iJRASET
International Journal For Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 14 **Issue:** V **Month of publication:** May 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2026.82412

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International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology (IJRASET)
ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor: 7.538
Volume 14 Issue V May 2026- Available at www.ijraset.com

Hamsageeti: The Hearse of Progressively Fading Time

Dr. Jnanee Debasish Mishra
Department of Odia, Ravenshaw University, Cuttack, Odisha, India

Abstract: ***This study provides a critical examination of Surendra Mohanty's 1977 novel, Hamsageeti (The Swan Song). Mohanty, a preeminent figure in modern Odia literature, utilizes this work to explore the existential crisis of the mid-20th century, specifically the hollow allure of the Hippie movement and the erosion of traditional moral values within an urban Indian setting (Delhi). Through the protagonist Subrata, the novel examines the "Generation Gap," drug addiction, and the "willful irresponsibility" defining the 1960s and 70s. The research highlights Mohanty's unique "social evolutionism," blending realistic storytelling with deep philosophical inquiry into the decay of the human spirit in the face of modern progress.***
Keywords: Odia Literature, Surendra Mohanty, Hamsageeti, Hippie Culture, Urban Alienation, Existentialism, Social Evolutionism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Surendra Mohanty (1922–1990) stands as one of the most influential and versatile figures in the landscape of Odia fiction. His life was a unique "Triveni"—a confluence of literature, journalism, and politics. While he possessed immense caliber in all three fields, his most enduring legacy was built within the realm of literature. Mohanty repeatedly acknowledged that his periods of political failure served as a catalyst for his literary inclination. With a bibliography exceeding fifty volumes—including novels like Nilasaila and Andha Diganta—Mohanty's work serves as a mirror to shifting social paradigms. This paper focuses specifically on his 1977 novel, Hamsageeti, a work that marks a significant crossroads in his novelistic journey, moving from historical grandeur to modern existential despair.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The scholarly discourse on Surendra Mohanty's work has frequently highlighted his focus on "social evolutionism." Critics such as Prakash Kumar Parida (Satabdira Saraswata Swara Saraswati Surendra) and Girish Chandra Sahu have analyzed Mohanty's ability to weave historical and political ideologies into the social fabric of his narratives. Earlier works established his reputation for historical and social realism, but Hamsageeti represents a bold departure toward the psychological crises of the urban youth. This transition reflects the author's sensitivity to the changing tides of Indian society post-independence.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To analyze the representation of the Hippie movement and its impact on the youth of the 1970s as depicted in Hamsageeti.
To explore the relationship between the urban environment (Delhi) and the psychological decay of the characters.
To examine the "Swan Song" metaphor in the context of existentialism and moral decline.
To evaluate the novel's critique of intellectual hypocrisy and social bankruptcy.

IV. SETTING AND CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Unlike many of Mohanty's previous works rooted in the soil of Odisha, Hamsageeti is set against the backdrop of India's capital, Delhi. The choice of location is critical; Mohanty integrates the environment to drive the narrative, establishing a parallel between the chaotic city life and the internal struggle of the characters. The metropolitan setting acts as a catalyst for the "Generation Gap," providing a stage for characters such as drug dealers (Mohan Oberoi) and socialites (Mrs. Malhotra), which creates a dramatic texture unique to the metropolitan milieu.

V. THEMATIC DISCUSSION

A. The Hippie Culture and Modern Crisis

Hamsageeti serves as a profound critique of the "Hippie culture" that emerged in the 1960s. Initially perceived as an idealistic movement questioning tradition and Western materialism, it eventually devolved into sexual addiction and narcotics. Mohanty exposes the hollow core of this "pseudo-renunciation," where the pursuit of freedom leads only to an "unfathomable void" and

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"howling loneliness." The novel suggests that the rebellion of the youth was not a constructive reform but a tragic diversion into self-destruction, effectively turning the "Green Earth" of the mind into a grey, stagnant wasteland.

B. Character Analysis: The Struggle of Subrata

The protagonist, Subrata, embodies the struggle of the 1970s youth—jobless, penniless, and starved of love. His character stands in stark contrast to John, representing "willful irresponsibility." Subrata's journey is one of "forced helplessness," where even the simple act of writing a letter to his love, Sumitra, is rendered meaningless by the noise of modern life. Subrata is a "dropout," but unlike the modern definition of the term, his dropout status signifies a total disconnect from established social values, leading to a suicidal instinct that Mohanty identifies as the core of the era's "Generation Gap."

C. The Intellectual Hypocrisy of the Elite

A significant thematic layer in Hamsageeti is the scathing portrayal of the "Kulabruddhas" or the intellectual elite. Mohanty points out the "intellectual hypocrisy" of the upper-middle class, who wear masks of idealism while harboring hideous screams of despair. He highlights how the 20th century became a stage for corruption where wars are orchestrated in the name of peace, and exploitation is rebranded as progress. These "elders" impose their one-sided beliefs on the impoverished lower-middle class, creating a society that is increasingly subservient to moral bankruptcy.

D. The Death of Conscience and the Narcotic Void

The novel explores how the death of conscience leaves life destitute, transforming society into a commodity-driven, advertisement-heavy mindset. Mohanty vividly describes the "narcotics-infused world" where individuals chase the mirage of happiness through addiction. This addiction is not just to drugs but to an illusory sense of joy that masks the internal decay. Subrata's attempt to "clean his house" after the exit of the addicts represents a faint, flickering hope for morality, yet it struggles to withstand the violent momentum of the times.

E. The Aesthetic of Decay and the Swan's Cry

The synthesis of philosophy and psychology provides Hamsageeti with its aesthetic depth. Mohanty asks a vital existential question: "How do so much hideousness, beauty, coldness, death, and life coexist in this world?" He argues that while the exhaustion of life in the pursuit of living is desirable, the insult to life through the "nurturing of death" (addiction and apathy) is unacceptable. The metaphor of the "Swan Song" encapsulates this; it is not a melody of grace, but a poignant, agonizing cry of the soul witnessing its own extinction while desperately clinging to the possibility of existence.

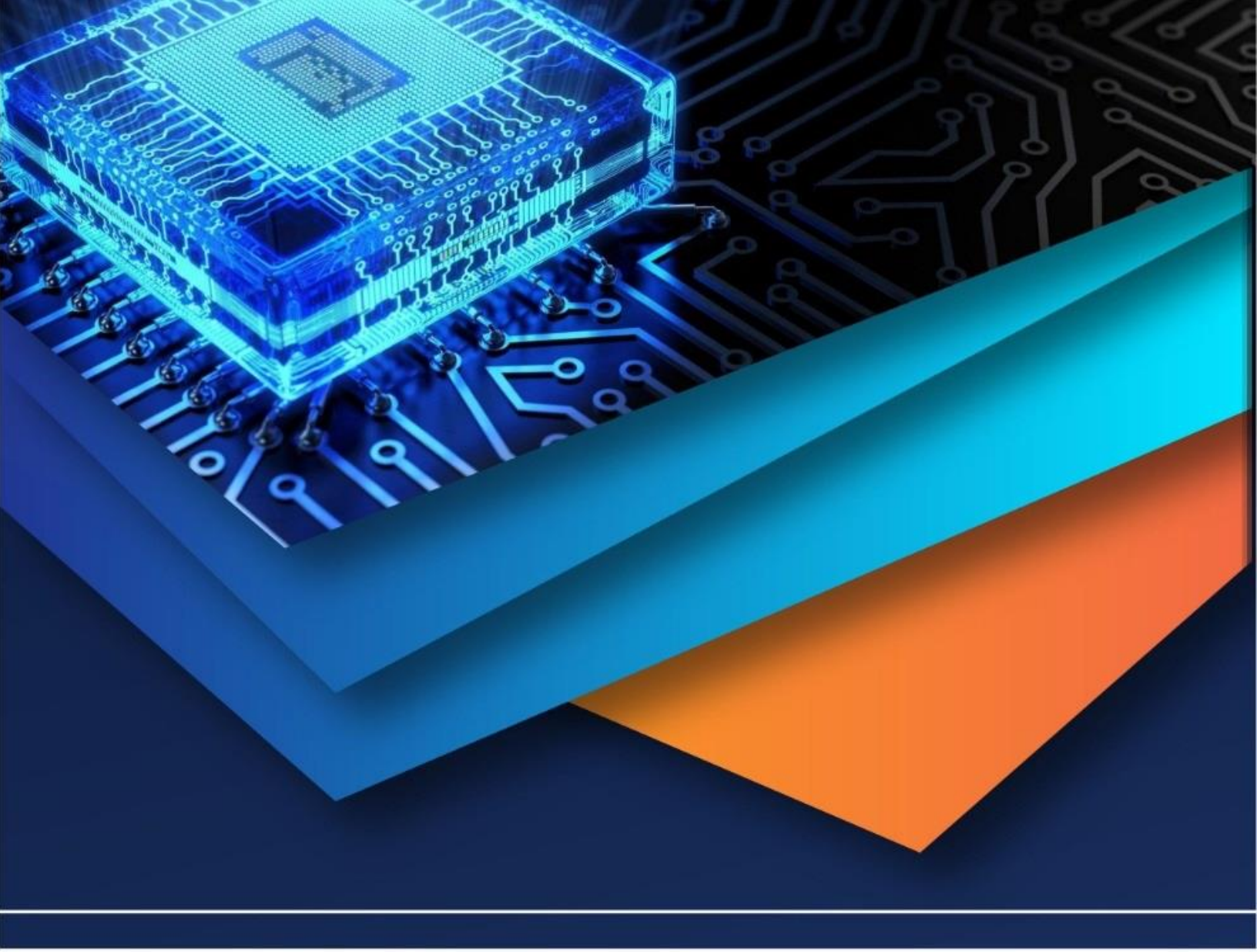
VI. CONCLUSION

Hamsageeti is a thought-provoking document of a generation caught in the whirlpool of an era-defining crisis. Surendra Mohanty remains deeply sensitive to how the late 20th century became paralyzed by corruption and the loss of empathy. The novel does not necessarily offer a solution, but it alerts the reader to the need for introspection amidst the "hearse of dead enthusiasm." It stands as a bouquet of hope placed before a fading era, serving as a testimony to the progressively fading time and the urgent need for a return to ethical consciousness.

Ultimately, Hamsageeti stands as a timeless mirror reflecting the cyclical nature of societal decay and the individual's persistent struggle for meaning. Surendra Mohanty successfully bridges the gap between local sensibilities and global existential angst, positioning the novel as a cornerstone of modern Indian fiction. It serves as a stark warning that unless the void of moral apathy is filled with a renewed sense of ethical purpose, humanity remains at risk of becoming a mere spectator to its own spiritual extinction. Thus, the "Swan Song" persists as a vital, haunting call for a profound social awakening.

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