

Over Bourgeoisie to Sahukars: An East vs West Comparison of La Comedie Humaine and Paraja

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Abstract:

This article explores a comparison between Honore de Balzac's La Comedie Humaine (The Human Comedy) and Gopinath Mohanty's Paraja. These two genius writers represent two different soils and cultures. Where one is regarded as one of the founders of social realism in the novel other is considered as one of the pioneers of Modern Odia Literature. This article examines their selected works in the light of the social realism theme. It also examines their writing techniques, lives, skills, and contributions and advancements to literature. This article gives a detailed description of their characters, motifs, settings, point of view, and plot in the novel.

Realism in literature began in old France; Honore de Balzac perfected this trend with his beyond-comprehensive wit and clarity. With the publication of La Comédie Humaine, he paints the reality of France through these hundred connected novels. Apart from Balzac, other French writers soon spread this trend throughout Europe. Writers such as Mark Twain and George Eliot wrote novels that depicted Europe in realistic settings. Tawin's Huckleberry Finn soon became a sentimental story that reached every house in Europe.

It took more than a century to reach the countryside of Odisha, where Fakirmohan Senapati perfected it and used it as his primary weapon to expose societal dogmas. Pioneered by Fakir Mohan Senapati, the realism in Odia literature emphasises the depiction of socio-political reality, class, and cultural struggle. Gopinath Mohanty stood second to Fakirmohan, where he skilfully used his pen to create rural Odisha. This review tries to find out the key techniques in these works, like motivation behind character, greed, money-madness, injustice, failure of poetic justice, fate, dehumanisation, etc. Through a detailed revision of these two works of literature, this review also tries to identify the key difference between French and Odia realism.

Keywords:

Narration, Money, injustice, law, greed, fate, modern literature.

Introduction:

Realism in literature is meant to depict everyday life in society, addressing themes such as greed, fate, realistic characters, and the failure of law, injustice, discrimination, and racism. It exposes the naked, ugly face of society. At first, realism in literature rose as a reaction against age-old romanticism. Where romanticism focused on the subjective area, realism gave focus to the objective land, the reality of life. The theme of Romanticism is very subjective, like nature, emotion, and the supernatural, which give joy and peace to the human mind. But in the race, it forgot about the hindrance that society has. It never highlighted that part in its mirror. The mirror it created has not even a single spot of slavery, chaos, loneliness, and injustice; it has green scenery, hope, love, and intense emotion. Realism, on the other hand, brings the mirror into the sunlight to make it visible, to make it see the real difficulties of the world. It focused on the underprivileged, poor, and inhumane.

In France, Honore de Balzac perfected this trend with his beyond-comprehensive wit and clarity. With the publication of *La Comédie Humaine*, he paints the reality of nineteenth-century France through these hundred connected novels. Apart from Balzac, other French writers soon spread this trend throughout Europe. Writers such as Mark Twain and George Eliot wrote novels that depicted Europe in realistic settings. Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* soon became a sentimental story that reached every house in Europe.

This revolution reached Odisha after a hundred years, where writers like Fakir Mohan Senapati, Gopinath Mohanty, and Manoj Das wrote extensively using this method. Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja*, Fakir Mohan's *Six Acres and a Third*, and Kalandi Charan Panigrahi's *Matira Manisa* became overnight sensations. All of their writing shows the actual problems of Odisha after the colonial rule. Fakir Mohan Senapati was the first person to use realism in his work. His *Six Acres and a Third* highlights the social injustice faced by poor peasants. Next to him stood Gopinath Mohanty, the son of tribal soil, who in his seminal work *Paraja* raised a voice for the Paraja tribe against the feudal rules.

Though written nearly half a century ago, this work highlights real issues of tribal life that those people are facing to date. Mohanty's *Paraja* is based on his close observation on Paraja tribe, a tribe running a way later than civilisation. When Mohanty was working as a sub-deputy magistrate at the Koraput district, he was highly influenced by this tribe, their tradition, songs, customs, festivals and values. Mohanty saw the invisible tear in their eyes, the pain they were suffering through, and the suffocation they held. Literature is the only way to show the outer world about their existence. Else the world treats them as "others".

Objective:

The primary aim of this paper is to examine the essence of realism present in *The Human Comedy* and *Paraja*. By analysing these two poles of two different worlds, this paper will identify the key techniques employed, the common reality and human flaws. It will highlight the characters and the encounters related to this theme. This study will demonstrate that apart from distance, these two worlds' realism has high distance values within them.

Methodology:

This review validates a qualitative approach to configure the hidden structures of realism in *Paraja* and *The Human Comedy*. Various articles and books have been studied to produce this article. Comparison between narration style, social depiction and realism has been used to formulate this article.

The Middle-class Dream:

Dreaming big is not a bad thing at all. Once, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam said that a dream is not that which you see while sleeping, it is something that does not let you sleep. Everyone tries to be successful in their life. Some take shortcuts while others suffer as they can't leave their values. Two prominent characters of these novels have some similarities as well as differences between them. The consequence of the choice to compromise makes one hero, while another a greedy character. Those two characters are Sukru Jani from *Paraja* and Eugene de Rastignac from *The Human Comedy*.

Compromising with one's own values kills a man from the inside. While the Forest Guard offers Jani free natural resources by giving his daughter a night stay with him, Jani rejects the offer and beats Kau, and warns them about the consequences. Though he is not wealthy, he is rich in self-pride, where he always taught his children about honesty and dignity. But things changed in the case of Eugene de Rastignac. Eugene also belongs to the same class. His eyes were full of colourful dreams where he came to the city to be successful. When the dark reality of the city unfolds, he can't uphold his dignity and honesty. It corrupts him from inside, and he became the part of it. His illicit affair with the old, rich lady for the sake of fortune shows the slow degradation of his moral values.

While French realism works on compromise, Odia literature works on denial. Though Jani, after this incident, has been penalised and threatened with imprisonment, he never compromises with his values. He did everything possible to protect his family. He safeguards his daughter from the nasty hands of foresters. Threat vs. opportunity is another key difference in these two works. While Eugene takes it as an opportunity, Jani takes it as a threat.

The Snakes and Ladders:

Human life acts like a game of Snakes and Ladders. A character from real life plays four roles in the game: the pawn, the dice, the snakes, and the ladders. If we put the characters one by one, what will perfectly fit their place among these four roles? The driving factor that assigns the roles is not the dice or the ladders; it's the game itself. The game sets the rules, impose it on the players, and enjoys the game from afar. It sets three different levels: the upper levels of snakes, the middle levels of ladders, and the lower levels of pawns. The dice's part is in its hand, where he moves the pawn according to its fate. Who reaches a hundred first wins. But the game tries to pull him back with every single move.

The society also works in the same way. Here, the bourgeoisie (sahukars) are the snakes, and the proletariat(workers) are the pawns. When the dice roll, the pawns try to move faster, but are eaten by the snakes. Realism identifies those snakes in literature. In Gopinath Mohanty's Paraja, the moneylender Ramachandra Bisoi and forest officers play the role of snakes. They set a trap for Sakru and his son, which they succeeded in. When the Forester put false charges against Sukru and stuck a large sum fine on his head, Sukru, to escape the imprisonment, took a loan from a sahuakar(money lender), and he, along with his son become his goti (bonded labour). When Jili went into poverty, she became the mistress of sahuakar. This ultimately leads to Sukru's abandonment of his own daughter. Where the father tried his best to hold up his dignity, her own child ruined everything before his eyes. To the Paraja community, self-respect and dignity are the crown of one's head, and a king with no crown is not a king at all.

Mahapatra, in silence, also talks about how education is important in one's life. Tribal people lack the skill of education, or we can say that, though more than half a decade passed, we can't channel education properly at tribal area. Education on corrupted hands always made the tribals the scapegoats. Whenever they tried to cope with the current flow the got eaten by the snakes of society.

In comparison, what we see in The Human Comedy is the ladders. It's about social climbing. Eugene made a significant relationship with Madame de Beauseant to gain a chance to get into the aristocratic society. He never loved her from the core of his heart; it was a relation of flesh. He is an opportunist who always tries to climb the ladder by compromising his values. He is a master manipulator who formulated connections with aristocrats and ultimately gained political and financial power at last.

Parenting:

Through the lens of realism, we can see the type of parenting Odia and French society have. Poverty is always a part of middle standard family where the characters play like puppets for money by the bourgeoisie class. These two masterpieces have two different types of parenting. Where Gopinath Mohanty's Paraja adores dignifying parenting, Balzac's La Comédie Humaine is based on abusive parenting.

In Balzac's La Comedie Humaine, a complex father-son relationship showed up where Eugenie's biological father always abused him for money. From his childhood, he has held trauma of abusive parenting, which was triggered in his adulthood. It makes him more mechanical in thought and life. The social inclining we see in those connected novels is the result of this trauma. Eugenie never believed anyone, as his own father taught him that, besides himself, no one in society thinks about his future.

On the other hand, there stood Sukru Jani, who, after his wife's death, brought up his children with love and support. He envisioned a happy and prosperous life with his children. His protective fatherhood is reflected when he beats Kau and gives a hard-hitting warning to the foresters. The Foresters represent the legal laws and system. A man against the whole system shows his love and protectiveness towards his children. Even this particular incident ruined his life, where he became a bonded labour, Sukru Jani never been harsh to his children. He accepts his fate and wants to rebuild his world from scratch.

Conclusion:

Honore de Balzac's *La Comedie Humaine* (The Human Comedy) and Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja* show two different journeys through two different worlds. While the first one exposes degrading human values, the second one shows its strong holding and rooting to the ground. While Balzac's *La Comédie Humaine* is based on material pursuit, Mohanty's *Paraja* is based on ideal happiness. Through their writing, these two writers expose the then condition of the middle class, their struggle, and the corrupted system. Mohanty successfully glorified the struggle of indigenous people against the system and time. Lastly, both writers present their society in its real shape and problems. Though it's the sweet wine shop of France or the muddled land of Koraput, the oppressed man always fights to prove his identity.

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