

DYSTOPIA TO UTOPIA: A STUDY OF SOCIO-GENDER PERSPECTIVES IN A TELUGU SHORT STORY SAMSKRUTHI

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Abstract

The present paper tends to explore the explosion of trauma represented in Indian Telugu Literature through a short story Samskruthi attempted by Raamaa Chandra Mouli, a renowned Telangana Telugu poet, fiction writer. Samskruthi stands as the foremost example for understanding gender, social and economic discourses. In the attempt to investigate the field of trauma studies in Indian regional literature that has gained significant attention, taking into account a psychoanalytic approach that places great importance on how the mindscape influences one's behavior and personality, a Telugu short story is appraised. Considerably, what wo/man thinks, forms what s/he is. Literature has the power to display pain, anxiety, wound. The narration of Mouli, who has become one of India's major writers in recent decades, brings to the fore the complex economic dimensions amalgamated within the society, and this proposed paper explores the traumatized female protagonist with five professional photographers situated in a room that can be characterized as dystopia enabling her to step in Utopia like mental space and attempts to locate it on a broader perspective.

Keywords: Trauma, Samskruthi, gender, discourses, dystopia, utopia.

I. INTRODUCTION

“The beauty of dystopia is that it lets us vicariously experience future worlds – but we still have the power to change our own.” (Ally Condie)

“As I'm fond of saying, if you want to find utopia, take a sharp right on the money and a sharp left on sex and it's straight ahead.” (Penn Jillette)

Pain, especially psychological, present in a story visible or underlined. Trauma represented moderately or extensively in Indian regional literature, has been largely subjective reflecting changeable community standards. Because the very concept of trauma is subjective, its history is nearly impossible to conceive in Indian

regional literature. The publication of a Telugu short story Samskruthi (1985) in Yuva, a monthly magazine, illuminating the contradictions from psychological perception, is considered for the present study. With a psychological trauma as the central element including mental pain, body language, and sexual sensibility, this landmark story captivates with a fascinating narrative presented in a style of fragmentation-narration.

Raamaa Chandra Mouli, a renowned Telangana Telugu poet, fiction writer, and distinguished academician from India has shot to literary fame with his path-breaking novel Kalanalika [5]. Any genre or any subject once chosen by this eminent writer, the treatment operated on it has brought to near perfection enjoying wide popularity among common readers and critics as

well. It is necessary to mention that his works have become the area of numerous research studies. With a spellbinding and exceptionally comprehensible style, profound discernment into human cognizance, and the subtleties of social relations as the strong points, his remarkable bold treatment of contemporary issues have been worth commendable in his writings, and the present selected short story stands as a testimony. Here, a thematic analysis is used to study the selected short story Samskruthi, published in Yuva, a Telugu monthly magazine.

2. Review of Literature

The modern history of trauma writings in Telugu literature begins with the most influential person, GV Chalam appealing to audiences of all socioeconomic levels and psychological sensitivities [2]. Apart from its psychological element, it has become a powerful vehicle for social, class, gender, and communal protest providing an exploration of intrepid ideas. "The idea that 'woman to has a body; it needs exercise. She has a brain; it needs knowledge. She has a heart; it needs experience' has been Chalam's premise on which his and most of the writers who pen in Telugu build their short stories as and when they build a story around a female. It has been a constant effort to provide a jolt to the readers and thereby push them from their comfort zone.

Simon De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) gave a clarion call to women to define themselves beyond/outside the female/male dyad. Writer, Clark M Zlotchew from the United States opines that '.... good fiction provides more truth about the world, about life, and even about the reader...' In society, skin business of cosmetics is regarded sophisticated but not a lady who has skinned herself for survival and the language expressed to address them has been tarnished unlike Patrick Rothfuss from Madison who suggests in his acclaimed work *The Name of the Wind* (2007) to 'call a whore a lady', though a spade is called a spade. As Nasrullah Mambrol states '...trauma is one among many responses to an extreme event.... and yet the stemmed suffering is unrepresentable.

Cathy Caruth relies on psychiatrist Bessel Van der Kolk observation of trauma to be a 'speechless terror' [6]. For Rothberg,

(*Traumatic Realism*, 2000) traumatic experience is a narrative mode and social response as well. Like Sophie Makintosh's *Blue Ticket* (2019) a dystopian fictional work on women, Samskruthi projects the male world order close to reality and women need to be eternally watchful.

3. Aim

The writers aim to identify how the mental and physical pain/risk involved in professions that are meant for livelihood has been influencing society and report the gaps addressing a single traumatic incident projected in Samskruthi.

4. Objectives

- ☐ To gain insight into the development of the theme of trauma.
- ☐ To comprehend how a short story relates trauma to socio-gender contexts.
- ☐ To make critical reading for wider philosophical, social, and gender implications.
- ☐ To stimulate critical reflection on human nature.

5. Research Questions

- ☐ Is trauma experienced by women complex?
- ☐ Is it comprehensible?
- ☐ Is the unspeakably experienced by characters similar?
- ☐ Does the psychic landscape represent the cultural/class element?
- ☐ Does Indian regional literature successfully capture the inner feeling?

6. Hypothesis

- ☐ Trauma literature influences the life of human beings empowering man's inner world.
- ☐ Trauma literature reflects the pain and suffering of female characters that would help them. to display warmth and thereby gain self-knowledge.

□ Trauma literature places women at the center of the discussion and showcases what traumatizes them.

7. Discussion

7.1 Trendsetting Short Story

Trying to envision the future of literature in India that can play a significant part in a globalized world dominated by information and knowledge produced, stored, and transmitted through a plethora of platforms and media, the genre of a short story in regional literature of India focusing primarily on life, politics, and human relationships has set the trend. Several short stories are written in Telugu, including the present selected one, hold a mirror to life presenting a contradictory portrait of various perceptions serving as a microcosm for society, accommodating contradictory forces like racism, gender discrimination, feminism, class inequalities in a ridiculing way. The Telugu short story employs several narrative styles and modes like satire, parody, absurd, romantic, serious, motivational, and influential. The style is recognized through its narrative style that becomes a vibrant invisible character. Indeed, the present story is a comment on various social issues through some half a dozen stereotypical characters besides the invisible style. The study is divided into two broad sections along with a part on the thematic framework.

7.2 Synoptical Samskruthi

Although any writing in the literature related to a prostitute comes under pornography, the treatment given to the subject in Samskruthi permits to consider it under trauma literature. The lady, the unnamed protagonist of the story, is charming and a posing session for a group of five artist-photographers as her unusual routine form the theme of the story. The lady poses for the group smiling and stilling as the cameras flash on. The lady and the group communicate through looks. She is asked to slip her jacket and its innerwear and again flashes of light on her consistently catching her graceful poses. They ask her to cooperate with them posing nude to win a gold medal in a contest. Like American novelist, Veronica Roth's woman in *Divergent* released in 2011, "... she did it without announcing it, without hesitation, and without appearing to consider another option." She

stands posing nude among them and a series of flashlights followed by a release of an amount of two hundred rupees for the session and boots out her from this agonizing posing. She hires a rickshaw and starts thinking of the incident positive while tears have been rolling on her cheeks incessantly as she has earned money through her beauty but not through her skin and finds them, gentlemen. On the other hand, one of the photographers feels that they are looted by her when not even a touch or hug is involved in the entire transaction and dare to call her a bitch that would undoubtedly remind us Tahereh Mafi's observation in *Shatter me* released in 2018. "We have lost our humanity."

A traumatic situation may be expressed as a face or person. A whole series of events may be expressed only as one particular symbol [1]. The story depicts the thoughts raise in her mind from the first click to the final click as she stands before them. Although the stream of techniques is used extensively, the story is narrated in a fragmenting style. The five artist-photographers are neck-deep in love with their profession and treat her with lots of respect. The lady is not matured like them and yet continue to do what they ask her as per their agreement. She may have briefed by them and she cannot swing between decision and indecision. At this juncture, her body does as directed but her heart, soul, and inner self shake to the core. It's all ends up in a simple photo session. The five photographers seem to be immersed to capture feminine beauty with a desire to create what is stated by Raoul Vaneigem, a Belgian writer-editor, in *The Revolution of Life* (1967) that "...the modern world must learn what it already knows, become what it already is, utilizing a great exorcism by conscious practice..." Their struggle to transform her beauty which has been the real object into artistic photography as the intended object, revitalizing photography theory is beyond her comprehension. The amount offered that would be released after the photo-session make her shake away her fear, shy and thereby allowing the camera to be an intermediary in the entire episode of projecting her body-scape in its natural form.

The diversified attitude is well captured at the end of the story. Readers observe her fight against herself at every phase of the session. Her hard struggle to suppress her conscious self can easily be pulsed as and when she comes out from

a state of unconsciousness to consciousness. Her beauty sends ripples in their blood but the hard fact that she is hired for a photo-session to nullify their desire and they deeply get into capturing her as wild as they can. A kind of agony, pain, exploitation are marvelously depicted on one side and her reaction in the climactic scene has made the story heart touching. We are introduced to a romantic routine in the lives of a lady and photographers in skin-business in a raw manner. The whole story may be considered a kind of erotic symbolism. All her actions are justified by the writer conveniently, of course. The most disorderly and erotic attitude of a male is projected through the photographers. The stream of conscious technique has made it strikingly thought-provoking.

What cannot be comprehended unless you read a grand philosophy work with keen attention, can be experienced by the truth reflected in a common man's life sometimes. With all her self-contempt, she sees the world inside out. With all their professional passion, they successfully conceal their shattered, imprisoned falsehood.

The concept of class struggle reduces human relations to mechanisms of exploitation demanding constant adjustment. A glance, a thought, a passing discomfort leaves in her a dull irritation. All she has done is to assume a manifestation of absolute mutation. Each flash ties and unties the knot of contract. When the agreement is governed, social harmony is achieved. But eyes do not recognize the agreement, their eyes become lusty, hers uneasy and empty.

7.3. Stream of Consciousness

Stream of consciousness is a literary technique in narratology used to describe the flow of thoughts recording the sudden rise of thoughts in the minds of characters. The mind is at full vibrant work jumping from one observation to another incessantly. A single traumatic experience of a prostitute with a group of five photographers flashing on her their cameras pointing her various poses including nude affect all of them equally – she experiences a feeling of shame, destitute were as they experience a desire buried. The point is both groups react in different ways to the same incident. In other words, not all of them are put into a traumatized situation. Although the internal monologue is

not recorded in its conventional form, the story facilitates reading the mind of the female protagonist in the story. A moment arrives whereby she is moving towards self-knowledge releasing herself from suffering and pain. With three approaches – feminism, psychoanalysis, and literary criticism – a new insight is gained that costs, however, pain and wound. The frank description of an erotic situation presented in the story act as a social or cerebral function and yet the licentious narration does not yield any seduced or sensual arousal. Her thoughts flow and she uncovers touch the readers intimately though very little is said beyond what is required. The trauma in her life is portrayed helping her (and readers as well) to find out Freud's consciousness and unconsciousness. The inner self of the traumatized female at the center of the story is focused on depicting her strength and weakness. The pain and suffering that emerged from the traumatized experience let her assemble the fragments and to change through knowledge and understanding. The revelation of truth is brought to the foreground exceeding human understanding at once. The story stands as a witness to an unspoken or unheard experience making the fragments constructive. Her thoughts when processed, bring her clarity, awareness, and insight. Though Freud's 'Talking cure' is absent, his 'cleansing of the soul' is in existence.

8. Trauma as a Life Force

Trauma as pioneered by Cathy Caruth fragments consciousness leading to a traumatic experience that damages the psyche [4]. Traumatization is experienced by a person when internal and external resources are not sufficient to cope with a challenge as stated by Stephen Merrill that trauma is "written into our bodies" [7]. As a foremost theme in modern world literature manifesting in popular fiction, trauma takes a central role. In response to a distressing event, a person may fail to cope, feel helpless, and diminish the sense of self. The resultant emotions succumb to trauma, investigated by Jean Martin Charcot, a French neurologist during the late 19th century. The majority of people experience a traumatic event in their life at one point or another that affects them regardless of age, race, or gender experiencing trauma which is of three types - Acute, Chronic and Complex. Complex trauma

is experienced as a result of exposure to varied and multiple suffering within Freud's conscious and unconscious libido. By the end of the story, female development after an insight within social constraints must be acknowledged. When the road of knowledge is paved, the primary focus on human nature is netted. The unconsciously saved trauma becomes significant and her articulation crystalizing the victimization has started. The narrative technique employed by Prof. Mouli facilitates to witness trauma producing the required effect and thereby the story becomes a means of representing trauma.

Colonial trauma entails in these works some combination of the following: a profound psychic disorientation; the deformation or eclipse of memory; an exile from chronological sequence and into the compulsive repetition of past injuries; and a form of writing that must, if it is to keep faith with this experience, mime and transmit to readers a break in linear, conventionally narrative representation [3]. Reading this becomes an experiment as the backgrounds of females and artists are quite different and as the story progresses to climax, the subjects have changed their personality. The venus like lady enhances the beauty to her heart and thereby attaining a goddess- like soul; on the other hand, the five artists limit their photography and dive into a sea of desire lamenting for not enjoying any physical intimacy and thereby move to a place darker than Satan's pandemonium. Her trauma is complex as

1. It has occurred between her and her men-clients.
2. She entertains the feeling of being trapped.
3. It is pre-planned, ongoing, and repeated.
4. It has a severe impact on her thought process.
5. She involves challenging her shame and self-esteem.
6. It affects her overall wellbeing and daily functioning.

In the room at the appointed hour, she is surrounded by the five with a really serious photographing session but beneath it a feeling that eludes, jolts, and provokes to think. It's like

a hit into a bolt of lightning. It's like Neo in the film *The Matrix* seeing what the universe is made out of? It's coming together all disparate pieces that reveal the impact of poverty, trauma, and social adversity as perceived by George Orwell, in his 1984 "...a hierarchical society was only possible on a basis of poverty and ignorance."

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, the story is a vehicle of communication, helping to comprehend how to recognize and regulate emotions and behavior which is crucial to nurture positive vibrations as the most healing. The onset of learning and behavioral issues control impulses paving the way to a normal response to the abnormal circumstance that she finds herself in, to calm herself down to connect with the life-changing relationship the terrible time is healed leading to a long time bond. She is extensively rejected by being victimized. She may continue to live challenging the rules but she makes a distance from her pain. Pain is inevitable but suffering is optional and this realization helps her to change. The story enjoys huge popularity appearing as a fresh breeze of change initiating a new trend bestowing them a surprising sensitivity who respond to the pack of emotions like longing, ideals, expectations, experiences, love, jealous studded in the story reminding US best-selling author's quote: "If love dies, that's when we've all truly died." (Keary Taylor, Eden) The story possesses a very highly developed visual erotica and flourishes achieving region-wide renown. That's what Raama Chandra Mouli has been for us ever and ever-expanding our dire critical arena!

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