

REPRESENTING WO(E)MAN IN SAIKIA'S *EVENING WALK*

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ABSTRACT

Woe and Woman are always been a favourite theme for many authors depicting the plight of women in a male dominated society. Whenever people talk of woman and man in relation there raises the question of love, trust, and pain. Love is one of the favourite themes in literature. Most of the literary works, in any language, deals with this universal feeling. But love in itself is not always a peaceful and happy affair; rather it is associated with another universal feeling, that is, of pain. The pain suffered by the lovers in love can be either from the forces that act against love in the society or can be caused by one of the lovers being unfaithful. Bhabendra Nath Saikia's *Evening Walk* (an English translation of *Sandhya Bhraman*- a short story in Assamese) is the story of Sumitra who was in love with Bipul, but Bipul ditched her. The story depicts the pain Sumitra suffered from after her relationship with Bipul. The paper focuses on the psychological aspect of Sumitra's pain and its depiction in the short story in relation to woman's predicament in society.

Introduction

Women have been represented in literature from various perspectives and outlooks. Women have been considered more emotional, than her male counterpart, and are also presented in many works of literature as more emotionally strong to undergo pain and suffering—when it comes to limit of their endurance. Woe and Woman are always been a favourite theme for many authors depicting the plight of woman in a male dominated society. Whenever people talk of woman and man in relation there raises the question of love, trust, and pain. The paper focuses on the psychological aspect of Sumitra's pain and its depiction in the short story in relation to woman's predicament in society. The paper is the study of the pain and suffering, the woe of woman, of Sumitra and her decision to live a single life in a male dominated society, in *Evening*

Walk, an English translation of *Shandhya Bhraman*— a short story in Assamese by Bhabendra Nath Saikia.

Bhabendra Nath Saikia's *Evening Walk*: A Brief Outline

Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia has written many novels, plays, short stories, children's books, and has also contributed to films in Assam. His great contribution in the field of literature, particularly Assamese literature, conferred on him many awards like the Sahitya Academy, Padma Shri, etc.

Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia's short stories are always thought provoking, witty and display his close view of life. *Evening Walk*, a translation of *Shandhya Bhraman*, is a short story in which the author has presented the story of a woman, Sumitra, who decides to live a life as a single woman. She was in love with Bipul, and during those days of her life she believed in such things as seeing *salika* bird in pair brings happiness. But when Bipul ditched her, she suspended all her belief on happiness and transformed herself into an impersonal person, "dry of emotions" (p.13). She has been offered help almost by everyone who meets her, but she rejects to accept any help extended to her out of pity. Niranjana Dutta is one such man, he even tries to flirt with her and shows some interest in her, but she does not respond to his advances which is seen from her decision of altering the plan of her house that she is going to build near his cottage.

Emotion in Literature

The most famous love stories of the world, like that of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, are particularly stories of pain, in fact pain in love. The pain in love is generally treated by lovers in two different forms, first in which if a lover ditches another than the other lives his/her life by remembering the pleasures of the past time and becoming sad in the present, as they find pleasure in the sad thoughts of the past life with the lover. They, thus, live a miserable life, for example, Sharatchandra Chattopadhyaya's *Devdas*. In the second place, there are lovers who learn a lesson from their relationship with the lover, as they consider it to be a mistake of their life, and resolve to live a life with stronger will. Saikia's Sumitra belongs to the second category. She teaches herself a lesson by confining herself to "home for a year with the excuse of being sick." (p.13)

Representing Wo(e)man in *Evening Walk*

Evening Walk is the story of the predicament of Sumitra in a society where male is the dominator, where male only has the right to relax in an armchair in the verandah of his house and where everyone is prepared to take "advantage of her singleness." Niranjana Dutta visits her very often "to extend whatever assistance Sumitra might need" (p.7). In the short story love is not clearly presented in terms of any peaceful or happy affair for Sumitra, rather it is hinted through emotion of pain which Sumitra experiences whenever she remembers her past days with Bipul. Bipul has ditched her in love, and that act of his made a deep impression of sadness in the mind of Sumitra. Every thought of her would reflect the sadness of her mind and heart that has been created by the act of Bipul. Once when she looks at "a small passage going up between the stairs" (p.11) of a house, to be used "for pushing up a two-wheeler" (p.11), she associates it with a mixed feeling of love and pain when she wonders—"A young man? Would his wife sit hugging him with an arm? Did he ever think that this woman would one day sit behind him like this, clinging to him? Or did he visualize another girl sitting close?—How painful!" (p.11). Here,

her initial thought simply expresses her emotional thought about being a wife (herself being a wife of Bipul) which is a part of her subconscious mind, but she then remembers how Bipul ditched her, and so expresses her doubt about the man visualizing another girl sitting close to him, the character she attributes through her thoughts to the man is of Bipul, she thinks of the wife and feels sorry for her which is expressed as “how painful”. She, then, suddenly remembers her lesson that she has taught to herself and makes her mind strong again.

Saikia states in the story of Sumitra that she “tried to forget the pain. But it came creeping in” (p.12). The ‘creeping in’ pain is visible in her thoughts when she saw a woman doing something in her garden. As she saw the woman she thought of her having a daughter, who would lie to her to meet her lover ‘a man like Bipul’(p.13). While expressing her thoughts about the imaginary daughter of the woman, Sumitra actually expresses her own pain; she questions to herself—“Did her daughter too find darkness engulfing her after a gap of three months or so? Did the girl come to hate her own body? Did a heavy pain hammer her day and night? Did she too feel disgusted with the whole world in those traumatic days?” (p.13). Her questions about the daughter of the woman are actually a declaration of her own feelings and an expression of her mental state after her separation from Bipul. She has expressed that her relation with Bipul has left her in a situation where she has started to hate her own body and where she is suffering from pain day and night.

The relationship with Bipul has transformed Sumitra’s personality. She punished herself for her mistake that she committed, by way of having a relationship with Bipul, by confining herself to a room for a year. Sumitra’s personality shift is stated in her own words in the story when she declares to her student Diganta that she is “hard, dry, cruel-everything” (p.14). She, even, has learned not to bother much about ‘whole-life’ promises which is expressed in her utterance in relation to Diganta when he asks her to give him some extra tuition and for which he will remember her always. Her loss of believe on ‘whole-life’ promises is a result of the pain that she has suffered in love, it reveals that Bipul might have made ‘whole-life’ promises of love and life to her and then ditched her forgetting every promise.

Sumitra as a ‘New Woman’

Bhabendra Nath Saikia has not only presented the pain that Sumitra has suffered after her separation from Bipul, but he has also made her an embodiment of a ‘new woman’ in Assamese literature, although she partly represents a ‘new woman’. Sumitra, through the ‘stern-lesson’ to herself, has put forward an expanded potential of women in Assamese literature. The very first instance of deciding “to teach herself a stern lesson” and “to become impersonal, dry of emotions” shows her potential of decision making in a male dominated society. She even decides not to marry which indicates that she would live a single life. Sumitra is very firm about her decision which is clear when she warns her mother saying “if you want to talk about these things, it’s better that you stop coming. I don’t want to discuss it” (p.13)

Sumitra is a lady with a decision to lead a single life, and so many male come forward to help her, for instance Niranjana Dutta, and try to flirt with her. But her stand about her decision to live a single life is stern, and the ‘new woman’ in her would not allow her to accept any help from anyone out of pity. She did not even have any traditional attitude of a woman to hide her age, she, as a new woman, with the new shift in her personality, is very frank in declaring to Niranjana Dutta that she is the elder sister of Nishi Chaudhury whose son has got three ‘letters’ in the Matric exam last year. When Niranjana says that she might be joking, she takes the whole

situation under a serious note and questions “why should I?” The question of Sumitra to Niranjana Dutta shows that she has shifted into the role of a new woman from the traditional role of woman.

Conclusion

Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia has presented the feeling of love through the expression of pain in the character of Sumitra. Sumitra, throughout the story, depicts her mental agony imbibed in her different thoughts. She relates every other situation with her love-life, as for example, she relates the lying to her mother to meet Bipul, to the imaginary daughter of a woman working in the garden. Again, she relates the words of Diganta about ‘whole-life’ promise with that of the ‘whole-life’ promises of Bipul. In fact, the short story is a story depicting pain, pain suffered in love. It is a story of a walk into pain, if pain can be considered the evening of love, where morning signifies a relation of love which is full of happiness and peace.

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