

## **‘CONCERNING VIOLENCE’ IN ‘THINGS FALL APART’ AND ‘PARAJA’**

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### ***Abstract***

*The following paper attempts to analyze the similarity between the colonization of the Igbos in Nigeria and the intrusion of the people of the plains into the life of the simple forest tribe Paraja in Odisha as depicted in Things Fall Apart and Paraja respectively. Applying Russian Formalism, Archetypal Criticism, Marxism and Post-Colonization as the theoretical approaches, it studies the traumatic experience of the Third/Fourth World under the rule of the outsiders and the violence that causes colonization and decolonization. Both the instances analyzed in the paper- though taken from two geographically and sociologically divergent literary atmospheres- show the failure of the violence used by the natives in their efforts to resist the unjust encroachment of the colonizers into their land.*

**Key Words: Colonization, Decolonization, Russian Formalism, Archetypal Criticism, Marxism, Post-Colonialism**

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The Third/ Fourth World comprising pockets of tribal culture have been intruded upon by the so called civilized outsiders both from within the nation and without. The intruder's aim to exploit the rich natural resources and destroy the natives' language and culture has met with resistance till the completion of the process of decolonization. In the Preface to Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Jean Paul Sartre writes: Hardly has the second generation opened their eyes than from then on they've seen their fathers being flogged. In psychiatric terms, they are 'traumatized', for life. But these constantly renewed aggressions, far from bringing them to submission, thrust them into an unbearable contradiction which the European will pay for sooner or later. After that, when it is their turn to be broken in, when they are taught what shame and hunger and pain are, all that is stirred up in them is a volcanic fury whose force is equal to that of the pressure put upon them. You said they understand nothing but violence? Of course; first, the only violence is the settlers; but soon they will make it their own; that is to say, the same violence is thrown back upon us as when our reflection comes forward to meet us when we go towards a mirror.

Sartre's thesis on violence can be illustrated further through representative instances of violence against the colonizers which is paid back in the same coin during the process of decolonization. Gopinath Mohanty's Sahitya Academy Award winning Odia novel *Paraja* and Chinua Achebe's famous English novel *Things Fall Apart* are superb examples illustrating the same stage of decolonization in which initial resistance of the colonized against the intruders or the colonizer fails with the death/imprisonment of the protagonists.

Both *Paraja* and *Things Fall Apart* deal with the lives of natives who practice subsistence farming for their living. In the tribal culture, seemingly large conflicts among the natives are resolved through little efforts and even debt is collected in a very human way. Simplicity, hard work and honesty form the core principles directing the behavior of an individual in both the societies before colonization. In Achebe's novel, the creditor visits the debtor's house but asks for his debt in a roundabout manner, that too after discussing extraneous details like the weather. When a woman of Umofia is killed by a man of another tribal clan of Mbaino, the Umofians send Okonko as a representative as do the civilized European nations even now. The representative bargains for a virgin and a young man as compensation and the demand is conceded to by Mbaino to avoid any further loss of lives and property. The *Paraja* tribe of the forests in Mohanty's novel enjoys peace and harmony in the lap of nature before the intrusion of the people from the plains. The *Igbo* tribe esteems hard work as exemplified in the happy lending of 400 seed yams by Nwakibie to Okonko. Man in the tribal society yearns for the fruits he earns. Self sufficiency of Sukru in *Paraja* gets destroyed only with the false framing of him

for illegal felling of trees. The common property of the *Paraja* tribe comprises all natural resources available in the forest. *Paraja* deals with corruption brought in by the intruders: the forest guard and the *Sahukar* (money-lender). The illiterate *Parajas* know no law except the customs, no law enforcing agencies except the tribal authorities like the *Jani*. The clerks, the courts, the advocates and the judges are borrowed machinery of the Western world used by the people of the plains who exploit the simplicity of the forest dwellers. Colonization in *Paraja* is second grade: it is a colony within a colony, its colonization within a British colony. The colonizers are the people of the plains imitating the complexity of the British colonizers.

The *Paraja* and the *Igbo* tribes have their well-knit and hierarchical social structure founded on beautiful religious customs and rituals. In *Paraja*, the *Dishari* (Head Astrologer), the *Jani* (Head Priest) and the *Jhakar* (Magic Man) illustrate the hereditary and religion-based officials of high esteem. Gods in this tribal society -Earth Goddess and *BaghDebata* (Tiger Goddess) - embody strong natural forces with substantial impact on the life of man. The well-structured tribal set-up of the *Igbo* as depicted in *Things Fall Apart* appears 'primitive' to the European settlers. The oracle, the crier etc. may seem 'primitive' or superstitious to the invaders, but they command as much as or even more respect than the Brahmin priests, the bishop and the archbishop. The native questions the inherent contradiction in the religion of the intruder. For instance, the colonizers' attempt to persuade the natives to replace their *false gods* with the Trinity is questioned in *Things Fall Apart* as the three figures in the *Trinity* hardly conform to the principles of *Monotheism*.

The peace of the natives is disturbed with the intrusion of the colonizers and exploitation of the son of the soil ensues. The natives tolerate all pains inflicted upon them for a long time and violence erupts like a volcano only at a later stage when the torture inflicted exceeds the level toleration. *Paraja* depicts how the simple life of the *Paraja* tribe in the forests of the Koraput district of Odisha gets intruded by the outsiders from the plains. The forest guard is the first intruder who develops lust for Jili, the daughter of the protagonist SukruJani. Spurned by Jili and insulted by SukruJani, the forest guard implicates the father in a case of illegal felling of trees. Consequently, Sukru, Mandia and Tikra borrow money from the *Sahukar* to fight the case. The *Parajas* cannot understand the complex judicial system: they are afraid of the police and other government officials. The oral constitution of the *Parajas* works out better than the greatest constitution of the colonizers: the rules of the tribe are followed in letter and spirit. Oral agreements made by the *Parajas* stand effective while written agreements made by the main stream get altered through a good lawyer. Stupefied by the reference to a false oral agreement of Sukru mortgaging his land, the support of the *Sahukar* by the bribed tribals and their failure to justify themselves in the court, Sukru, Mandia and Tikra visit the *Sahukar* to plead mercy. When the *Sahukar* kicks them out, Mandia beheads the *Sahukar* with his axe in a state of uncontrollable fury and the three, surrender before the police. The narrative structures of both the plots display similar characters and functions: they embody the archetypes of all literary works on colonization. The first intruder in *Things Fall Apart* is a white man who is killed by the natives of Mbanta. One of the converts unmasks an *egwugu*, an act equal to killing an ancestral spirit. In retaliation, the *egwugu* burn the church. The District

Commissioner calls the leaders of the Igbo to discuss the church burning 'as friends' but they are imprisoned: words terribly mismatch actions. The Commissioner sends a messenger demanding two hundred bags of cowries as compensation in return for the release of the tribal leaders. The messengers make it two hundred fifty bags of cowries to make their own profit: officials at each step take recourse to lies. The mental and physical assault on the Ibo prisoners during the imprisonment results in the village meeting to discuss the disgrace. Five court messengers arrive to stop the meeting but in a state of fury Okonko kills the messenger who made the announcement. Okonko hopes that the others would attack and kill the messengers but the emissaries of colonization are let go. Next day, the commissioner comes to Okonko's house to find that he has hanged himself from a tree to avoid imprisonment, torture and insult. The death of Okonko has its parallel in Mandia who kills the Sahukar in Paraja, but the violence of the natives in both the cases is unorganized and not supported by the other natives. Too much faith on the comrades brings disastrous consequences to the protagonists in both the novels.

The colonial structure with all its complexities forms a panopticon much beyond the comprehension of the *Parajas* and the *Igbos* in both the novels. The *Parajas* and the *Igbo* are observed but they cannot observe. Sukru, Mandia, Tikra and Okonko are the archetypes of the colonized while the *Sahukar*, Reverend Smith and the commissioner are the archetypes of the colonizer or the intruder.

The Fourth World lies unexplored beyond the sound and fury of the civilization but is governed rules and regulations observed diligently. The mainstream society, on the other hand, displays difference between appearance and reality. The simple folks of the Fourth World reflect their inner feeling in their words and actions. They resist intrusion from the West and the so called civilized mainstream. Violence in both the novels- *Things Fall Apart* and *Paraja*- starts with the intrusion. The violence among the natives breeds no further violence of larger consequences. Beating of the wife by Okonko results in his repentance as dictated by the tribal authorities and the murder of the Umofian woman by the man from Mbaino resolves with the handing over of a virgin and a young man as compensation by the erring party. But violence by the intruder breeds violence and pain for the party that has already been victimized. 'The settler has only recourse to one thing: brute force, when he can command it; the native has only one choice, between servitude and supremacy.' In both the novels, the protagonists choose death or imprisonment for servitude and indignity, but their just violence is the prelude to the process of decolonization. In the words of the colonizers the action may be called *The Pacification of the Lower Tribes of the Niger*, but for the victim murder of the intruder is the right punishment to the outsider who has no reverence for the socio-cultural and religious rights of the natives. The mainstream society may term the acts of Mandia and Okonko as 'taking law into one's own hands' but, in terms of the Fourth World, it would be a desperate attempt to secure justice through violence after the failure of peaceful means.

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