

***Chāta (Roof): A Blend of Classics and Social Consciousness*****Bikash Kumar Pal**

Research Scholar, Utkal University, Vani Vihar, Bhubaneswar

**Article Received:** 26/01/2026**Article Accepted:** 27/02/2026**Published Online:** 28/02/2026**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.01.529**Abstract**

The play '*Chāta (Roof)*', authored by Dr Nārāyaṇa Sāhu, stands as a searing indictment of the profound erosion of family values in modern Odia society and the ruthless self-interest exhibited by children toward their elderly parents. This drama poignantly depicts the life struggles of an idealistic father, Jīban Bābu; his unflinching sacrifices for his family; and, in the end, his helpless death in the old-age home he himself had built. It realistically illustrates how the horrors of the COVID-19 pandemic have tainted the sanctity of relationships and how social distancing has morphed into emotional alienation. This is not merely a play but a sharpened social warning for the self-centred younger generation.

**Keywords:** *Chāta (Roof)*, Selfishness, Old Age Home, Corona, Nārāyaṇa Sāhu, Family, Values, Odia Drama

**Introduction:**

In Indian civilisation and culture, the family is regarded as a sacred institution, where parents are equated with the sky and the earth. This society, founded upon Upanishadic consciousness such as '*Tat Tvam Asi*', is today losing its foundational roots amid the arrogance of youth and the shadows of selfishness [14,15]. Dr Nārāyaṇa Sāhu, a distinguished creator in Odia dramatic literature, vividly articulates this moral irony of contemporary society through his play '*Chāta (Roof)*' (2020). The drama dynamically revolves around the life of a middle-class individual, Jīban Bābu, who invests his entire life's capital to construct a secure 'umbrella' for his children, only to find himself deprived of its shelter in the end [1,3,6]. In the view of Professor Prafulla Kumar Mohanty, this play is highly pertinent to the times, as it artistically encapsulates the self-centred mindset of the younger generation and the legal proceedings in the judiciary aimed at safeguarding elderly parents. The playwright employs COVID-19 as a metaphor or symbol here, unmasking humanity's concealed self-interest. This research-orientated essay provides a comprehensive discussion on the play's thematic content, the psychological analysis of its characters, and the evolving structure of the Indian family system [1,12,13,15].

**Evolution of Selfishness:**

The title of the play '*Chāta (Roof)*' is profoundly cryptic and symbolic. It does not merely refer to the roof of a house but signifies the protective canopy of parental affection. At the beginning of the play, the scene where young Bābu and Sumi quarrel over the roof while building a house with matchboxes serves as a foreshadowing of the entire drama [1,8]. At that moment, Jīban Bābu remarks, "*If the foundation isn't strong, neither the walls nor the roof will serve any purpose.*" This foundation represents the family's values and trust, which later crumble due to the selfishness of son Bābu and daughter-in-law Sumi [1,9,7]. In the play, an extreme manifestation of selfishness is evident when Jīban Bābu sells his village land for 10 lakh rupees, which Sumi cleverly uses for her father's needs and her brother-in-law's engineering education, and later, upon recovering the money, places it in a fixed deposit for her own child's future. Here, Sumi's self-interest is not merely financial but a cruel endeavour toward generational security. The false promise they give to Jīban Bābu about leaving him at the old-age home—" *We'll bring you back if the house's roof collapses*"—exemplifies the deceit of modern children [1,10,11].

#### **Idealism versus Materialism:**

The characters in the play represent various societal mindsets. Jīban Bābu is a self-sacrificing individual who, instead of building a home for himself, plays a pivotal role in establishing an old-age home like '*Gaṅgāśrama*' for others. His wife Kaim's character is profoundly tragic; even after returning from a pilgrimage, she cannot step into her own home due to her daughter-in-law's selfishness and the fear of COVID [1,3,11].

<b>Character</b>	<b>Nature and Role</b>	<b>Social Message</b>
<b>Jīban</b>	Idealistic, Philanthropic	Symbol of the dedicated old generation.
<b>Sumi</b>	Excessively cunning and selfish	Face of the growing moral degradation in society.
<b>Bābu</b>	Weak and henpecked	Irresponsible middle-class youth
<b>Bābulā</b>	Aware and cultured	Optimism and protest of the upcoming generation.
<b>Bibhū</b>	Self-centered and foreign-returned	Symbol of familial isolationism.

Bābulā's character in this play serves as a beacon of light. Even as a young child, by preserving his grandfather's broken spectacles and his grandmother's torn blanket, he indicates that he is preparing to make his own parents taste the same ruthless consequences. This points to the reality of '*karma*' in society [1].

#### **Depth of Dialogues and Cultural Transformation:**

The dialogues in the play are exceedingly sharp and poignant. Particularly, the final-stage dialogues between Bābulā and his parents present the transformed image of modern Odia culture [4,9]. Dialogue example: Bābulā: "*Baba, I'm keeping this broken spectacle for you. One day or another, you'll grow old. And if your spectacles get lost or broken then? Where will I find a broken spectacle for you?*" [1,8]. This dialogue is not merely a family conversation; rather, it represents a massive cultural shock that has arrived in Indian society. Previously, in the villages and hamlets of Odisha, the tradition of the 'joint family' prevailed,

but today it has vanished amid the narrowness of urban life. In ancient times, '*Bānaprastha*' was a matter of pride, but today's 'old-age home' is a compulsory exile [7,10]. In the play, the sanctity of Odia household festivals or pilgrimages takes a backseat to the fear of COVID and financial security, which serves as an indicator of cultural decline [1,6].

#### **Society's Realistic Portrayal and Characteristics of Dialogues:**

The play '*Chāta (Roof)*' unveils that truth of society which people generally fear to acknowledge. The reality of old-age homes is not limited to mere food and lodging; rather, it is a torture chamber of mental isolation. Through the characters of the other two elderly individuals, Bādal and Nilu, the play depicts the similar fate of people from various professions in society [1,10,9]. Social reality dialogue: Nilu: "*Once someone comes to this place, no one enquires about them anymore, nor do they turn their faces toward them*" [1,5]. This dialogue aligns with recent statistics from Odisha. According to reports, approximately 33.6% of old-age home residents in Odisha have been abandoned by their families and children, and no one even comes to visit them [10]. The social reality during the COVID period was even more terrifying. When Sumi calls 104 to evict her mother-in-law from the house, she argues, "*What are you saying? Should the three of us die of COVID for your mother's sake?*" This dialogue illustrates the extreme tendency of modern humans to sacrifice others for their own survival [1,11,12].

#### **Literary Realism: Symbolism and Philosophy**

From a literary perspective, '*Chāta (Roof)*' is a masterpiece. The playwright presents the word '*Chāta (Roof)*' not merely as an architectural element but as a philosophical shelter. At the end of the play, Pradeep Bābu's dialogue is a grand example of literary truth. Literary truth dialogue: Pradeep: "*I'll keep the two photos of your parents in that house. Watch, the house's roof will collapse on its own. Hey, those two are the roof of your house*" [1,2]. Here, literature provides a spiritual solution to bridge society's distances. The arrival of Jīban Bābu's soul in the play's final scene employs a 'postmodern' dramatic style, where he directly questions the audience. This not only narrates the story to the viewers but also makes them a part of the play. Jīban Bābu's final question—"*Our social customs or so-called civilisation?*"—transforms the entire play's climax and literary realism into a profound truth [1,8,14].

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Social Reality</b>	<b>Literary Reality</b>
<b>Old Age Home</b>	An abandoned place, considered a burden to the family.	A spiritual Vanaprastha and final refuge.
<b>Corona</b>	A deadly disease, fear, and social distancing.	Test of humanity's inner selfishness and values.
<b>Chāta (Roof)</b>	A covering made of bricks, cement, and rods.	Symbol of affection, love, and parents' protection.
<b>Children</b>	Heirs and owners of property.	A reflection of karma (Bābula).

His play '*Chāta (Roof)*', meticulously crafted around the struggles of the COVID-19 pandemic and the erosion of humanity, has earned profound acclaim among readers and audiences alike.

**Conclusion:**

Dr Nārāyaṇa Sāhu's play *Chāta (Roof)* stands as a powerful testament to unwavering social commitment. It portrays the selfishness of children and the helplessness of elderly parents not merely as a narrative but as a stark social mirror. When the family's '*Chāta (Roof)*' collapses under the weight of self-interest, the very foundations of society tremble. The play imparts a vital lesson: parents are living embodiments of the divine, and to neglect them is to consign one's own future to darkness. Through the character of Bābula, the playwright delivers a poignant warning: "*What we sow today, we shall reap tomorrow.*" In the end, the soul-stirring questions from Jīban Bābu's spirit unleash a moral tempest in every viewer's heart—a hallmark of a truly successful drama. *Chāta (Roof)* will endure as an eternal classic in Odia literature and a cornerstone of social consciousness.

**Reference:**

- Sāhu N. (2020) *Chāta (Roof)*, jñānaajuga Publication, Bhubaneswar
- Baral P.K. (2007) *Svadhinatā Parabartī Odiā Nāṭaka*, National Bok Trust, India
- Sāhu, N. (2016) *Āsrā Koji buluthiba īsvara*, SatyaNārāyaṇaa Book Store, Cuttack
- Dās H. K. (2006) *Odiā Nāṭakara Aitihāsika Bibartana (2<sup>nd</sup> Part)*, SB publication, Cuttack
- Panigrahi, A. (2010). Determinants of Living Arrangements of Elderly in Orissa: An Analysis. *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*. 25. 10.18356/3a258644-en.
- The Changing Landscape of Old Age Homes in India - Epoch Elder Care,
- Pandy Dr.A.D, Singh S.K. (2025) *Astudy on the impact of Drama on Modern Economy*, tsjindia – THEATRE STREET JOURNAL - WordPress.com,
- Verma, M. & Sureka, R. (2023). *Old Age Homes and the Quality of Life of the Elderly.*,
- Kumari, A. & Kumar, A. & Ajit, K. & Behura, (2018). *Old Age Home: The Biggest Concern of Human Relation.*
- Pandian S., Naik S., Ramachandran U., Grace G.A., Gopalakrishnan S. (2024) *Social Factors Influencing Utilization of Old Age Homes by Elderly in Urban Area of South Chennai, Tamil Nadu.* *Indian J Community Med.* 2024 Jan-Feb;49(1):41-45. doi: 10.4103/ijcm.ijcm\_295\_22.. PMID: 38425971; PMCID: PMC10900463.
- Odikpo J. (2024) *Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on The Elderly*, Walden University, ScholarWorks,
- Derrer-M. E, Reyes-R. MF, Soulsby LK, Roper L, Bennett KM. (2023) *Older adults' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic: a qualitative systematic literature review.* *BMC Geriatr*; 23(1):580. doi: 10.1186/s12877-023-04282-6. PMID: 37730571; PMCID: PMC10510218.
- Barik P. (2025) *Role of Odia Dreama in Establishing Dalit Identity in Odisha*, Online International Interdisciplinary Research Journal, {Bi-Monthly}, ISSN 2249-9598, Volume-15, Special Issue,

SP Publications

**International Journal Of English and Studies (IJOES)**

An International Peer-Reviewed and Refereed Journal; **Impact Factor:** 8.337(SJIF)

**ISSN:** 2581-8333|**Volume 8, Issue-2(February);2026**

---

Islam, J. (2025). Staging Society: The Role of Contemporary Indo-English Drama in Reflecting and Reshaping Social Realities. *Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)*. 13. p.p 102-109. 10.33329/rjelal.13.1.102