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A Study of Trauma in Select Modern Bodo Short Stories

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Abstract: The book *Modern Bodo Short Stories* is a compilation of eleven short stories by a dynamic group of Bodo writers. It basically deals with the idea of Bodo social and cultural correlatives. Bodo society appears with all its distinctive and eloquent integrity. The entire collection is a plethora of human directory that deals with social commitment, familial bondage, mental dilemma, individual dealings and collective positioning. The variety of themes contributes to the multifaceted Bodo societal structures. The present paper intends to deal with two short stories namely HerambaNarzari's "The World of Baudaram" and HareswarBasumatari's "The Means". The study further makes an attempt to correlate the phenomenon of pain and trauma with the individualised identity of the characters. The plot, characterisation and objective disposition of the stories orient to the prodigy of trauma and pain. Further, the paper aims to situate the domain of trauma in its existential nature in the life and living of characters. It contemplates to reconfigure the evolving male dominance and sustainable mental upbringing among the woman. It executes the panorama of suffering, mental conflict, physical decay and degeneration.

Keywords: Individual, society, trauma, conflict, pain.

North-East India holds a significant place in the global arena. It is basically known for its traditional input, cultural practices and natural resources. The Bodos are one of the most primitive tribes of this region. They represent their distinct linguistic and rhetorical identity. They seem to be one of the most accorded communities that live with facts and reality. They are known to be honest, innocent and humble. The Bodo society is a patriarchal society. They basically live on agricultural production. The book *Modern Bodo Short Stories* emphasizes on the contemporary Bodo society. The stories seem to be a culmination of social practices, cultural inferences, individual choice and personal commitments. The collection appears to be a plethora of different subjects like representation, recognition and regeneration.



The narrative framework of the stories rests on the economic and social canon. The stories appear to be a clear depiction of the Bodo suburbs. It mainly delineates their basic struggle to survive, an agenda to live a simple and carefree life, a mood to escape and at times to negate the facts of life. Even the inclusion of both the rural and urban lifestyle allows the authors to present an overview of the Bodo society. With a wide range of characters and events the writers attempt to stage the socio-economic context of a Bodo society.

This paper intends to deal with Heramba Narzari's short story entitled "The World of Baudaram" and Hareswar Basumatari's story titled "The Means" from the lens of trauma studies. These stories reflect both internal and external affairs, idealisation of tradition and modernity, conflict between will and duty, element of virtue and vice and so on. The characters in the stories seem to be engrossed with financial and domestic tensions, evil intentions of people, ignorance and accountability, social criticism, negligence and power concern. Moreover, these stories depict socio-cultural reality and different cultural implications that seem to be prevalent in a Bodo society.

The concept of Trauma declares the strategy of mental psychology and physical decadence. Trauma theory is an evolving area of study in this century. It calls for the elements of conscious and subconscious self. It delves deep into the making of an over saturated and engrossed self. It relocates the manner in which a person suffers and struggles to survive in the cosmos. Trauma studies first appear in the 1990s that indicates the aspect of suffering, mental imbalance, psychological disorder and sequential transformation. The field of trauma studies is well modelled by writers like Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman and Geoffrey Hartman. In *Unclaimed Experience* Caruth writes that trauma is an "event [that] is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (4). She further states that trauma "is never simply one's own [...] [but] precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (24). The characters in the stories elucidate a conscious assimilation of surrender and abolishment. Further, it portrays events and incidents that foster in the making of a fragmented self. Stef Craps and Gert Buelens in a special issue "Studies in the Novel" writes, trauma is "the chronic psychic suffering produced by the structural violence of racial, gender, sexual, class and other inequities has yet to be fully



accounted for” (3-4). These short stories decode the amount of gendered violence and biased society. It is due to the irrationality of the males that the females become victim of dominance and monopoly.

Trauma appears to be a mode of ‘return’ (17) as Caruthrightly points out and it also seems to be a ‘representation’ (27) as Rothberg says in one of his interviews. HerambaNarzari’s short story “The World of Baudaram” talks about the inner psyche of the protagonist, Baudaram. He seems to be an irresponsible and lazy man, devoid of any serious thought. Through the configuration of a man like Baudaram, Narzari aims to situate the phenomenon of a traumatised individual. The story begins with the narrator’s visit to his uncle’s village. His uncle seems to be almost on the verge of death. Baudaram during his childhood was good in his studies. The moment he moves to the town for pursuing higher studies, he finds himself engulfed in the towns culture. He devours himself from all kinds of responsibilities. Further, he draws himself towards his beloved named as Laishree. His character passes through transformation and change. As Narzari writes: “Baudaram’s world too underwent significant metamorphosis” (13). Besides being lethargic, he appears to be a drunkard. His character symbolises confusion, pessimism and disapproval.

Shoshana Felman writes that in literature traumatic experiences remain open with all its horrors, nightmares, silence and cognitive and linguistic breakdowns. (8). Narzari’s creation of Baudaram calls for a kind of willing suspension of desire and submission before reality. The story centres around the main figure, Baudaram. He seems to be engrossed with material pleasure, earthly interest and physical amusements. For him, life becomes a burden. At first, the writer introduces him as studious and obedient. Later, the townish life and hostel facilities encircle him with addiction, compulsion and dependence. He begins to cater to free and independent lifestyle. His traditional outlook gets transformed to a modernist agenda. He almost forgets his rustic and conventional way of life. His marriage with Laishree brings him a whole lot of responsibilities that is again inclusive of divergence of thought, psychological belief and strange behaviour. He seems to be unable to perceive the value of time and place. As a father, he fails to run his family and earn livelihood for his children. His irresponsible nature forces him to sell off his lands and cattle. He thereby passes through crisis and confusion. He becomes more conscious and critical of being alive. Thus, he turns traumatised. All his ancestral property gets ruined. Cultivation seems to be the only repository to him. It was only debt that revolves around him. His loans, mortgage of lands, and disposal of cows and buffaloes become the reason



of his turning insane. He begins to suffer both mentally and physically. In an instance, Baudaram says in utter dismay: “I have no longing to live anymore in this world. What would be the gain by living? There is peace and happiness nowhere... In such a world, death is better than life” (15). His suffering here seems to be his own creation. Life to him seems to be full of anxiety and hardship. He urges to escape from the reality of his life. He feels overburdened and encumbered.

Erikson defines trauma as ‘a state or condition produced by such a stress or blow’ (184). Here, Baudaram’s traumatised mind seems to be the outcome of his pressure and fear to earn and run his family. He usually prefers to live a carefree life. He feels like dying. He craves for easy earned money. As Narzari writes: “He was averse to labour” (13). As a result of his imprudent nature, his wife goes out to beg. But still he didn’t have “remorse or repentance” (15). The story ends with certain exclamatory sentences like: “But what about his children? What is lying in store for them?” (16). These questions justify Narzari’s critique of a capricious man like Baudaram. His creation of such a character hints at the hegemonic discourse and structured society of the Bodos.

Ellisa Marder talks about the interdisciplinary approach of trauma. She tries to situate the role that trauma plays as a phenomenon in varied fields. “The Means” by Hareswar Basumatari talks about Bakhunda, the central figure in the story. It deals with irresponsibility, misconduct and negligence. The story begins with a series of flashbacks where he blames his luck and gets angry and annoyed. As the story reads: “I can no longer do it. Don’t fall back only upon me. You should also find ways to earn somehow’ (80). He starts believing that his duty as a husband and as a father ‘was over’ (80). He appears to be a poor man with no ancestral property. He earns his livelihood as a wage-labourer cum firewood hawker. In some instances, he returns home empty handed. The story reads as: “Sometimes, they had to starve for two or three days in a row” (81). Basumatari considers this to be a matter of luck. All his attempts to earn money seem to be in vain. Thus, he suffers mentally and rebukes his wife and children. A lot of queries penetrate his mind. He starts feeling lazy from inside. He abuses his fate for not being kind to him. A sort of dilemma surrounds him: “He could not make up his mind if he should get up and even if he got up, what he would do” (83). He becomes more conscious than before. He envisions how his inability to work let his wife beg from door to



door, makes his grown up daughter, Tharli think in a different way and helps evil people like Sonaram to take advantage of the grim situation.

As Negin Heidari-zadeh insists on the different representations of trauma. In this regard, he idealises on the aspects of ‘textual anxieties’ (789). In this present story, the element of food arouses the level of anxiety. The amount of hunger grows so much, that Charli realises that she should take up a means to feed her family. She intends to earn money for the livelihood of the family. Her spirit to procure arouses intensely. Basumatari, in this instance, introduces an evil-minded man, named as Sonaram. At the beginning, Tharli declines his grimy aspersions to sell herself to him. Later, she realises the truth of life and living. The necessity of money makes her accept his veiled remarks. As the line reads: “...Tharli not only gave vent to her rage in outbursts, but also threw the note, clenched in her fist, to his face” (85). The way Tharli invites him to their house shows her sense of realisation and commitment. She seems to be symbolic of survival and existence on the one hand and inaccuracy and aberration on the other. The moment Sonaram enters the house with his evil intentions- Bakhunda apprehends about a sinister episode to happen. But still then he feels unable to gain strength and vigour to come out of his bed and room. This attitude of Bakhunda proves him to be a man of carelessness and cowardice. He seems to suffer psychologically.

Zoe Norridge writes: “... pain is often either a result or a cause of the denial of another person’s voice” (209). Here, Bakhunda’s mental illness seems to grow more intense with Tharli’s extreme and immediate commitment. The way, Tharli receives Sonaram shows how she readily agrees to sacrifice her modesty, chastity and dignity as a woman. She says: “No brother, I did not know the value of life on that day... But today, I have come to understand that the agony of the stomach is more urgent than the purity of the body and mind” (86). The manner she addresses him as her brother adheres to her self-conscious approach and self-esteem. Her desire to survive forces her to ask him to come daily and give her money. Bakhunda overhears their conversation and reacts within himself. As the story reads: “Bakhunda tries to level himself with the bed by covering his nose and ears. He felt as if somebody had set fire to his bed and the conflagration blazed alarmingly” (86). The story in fact ends with his screaming: “Let it burn let the entire house turn into a mass of embers” (86). The pain in his mind relegates his amount of struggle to live anymore in this world. His grief-stricken mind is the result of his inaccuracy and laziness.



Bessel van der Kolk's *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on the Mind, Body, and Society* defines trauma as 'speechless terror'. He emphasises mainly on experience. Both the character of Baudaram and Bakhunda suffer due to their inability, instability, callousness and statutory mindset. Their suffering seems to be their own creation. Their conscious being seems to be uncontrollable and least bothered about their future endeavours. Michelle Balaev writes in 'Trends in Literary Trauma Theory': "Trauma, in my analysis, refers to a person's emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual's sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society" (150). Both the stories decipher the aspect of incomprehensiveness and nescience. The characters always prefer to live in the present state. The past affair of their lives preoccupies them with consistence and coherence. As Morris in *The Culture of Pain* rightly says: "pain is always personal and always cultural" (6,25). The personal and individual suffering of the characters acts as a subsidy for cumulative ordeal. In both the stories the plot revolves around time past and present that again help the characters build their identified consciousness. The fact that they have a family appears to be less a fact and more a substance. They live with a pre-conceived notion about life. For them living is a matter of choice and change. But at the end they pass through a sort of realisation and recognition. When Baudaram feels good at his wife's death and Bakhunda did not react to his daughter's decision, they arrive at a certain conclusion where they either prefer to die or live with dereliction and evacuation.

Kali Tal writes in *World of Hurt*: "Accurate representation of trauma can never be achieved without recreating the event since, by its very definition, trauma lies beyond the bounds of 'normal' conception" (15). The above mentioned stories contribute to the displacement of thoughts, personal grief about loss of land, property and cattle, irresponsibility and exclusiveness. The characters suffer mostly from inside. The conscious self, the psychological self and the categorised self, abounds them with different dilemmas, certain disorders and varied negotiations. The paper ascribes to the issue of reality versus illusion. Both the figures go through a phase of escapism. They subscribe to the verge of arguments and conflicts between themselves.

The character of Baudaram symbolises rejection, unfulfillment, despondence and detachment where that of Bakhunda symbolises irrationality, dejection, acceptance and reclusion. Their assertion of their carelessness makes them think differently. Their averse nature contributes to the aspect of trauma. Their individual self asserts the fact of being psychologically affected. The characters converge between the



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elements of death and survival. The narrative representation rests on the dimensions of behaviour, reactions, upheavals and determination. The disassociation and distress cultivate the trajectory of traumatic experience. They also comprehend the collective psychological experience and expression of a particular social group.

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