment of which would mean imprisonment. Nobody comes
to Sukru’s rescue. So, Sukru and Tikra work as ‘gotis’ (serfs) for Ramachandra Bisoi
the moneylender who gives them a loan in return.

Sukru is free of deception. He does not realize the Sahukar’s plot. He gains
courage to take the loan. Then Mandia is arrested on a charge of distilling liquor. He
also becomes a ‘goti’ under the Sahukar as he borrows fifty rupees from him. Sukru’s
misery does not end there. Mandia’s lover Kajodi goes away with Bagla. Jili submits
herself to a road contractor.

With many difficulties, Sukru is released from his ‘gotihood’ but only by
mortgaging his land. He picks up courage to fight adversity. All of them want the
land back. They express their desire to get it back. The Sahukar (moneylender) gets
angry and refuses. Then they seek the help of the law court. But the Sahukar,
Ramachandra Bisi uses his tricks and money and thwarts them. As a result they return empty-handed. Then they seek help in the court again to request the Sahukar to release the land. The Sahukar instead, rebukes them. They get extremely angry and cut off the Sahukar’s head. Thereafter they go to the thana babu (Sub-Inspector of Police) with the head to tell him that they have killed the Sahukar and that they are ready to accept punishment.

Mohanty is critical of the capitalist economy interfering with the tribal way of life. He feels that it kills the social and communal ethos of the tribal community and culture. According to him, with the entry of the outsiders, the tribal world gets disintegrated. He shows sympathy for the blissful innocence of tribal existence, but he is not nostalgic like Verrier Elwin who wanted to see the garden of Eden in tribal society. Unlike Elwin, Mohanty does not exoticise the tribal world, and recognizes the problems and difficulties faced by them in different spheres of life. However, Mohanty disapproves of modern society coming in and causing disintegration. This has been his constant concern in almost all his novels on the tribals. In The Ancestor it is suggested that because Thenga Jani goes away with Santosh Kumari to Assam, misfortune befalls Lulla village. In Paraja, it is with the advent of the outsiders such as the forest guard, the moneylender and the contractor that Sukru Jani’s peaceful world is disturbed. About Mohanty’s view on this B. K. Das, the translator rightly points out:

We know then that the disapproving eyes are dangerously near; the end is at hand. The gradual corrosion of innocence by a creeping,
crawling, lurking evil is as maddening as any modern method of torture: it not only destroys but debases and humiliates. The contrast between natural and man-made calamity is glaring. Sukru Jani’s wife, Sombari, we are told, was dragged away one day by a man-eating tiger as she collected dry twigs in the forest. Sukru Jani suffers, but for him this event is comprehensible: it is a part of his life. What he cannot comprehend, however, is the infinitely convoluted process by which he and his children are transformed from free men into ‘gotis’ or serfs, bound to the Sahukar (moneylender) for ever. He cannot comprehend why a man should be arrested and fined for cutting down trees in the jungle. (vii)

Mohanty paints a contrast between life before the advent of outsiders and life after their entry into the tribal world and holds them responsible for the degradation and disintegration of the tranquil tribal society. For instance, look at the way Mohanty narrates Sukru’s life before it was affected by the outsiders:

Sukru Jani lives in ‘Paraja Street.’ He has his hut and his small family, and he lives in peace. His needs are simple: a bowl of mandia gruel every morning and again in the evening, and a strip of cloth of four fingers wide to wrap around his loins—and these he never lacked.

(Mohanty, Paraja 2)

But life is difficult afterwards. Jili and Bili live a life of want and deprivation. This is depicted in the following passage:
Jili sat on a low mound in front of her hut, gazing into the night sky, forgetful of her existence. Bili crept up softly behind her and put a hand on her shoulder.

‘Come to bed, sister,’ she said softly. And Jili got up and followed her into the hut, while the sounds of the night still called to her.

Several months had passed since their father and brothers had left home. At first, life had been easy; the mandia had already been harvested, and there was enough food. When the meal had been cooked, there was time enough to wander off into the forest and join the dance in the evening. There was no cause for anxiety.

But then the stores of mandia and paddy, kept in the attic above the ceiling, ran low. This was a development which no one had foreseen. (114-115)

Mohanty further describes Jili’s plight:

She was filled with a sense of shame. For the first time in her life, she understood poverty. She wanted to hide herself and her misery, melt away into some dark corner, away from the pitiless glare of a hundred inquisitive eyes which pried into the privacy of her hut, turning up pots and pans, raking up her rags, looking into the attic where the grain had once been, searching among the few sticks they possessed. And those eyes pierced through the mud walls and the straw thatch, exposing all her disgrace; they scorched her dry, leaving
her stark and leafless, like the bare trees on the hillside in summer.

(118)

Mohanty also perhaps indicates that there is a change in values even in the tribal mind as the capitalist, individualist economic system creeps into the self-sufficient, communal economy of the tribals. Sukru is ambitious to possess land, he realizes the wants and feels despair as a consequence.

According to Mohanty, the entry of the outsiders into the tribal world signals disintegration. The forest guard is an outsider. He is also an agent of a government institution imposed on the tribals. Here, Mohanty helps us to see how the forest laws caused disaster to the tribals. Before the law was imposed, the tribals had easy access to the forest. It was their means of livelihood. But with the introduction of the forest law in 1871, the tribals not only lost their means of livelihood but were affected by other problems that arose because of this law. E.V. Ramakrishnan points out the adverse effects of the western model of development on the tribals:

Our obsessive pursuit of a western model of development seems to assume that one day we shall catch up with the west and then would all live happily ever after. The story of colonial intervention, which altered the patterns of agriculture, displaced indigenous communities and bred inequalities between various regions within the country has been told over and over again. It is a tragic story from which we have not learned any lesson. This inability to reorient ourselves towards a more enlightened, eco-friendly model of development has a great deal
to do with the nature of institutions we have built in the postcolonial era. (qtd. in Hansdak 8-9)

The tribals’ right to the forest was taken away by these new rules. The tribals were seen as destroyers of forests and not their protectors. In this novel, Mohanty’s role as an administrator can be seen when he describes Sukru Jani’s dream: “how nice it would be if these these trees could be cut down and the ground completely cleared and made ready to raise our crops. […] Why should there be forests, when they mean nothing to us, and not crops? .... God created all these lands for human beings—what a shame that man prevents his fellow men from putting them to their proper use!” (Mohanty, Paraja 22-23). Mohanty comments: “Sukru Jani knew nothing of soil conservation or the danger of destroying forests. Such considerations never entered his head. He was concerned with the present and with small personal interests” (23). When Sukru Jani plans to cut down trees, Mohanty as an administrator lays stress on forest conservation. However, his notion of tribals as destroyers of forests may be difficult for us to digest, as we know that tribals believe in living in harmony with nature, and that they know how to make judicious use of forest wealth. In the novel itself one can note that Sukru is very unhappy when the Sahukar plants oranges in Sukru’s field as this causes damage to the land meant for growing rice.

As in Paraja, Mohanty’s concerns about disintegration of tribal society caused by the outsiders are also found in his novel The Ancestor. The Lulla village faces disintegration because of the elopement of the headman’s son Thenga Jani with
a Christian girl Santosh Kumari. Thenga Jani, the only son of Ramachandra Muduli, the headman of Lulla village, is betrothed to a beautiful girl Saria Daan, the only daughter of Hari Jani, a respectable elder of the same community. But Thenga comes into contact with Santosh Kumari, a Christian Domb girl. They fall in love and reject the discipline of the tribal community. They decide to run away to Assam to work on tea estates and plan to build their dream home in a town where the rules of the tribal society do not prevail. Santosh Kumari and Thenga Jani’s migration to the Assam tea estate could be seen as an act of dishonouring traditional values. For Mohanty, one of the visible symbols of the external force responsible for the disintegration of tribal societies is the Christian church. He ridicules missionaries who are engaged in desecrating the tribal gods. As we see in the novel, there is a church in Koraput, where people assemble to listen to sermons which they hardly understand. But they remember the church tower, where the bell rings. There is a priest named Reverend Solomon at Pindapadar village who supervises the activities of the missionaries. About them Mohanty says:

In the scorching heat the missionaries in black coats moved from one village to another preaching the message of Christianity. They sweated profusely, and their feet were blistered. Whenever they came across someone they would preach to him the message of their religion: Have faith in God, the Almighty, who sent his favorite son to wipe out the evil from the earth; have faith in Him alone. (Mohanty, Ancestor 32)
Mohanty, as an administrator, believed in the socio-economic development of the tribals. So he finds it ridiculous when the missionaries give them mere sermons. However, as Ivy Imogene Hansdak points out: “The genuine content of the Christian missionaries’ work among the lower-caste groups in India, is [...] negated by the author” (49).

Tribals and non-tribals in the novel have been presented as opposed to each other. The tribals such as Sukru Jani and his sons are shown as dark muscular figures. Sukru’s physique is described as “a mass of bulging muscles; his calves are as hard as rock and his bare skin is proof against all weather” (*Paraja* 6). Again Bagla is “like a straight and tall saal tree” (16). Mohanty’s perception of the tribals seems to be stereotypical. His idealization of the tribals is also a contributory factor in describing the tribal this way. The non-tribals on the other hand are portrayed in negative terms. The Sahukar’s “thick, drooping moustaches, deepset eyes” have been highlighted (*Paraja* 48). Madhu Ghasi’s “thick lips and pink eyes” are also stressed by the novelist (255). Mohanty also characterizes the tribals as naïve, simple and sometimes helpless creatures. However, the Dombs have been represented as cunning and crafty people. Chamru Domb deals in illicit liquor by bribing the excise officials, Madhu Ghasi gets Domb and tribal women for the Sahukar. The subalterns also hold this opinion against each other. Sukru Jani points out that the Dombs are suitable for selling their bodies. So the Forest Guard should send men to procure Domb women instead of sending for his daughter. He says: “The Dombs would feel flattered if the Forest Guard asked for their women! Go and try your luck with them!” (30). It is a
mighty irony in the novel that it is precisely the same kind of corrosion and degradation of the same girl, Jili, which the father had angrily resisted, that led to the beginning of the downfall of the family. And the contemplation of this irony produces a kind of sadness that is not easily shaken off with songs, though songs and funny scenes are not wanting in the novel. The Parajas look down upon the Dombs. The Sahukar is said to have “some low Domb blood” in his veins since he is lecherous and cunning. These subalterns, as Tanika Sarkar points out, “have internalized the ideologies of the dominant class/caste” (Sarkar 152-153). The Christian Dombs are also portrayed as cunning and ridiculous. They are described as people who will stop at nothing to get their work done. Hansdak points out that “[t]his attitude towards the Dombs seems to reflect the author’s own caste prejudices” (Hansdak 14). Mohanty as an administrator does not like to recognize the genuine work done by the missionaries. The tribals and caste people have been living a life of harmony and cooperation for ages. However, they clash against one another. The administrators play a major role in this conflict.

Like men, tribal women are depicted as sensuous and their bodies have been romanticized. Also their nudity and lovemaking are given undue importance. The descriptions of Jili and Bili are cases in point. Mohanty makes the novel interesting by depicting love and courtship scenes. He describes the dormitory system prevalent among the tribals. This dormitory system is viewed as a space for lovemaking for the writer. S. C. Roy, however, in his studies of the dormitory system—in *The Mundas and Their Country* (1970)—mentions that the system provides opportunities for the
tribal youth to learn traits and skills from their peers, and it is not merely a space for primeval love and sensuality. Love is accidental, secondary, and not the main thing.

Mohanty has a great liking for tribal society and culture, and he would like to see its culture flourish. He perceives that the penetration of the outside world may cause irreparable damage to tribal society. He shows how a harmonious and peaceful society goes through transition in terms of customs and values with the entry of an alien culture and with the introduction of alien institutions like the court, ‘thana’ etc. As an administrator he sees from close quarters the manner in which government officials exploit the tribals. Mohanty in an artistic style creates an ideal tribal world with songs, dances, love and courtship, exploitation and revenge. Bikram Das has preserved this style in his translation, and the novel becomes interesting to English readers.

Mohanty’s love for the ideal tribal world has come alive in his novel *Amrutara Santana* (1947)—which can be rendered in English as *The Sons of the Immortal*—where the tribals have been glorified as the sons of the immortal. While *Paraja* tells a moving story of Paraja life, *Amrutara Santana* tells the story of the Kandhas (also referred to as Kondhs by anthropologists), another aboriginal tribe of Orissa. Unlike *Paraja*, *Amrutara Santana* is not a story of the simplicity and exploitation of the tribes, but explores the mind of the Kandhas living in the wilderness of the forest with their own faiths and social institutions. Like Sukru Jani in *Paraja*, Sarabu Saonta is the patriarch of a small family. He lives in Miniyapayu village. He passes away after some time leaving behind his younger brother, Lenju.
Kandha, son Diyudu, daughter-in-law Puyu, and daughter Pubuli. All of them live a happy life in the hills that are at a height of 4000 ft. Pubuli is betrothed to Harguna, but she develops an intimacy with Besu Kandha and marries him without social rites. Sarabu’s son Diyudu is a married young man. He is no more attracted to his wife Puyu as she has lost her youth and charm after giving birth to Hakina. So, Diyudu is attracted to Pioti, a young and beautiful girl of another village called Bandikar. One night, leaving behind his wife and son, he goes to that village, marries Pioti and comes back home with the new bride in the early hours of dawn. At this Puyu becomes jealous of the co-wife and weeps bitterly as she finds that her husband loves her no more.

The novelist has added a few more characters such as Lenju Kandha, Phatiru Bejuni, Sona Dei and Pandru Disari. Lenju Kandha is broken man after his elder brother’s death. He is not able to put up with his nephew’s behaviour. He finds himself excommunicated and alienated. There is nobody for him. He is overcome by self-pity. He is rejected by Suna Dei, the Domb (low-caste) woman.

Thus, the novel has a simple story line, but deals with different aspects of Kandha life. Mohanty attempts to highlight the Kandha philosophy of life. When Puyu is in distress due to her husband’s negligence, the Disari, or the priest consoles her by telling her that they are born in nature to make merry. She adds that to a Kandha, the world cannot be woeful. Everybody has a place under the sun and is destined to live a life of joy. Puyu observes nature and finds that a small bird has a nest and a natural dispensation. Such things give her strength and confidence. So she
decides to leave her husband and his house. With her dear son, Hakina, she will have a separate house. She comes to realize that life is immortal, never laden with sorrow and forever pleasant. This is how the novelist attempts to show the tribal world to the reader. Mohanty appreciates the agility of the Kandhas in spite of their economic distress and suffering. This he depicts through the character of Sarabu who plays the flute and remains happy in spite of suffering and distress. Mohanty, coming from an urban background seems to be unhappy with urban culture and has a lot of appreciation for the culture and traditions of the tribal people. This is obvious in a number of places in his novels. Moreover, his appreciation for rural life is obvious in his novel *Mati Matala (The Clay)*. It is a voluminous work of fiction running to more than a thousand pages; it critiques urban life and celebrates the rural ethos.

Mohanty also highlights some tribal rituals. For instance, when Diyudu’s son is born they send the good news to the baby’s maternal uncle’s family. Then the Disari (the priest) arrives and performs the naming ceremony. Mohanty describes the ritual in elaborate terms. Disari and Bejuni are priests and administrators and controllers of culture. It is believed that the gods listen to their prayers and accept offerings from the devotees. The novel was published after independence and the writer has given more importance to socio-economic aspects of tribal life. He does not speak about the problem of freedom. Though these examples of exploitation, group fighting, etc. may be cited, they are not so obvious in *Amrutara Santana*, as they are found in *Paraja*. In the novel the Kandha is a child of nature; he grows up in
the lap of nature; and he gets inspiration to perform his duty to nature. Instead of becoming violent in order to find meaning in life, he searches for the truth in nature.

Another important aspect of Kandha life is seen in the role played by Bejuni (the priestess). Bejuni is not a person but an institution. She has an important role in different aspects of Kandha life. Mohanty describes Bejuni thus:

Bejuni’s house is at the end of the village. Around the house there is a hedge. Bejuni lives here. She has an important place [in Kandha social life]. She is possessed. She can invoke whatever God she likes to. She is barren. She is a link between life and death. People are scared of her. There are necklaces of many colours around her neck. She has herbal medicine-talisman. She can do impossible things, she can walk in fire, sit on thorns, pierce her belly with a sword. She is the bahana (vehicle) of the deity. (Mohanty, Amrutara Santana 29-30; translation mine).

The novelist is also impressed by the way the Kandha people conduct meetings and resolve social problems. He highlights the fact that women also participate in these meetings. The novelist also describes religious rituals and ceremonies performed by the Kandhas on different occasions like birth, marriage and death. They drink on these occasions as a part of their rituals. They drink and eat at the time of cutting the navel cord and also perform rituals (9). Human sacrifice is a part of the Kandha rituals. They perform these rituals to satisfy the Mother Earth. As
we see in the novel, witchcraft is another practice that we find among the tribals. Mohanty also narrates the practice of Udalia marriage i.e., if an affair is not approved by parents the couple can flee and live together after paying some penalties to the elders of the community.

In this novel too, Mohanty expresses concern about the decadence of tribal culture. He shows this through Sarabu Saonta who in the beginning of the novel contemplates the sorry plight of the tribals. The novel begins with Sarabu Saonta’s death and ends in the final rupture of the marital relationship between Diyudu and Puyu, his son and daughter-in-law. Sarabu is the absent headman whose presence is felt throughout the novel. It needs mentioning that Sarabu is concerned that tribal tradition is suffering from the influence of an alien civilization:

It was the golden sunshine of the last days of Pausa. Eighty-year old Sarabu Saonta leaned against the saal tree at his doorstep and looked at the distance. The air was fragrant with the aroma of unknown forest flowers and ‘mahua’ wine. Butterflies with multicolored wings floated as lamps in the golden sun. In the distance, at the end of the village street, the worship of Dhartani (Earth Mother) had started. Almost the entire village had gathered there. The houses and the village street looked empty. Rhythmic beat of the drum revived memory of his earlier days and Sarabu started reminiscing. He remembered his youth, his songs, the mad abandon of moonlit nights [...]. His entire past
floated like a dream, like the morning fog slowly unfolding layer after layer of the hills [...]. Sarabu was ill. His whole body ached. There was pain in the chest [...]. Sarabu brought out his flute from the house [...]. Sarabu danced as if he were possessed like the Kalsi or the Bejuni, as if the Nachini Goddess had entered him and he was worshipping the flute and danced. In the honey-coloured afternoon sun, the village dozed; dark shadows danced before his eyes and Sarabu dozed off finally on the most important festival day of the Kondhs. (qtd. in Mahapatra, *Reaching 1*)

Sarabu’s illness can be read symbolically as illness suffered by the tribal world or the degradation that has been taking place there. And this concern of Mohanty has been manifested in many different pages and through different characters. For instance, Mohanty mentions how the Kandhas are pushed away by the mainstream. He points out: “Kandha makes a field clearing the forest. Civilization follows him, followed by the moneylender and the white collared officials. They find the land to be good, and make it their own. Kandha moves away and up the hill. Up there too there is the forest, and there is Kandha. Once the land is cleared, Kandha is once again chased out” (Mohanty, *Amrutara* 60; translation mine). He shows his concern for the tribal people and is critical about the people of the plains. Mohanty explains:

People of the plains think that as long as the Dongria Kondh, the Langia Sabar, and the Kotia Kondh live in this primitive stage, they
can be easily cheated and exploited. One can buy 96 bananas for 25 paise, a buffalo skin for two rupees and a basket of turmeric for one rupee or two rupees. As the colonialists prepare the tools for exploitation they know how to do it. They push drugs into the market. They get the tribals drunk. They open liquor shops for the tribals. They want the tribals to remain illiterate. Nobody should go and educate them. Only the businessmen should have access to the tribal inhabitants. (15)

In almost all his novels Mohanty is critical of the Domb community. He depicts them as cunning and deceptive. According to Mohanty, the Dombs (a neighbouring low caste community of the Kandhas and Parajas) are among the exploiters of the Kandhas. About a Domb character he writes:

Barik is from the Domb caste. He is the key to the village. He is the link between the outside business and the villages. He has contempt for the villagers. The villagers want him to work hard and earn instead of just earning his livelihood through mediation and negotiations. He does not want the Kandhas to be educated. He thinks that if the Kandha is educated, he won't need the Domb anymore. (124)
A similar concern has been shown by Mahasweta Devi in her novella “Pterodactyl, Pirtha and Puran Sahay,” where Sankar laments the invasion of the outsiders which leads to the miserable plight of the tribals (see p. 191-192 below).

Mohanty is concerned about the outsiders coming to the tribal regions and using them for selfish gains. Unlike Elwin, Mohanty is not an isolationist who would advocate purity of tribal culture. But Mohanty’s fear is like that of Mahasweta Devi’s that the cunning and selfish people from outside may exploit the tribals and their resources.

In an interview with Sitakant Mahapatra, Mohanty expresses his anxiety and points out: “Amrutara Santana deals with the life, culture, problems, and changes of the more primitive Kuvi Kondhs. It also deals with exploitation and with decay of values particularly the havoc wrought by civilization” (Mohanty, “Himself” 11). In the same manner, Mohanty’s Sarabu Saonta thinks about the sorry plight of the Kandhas:

Day by day misfortune goes up. The land on the hill in front has been lost. The Kandhas went further up. There is also everything that belonged to others not of the Kandhas. The yoke and burden is of others. It pains the body and mind. The empire of the Kandha is lost. His country is dispersed and dispossessed. Perhaps people one day will forget that there was something which belonged to the Kandhas.

(Mohanty, Amrutara 2)
Mohanty shows that the Kandha is free at an individual level and at the same time he is bound by society. Brahmananda Singh in his book *Aupanyasika Gopinatha* (1996) or *The Novelist Gopinath* writes about the Kandhas:

He [the Kandha] loves freedom, courage, believes in fate, and is conservative in attitude. He does not recognize anyone’s lordship. He is selfless. He lives in the uniqueness of nature. He becomes possessed with the advent of spring. He sings for the betterment of all. In every Kandha village, there are institutions like the Saonta, the Jani (head) and Bejuni (midwife) who guide the society. (125; translation mine)

Gopinath Mohanty lived in Koraput during 1940-45 and saw the tribal people from close quarters. He learned humanism and self-respect from them. He also sang *Vande Mataram*, taught Gandhian ideals, Communism and Socialism. The novel *Siba Bhai* (1955) is an outcome of Mohanty’s belief in Gandhian ideals. It also shows how Gandhian ideals could spread among the tribal people. One of the important characters in *Siba Bhai* is Apa, or elder sister. She carries forward the ideals of Gandhiji and performs activities suggested by Gandhiji. Apa works for cottage industry, prevention of cow slaughter, abolition of ‘Beth’ and ‘Begar,’ preaches cleanliness, abstinence from liquor, use of khadi, and asks parents to send their children to school. These activists operate from Dumriguda Ashram. Siba Bhai’s wife Mukta is also an active worker. She does not have a child. So she wants Siba to marry a girl called Parvati and to have children from her. But he refuses to marry again even for the sake of progeny. He wants to devote more time for the movement.
He has a lot of appreciation for his Apa. He devotes his time to spirituality, as he feels that the “soul is more important than anything else. Even if we earn a lot, we should not forget the soul, take the examples of Aurobindo and Gandhi” (Mohanty, *Siba Bhai* 16). Apa does not get married because that would be a hurdle to her work. She teaches in a village school. Biswanath Bhai, another worker, is dead, but his ideals are remembered and invoked by Siba Bhai.

Tima is Siba Bhai’s nephew. He advises his nephew also to follow the path of Gandhism. One day Tima and Siba Bhai are out in the forest and Siba Bhai is killed by a tiger. But Siba Bhai is remembered even after his death. His presence is felt throughout the movement as well as in the novel. Apart from Siba Bhai, another person who joins Apa is Jeniffer Mary Wilberforce Hamilton. She is the daughter of a Domb priest called Mathias. She meets Apa and expresses her willingness to join the movement. She changes from her colourful attire to Gandhian Khadi, and gives herself up to social work. She is called Jooni Apa.

Jagannath Bhai is another Gandhian working for the betterment of the local people and helping them to earn their livelihood. It is certainly a difficult task when everyone is crazy for money, and is using false means to exploit people. In that situation, it is not easy to teach them the path of sacrifice, honesty, equality and empathy. But the workers are honest, and Jagannath Bhai eats once a day and fasts in the night, saying that in our country people anyway don’t get food to eat twice a day. He wants to show solidarity with them. These activists are charged with
determination. Jagannatha Bhai is immersed in his work. He requests the people to adhere to the ideals of Vinobha Bhave and Gopabandhu Das. They distribute land, and give up their desire for land in order to enable everyone to get some and live a happy life.

After independence, the top leaders of Indian National Congress started the mission of solidarity and sympathy for the poor in society. Vinoba Bhave took up the leadership. He set up ashrams in different parts of India and involved people in persuading the landholding class to distribute land to the poor. In fact Vinoba Bhave came to Orissa in 1955 to spread his message of Bhoodan (‘donation of land’) and with his entry, the message spread throughout Orissa. Though Siba Bhai was published a little before this, it captures the essence of the Sarvodaya Movement. Started at the national level, Siba Bhai’s movement was certainly influenced by it.

The novelist reminds us in the novel that “Vinobha Bhave is moving throughout the country spreading the message of love and non-violence. Along with him, a lot of people are also travelling not for themselves but for the country. There won’t be violence, war, disorder and wants.” (54). They come from Uttar Baleswar. Sumitra Devi is another activist as also her husband, Budhinath. He has come to this locality all the way from Cuttack to serve these people. The way the activists work is really worth appreciating. As Mohanty narrates:
Thereafter came a long valley. On both sides there are mountains and in the middle a river, the Kandhas used to cultivate this land some years ago, they have abandoned it for fear of tigers and bears. The land is full of tall grass usually used to make thatches. There are a few sal trees here and there. There is pasture land here. Forests and forests. Jagannath Bhai moves from one village to another. He does not bother whether it is morning or evening, bears, tigers or elephants [...] In the forest he just wraps a piece of Khadi cloth upto his knee. (Mohanty, Siba Bhai 72)

They were Bhoodan activists. Even if Siba Bhai is dead, his presence is felt even after. He used to go with Apa and tell the people: "It is required to distribute among landless. Donate land. If you are four brothers, consider us as the fifth and give us our share. It's a big movement" (19).

It is easy for the outsiders to motivate tribal people. Any movement will spread like fire in the tribal region. The novel shows that Mohanty has a lot of knowledge about the region. He can talk about the village and their landmarks, railway stations, rivers and their peculiarities, belief systems, marriage rituals, songs and dances. This is how Mohanty records the influence of the Gandhian Movement among the tribal people. He narrates how the simple-minded people loyally follow the Gandhian ideals. The workers are also devoted to spreading Gandhian ideals. It is to be noted that he is all for it and records these aspects favourably. Perhaps as an administrator, he is also convinced that these movements and activities are desirable
as they constitute development projects. These he finds better than the proselytization of Christian missionaries. But it is to be noted that it is mainly the outsiders who come and decide what is good for the tribals. It is important to see what the tribals themselves look for. A mark of Mohanty’s interiority in tribal matters is his intimate sense of tribal specificity and reality. He mentions even small streams, waterfalls, small villages like Muniguda, Dangsuruda, Chandrapur, etc. in his fiction. This demonstrates his fidelity to place and location, and gives his fiction specificity.

The novel *Siba Bhai* is written in a mode different from that of *Paraja* and *Amrutara Santana*. Unlike the last two, this novel does not focus on the theme of the village and the agricultural life of the tribal people, but on a different theme. It is based on how the mission of Vinoba Bhave has spread in the tribal region. The novelist shows that the tribals embrace the value of equality and universal brotherhood. They embrace this, whereas in the urban and mainstream society it is not so popular. Having examined the strains and stresses in tribal society in the wake of the advance of outsiders, Mohanty shows how the educated tribal youth work for the development of their region. He apprehends that educated tribal youth might forget their own roots and become exploiters themselves instead of serving their own people. This concern of Mohanty has been expressed in the novel *Apahancha* (1961) or *The Unreached*. It is the last of Mohanty’s novels on the tribals. After observing tribal society, Mohanty sets an agenda for them to achieve a better life for themselves. The novel *Apahancha* is an instance where he desires that the educated young people from the tribal community should shoulder their responsibilities instead of going
towards cities. This is a critique of the youth who are attracted towards urban life, forgetting their roots. Tima is the young son of Bima Kondh of Melkabai village. While Tima is in school, his father thinks that he will be a great man. Not only his father but also the entire community pin their hopes on him. Tima will come out as a unique person, and he will be great, and save them from suffering, misery and exploitation. The Sahukars won’t be able to cheat them. When he is in his High School, he gets his name changed and along with it he changes his dress, and behavior. He passes his matriculation, and then forgets himself. He forgets his language and culture. He gets a job and marries Rajani the daughter of a rich man called Narasinghlu Dora. She is arrogant, and is proud of her status. She does not like to live in a mud house. She also shows disrespect to her parents-in-law. Tima lives in his father-in-law’s house and becomes a Sahukar (moneylender), and starts exploiting his own people. The dream of his community is shattered. The village is enlightened, modernized, and each one of the village has become a leader. There are ‘ashrams’ set up in the villages, and the lifestyle has changed. People apply intellect, cunning, and force in unhealthy competition and indulge in vulgar shows of wealth. These are signs of modernization. Tima becomes K. Timaya Dora (K.T. Dora). Tima loses his community and takes on a new form. He becomes an important representative of the tribals, in the view of the government. Many people come and meet him. All of them enjoy wine and women. Tima changes. As he forgets his people he in turn is also forgotten by them. He contests the election and goes for campaigning, but when he meets his people, they abuse him and tell him: “Eh, son of a bitch, where is your village?” He loses the election. His friends forget him. His father-in-law does not help
him. He undergoes a transformation. He recollects his past, becomes repentant for the follies he has committed. He recollects how the tribal people used to love and adore him. They had made him a symbol of their hopes. Now they do not like him. He realizes his folly and comes to lead his people and improve their lot. He calls upon them to resort to collective farming, to work together, to eat together and to live together. His words thrill the people of the tribal hamlet with the hope of a new life full of peace, harmony and opulence. We find an identical situation in Chinua Achebe’s novel *A Man of the People* (1966) where Nanga forgets his own tribal community after being educated and assuming power. Here, Achebe critiques the educated youth who become rootless, forgetting their social responsibility. But the location of these two writers is different. Achebe is an insider wishing good for his own society, whereas when Mohanty does the same it is problematic, as he is an outsider to tribal culture, and in spite of his interiority of perspective, cannot possibly have total identification.

In all these novels on the tribal people, Mohanty presents Nature as an important part of tribal life and culture. Nature controls their life and living. The seasons with their vibrant opulence, the ancient, formidable mountains and the streams, the flowers and foliage, the cloud and storms, the birds and beasts, the totems and taboos—all these have their presence in the life of the tribal people. Nature gives them solace in times of misery and sorrow. In *Paraja* when Sukru Jani, Mandia and Tikra, the three bondsmen, return home for celebrating the ‘chaitra’ festival, Nature offers sympathetic services. The fresh breeze of dawn strokes their
unkempt hair. In *Amrutara Santana* Nature gives Puyu confidence when she loses the love of her husband. Nature inspires her to live and not to put an end to her life. The glorious sunrise reminds her that darkness will give place to light and hence tears may be substituted by laughter. Nature teaches her lessons on living happily. Nature also provides the right atmosphere for the lovers. The moonlit nights make Diudu passionate. In *The Ancestor* the forest fire frolicking on the hills and looking like curved lines of lightning fascinates the tribal people. Along with the description of nature, Mohanty celebrates the beauty of tribal men and women, their physique, and wild love. His love for the tribal people prompts him to urge that the tribals should not be exploited by the outsiders. For this reason he finds people other than tribals as exploiters and oppressors. He does not spare even their neighbours such as the Dombs. Mohanty, after demonstrating aspects of tribal life, expects that the tribal youth should take up leadership and lead their society.

Gopinath Mohanty’s perspective on the tribals is very different from that of the Anglo-Indian and Indian English novelists. Unlike the Anglo-Indian writers, Mohanty does not denigrate the tribal society placing it at the lowest rung of civilization and modernity, nor does he view the tribals as obscure museum artefacts to be show-cased, appreciated and preserved. Further, he does not view them as primitives living in tranquility far away from civilization as they are represented by the Indian English novelists. Mohanty’s concern for tribals and tribal society is one of recognition of their way of life, charm and problems. His novels show that ‘outside’ intervention is disruptive, affecting tribal harmony in adverse ways. This problem is
addressed emphatically by K. Shivarama Karanth in his novel in Kannada *Kudiyara Kusu* rendered as *Headman of the Little Hill*. We shall discuss it in the next chapter.