TRAUMA OF DISPLACEMENT: A STUDY OF SELECTED CONTEMPORARY ASSAMESE NOVELS

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I do hereby declare that the thesis entitled **"Trauma of Displacement: A Study Of Selected Contemporary Assamese Novels"** is the result of investigation carried out by me at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, under the supervision of Dr. Liza Das. The work has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any other university / institution for research degree.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Mr. Ratan Deka has prepared the thesis entitled **"Trauma of Displacement: A Study of Selected Contemporary Assamese Novels"** for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati. The work was carried out under my general supervision and in strict conformity with the rules laid down for the purpose. It is the result of his investigation and has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any other university / institution for a research degree.

(Liza Das)

Supervisor, IIT Guwahati

Uddastu[1]

M. Kamaluddin Ahmed

Driven away from their land,
These red-ants from a distance,
Odds and ends upon their heads
Soaked in the throbbing
Of their brains.

Is one of them tainted
With blood dropping from their hearts?
Those displaced people,
I could never meet them.

If I did
I would have measured their fieriness
Which rages more -
The temperature in the brain, or
The warmth in the heart?

We too keep moving
Along a railway track
The nomads along the other -
We never meet one another.

The dust on our hair
Glitters with distant twinkling stars
And their epic life - is it drawn
On the dust of their heels?

[1] Translated from M. Kamaluddin Ahmed's poem "Uddastu" in Assamese published in *Prakash*, April 2016. In Assamese "*Uddastu*" means displaced people.

Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements

When Assamese writer Rita Choudhury's novel *Makam* was published in the year 2010, it received huge media publicity for its theme and the way it was written. I got hold of the novel and read it several times over a period of some days. It generated such an intense feeling in me that I started looking for similar novels in the Assamese language that treated forced removal or displacement of people from their place of living. This search for the novel with similar thematic concerns introduced me to Mamoni Raisom Goswami's *Chenabar Sont*, Debendranath Acharyya's *Jangam*, Umakanta Sarma's *Ejak Manuh Ekhon Aranya* and Arupa Patongia Kalita's *Felani*. These quests encouraged me to undertake further exploration of the similarities of matter and form among these writers. But no critical studies or books, either in English or Assamese, was available to help me in this regard. Thus an idea to go for further research in this area took shape, and I approached a few of my teachers and friends how to proceed with my exploration. During our initial discussions and conversations, the possibility of applying trauma theory to the representation of displacement in Assamese novel emerged. It has been an unexplored area in Assamese literature in terms of research and publication. My initial research revealed that this area is intricately related to other areas like memory studies, psychology, politics and sociology, that isolation is both impossible and undesirable. Although trauma theory has not been applied to the study of the Assamese novel till date, my humble intervention may become useful to those who choose to tread a new path and see Assamese literature from a new

perspective in future. But this limitation of the study has excluded *Felani* from my framework of research, narrowing its focus on the other novelists mentioned above.

At the very outset, I would like to express my sincere gratitude and thanks to my supervisor Professor Liza Das for her guidance and immeasurable support during the research. It is because of her insights and efforts that the whole idea of this research took definite shape during the coursework as part of PhD research at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at IIT Guwahati.

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Chapter I

Introduction: Assamese Novels and Trauma Studies

> The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word unspeakable.
>
> Judith Lewis Herman

Geographically the state of Assam is situated in a sensitive zone. It is touched by an international boundary from more than one side. Human displacement to and fro Assam is a much-discussed problem across the political and academic disciplines of the region. Internal displacement as well as illegal influx from bordering countries to Assam have irreversibly changed the demographic pattern of the state. Unlike the voluntary movement of people from one place to the other, forced displacement leads to multiple complexities which are dehumanizing most of the time. The phenomenon of the trauma of displacement is sought to be studied here against a backdrop of several long histories of movements brought about by trading activities, exile and migrations through its representation in selected Assamese fiction of the post-Independence period. Informally, displacement can denote several phenomenons. Its most typical meaning is "removal of a thing from its place; putting out of place; shifting, dislocation" as given by Oxford English Dictionary (Hornby 442). It is in this sense that displacement is used to describe exiled persons. It can also connote "replacement or relocation" (see Basch et al). But like the word repression, Freud uses 'displacement' as a psychological term when, as Judith Herman notes, he chooses it "to designate the dream-process that diverts the attention of the psyche away from potentially damaging material." Thus it is accepted that fears and forbidden desires are "masked by their association with relatively trifling symbols, objects or situations." If used in a psychological sense then displacement may refer to "the transfer of feelings or behavior from their original object to another person or thing" (16). If we consider the praxis of the

term in the theoretical realm we will find that "displaced" is the word Freud used to describe misdirected feelings, and that laymen use to describe anything in any way out of place. So, the term displacement has both physical as well as psychological connotations. Internal displacement can happen owing to multiple factors. Internally displaced are defined as "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflicts, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border" (UN Office document). But there have not been any proper common laws to address the problems of internally displaced people due to these reasons. In the Assamese language, different expressions can be found that refer to the experience of displacement and related complexities. Some of the expressions shortlisted for this purpose are *bhagonia*,[1] *uddastu*,[2] *xaranarthi*,[3] *chinnamool*,[4] *aghari*,[5] *bitaron*/*bohiskar*,[6] *ushhedito*[7] and others. The English word displacement does not completely carry all the nuances that these Assamese words or the kind of experience *bhagonia* or *uddastu* are capable of conveying. The word *bhagonia* refers not only to geographic dislocation but also to the distressed emotional condition that a person undergoes after experiencing a tragic loss. In English, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines displacement as "a removal of a thing from its place" and "putting out of place." The second meaning, "removal of a thing by substitution of something else in its place," is relevant in the context of the novels in the characters' distant dreams of homeland in *Chenabar Sont* (The Current of the Chenab, 1972), *Jangam* (The Movement, 1982) and *Makam* (The Golden Horse, 2010). Segregation, deportation, expatriation, deracination, and estrangement are some of the thematic concerns of writers that come close to the first meaning of displacement. The latter consists of placing oneself in two different places, as "*dis* is etymologically related to the Latin *bis* and to the Greek twice from duo, two and the primary meaning being two ways, in twain " (442). The duality of being in two places - physically in one and emotionally in another geographical location is

[1] Beggar
[2] Placeless people
[3] Refugee
[4] Torn away from roots
[5] Homeless, wanderer
[6] Expelled, expatriates
[7] Evicted

utilized by different novelists to reveal the placelessness and emotional restlessness of the protagonists. This approach refers to an attachment to the past, to the homeland, and to the need to return to the homeland.

According to theorist Susan Martin, displacement can be of two types: one is conflict-induced displacement such as war, and the other is displacement induced by natural disaster like the tsunami, flood, earthquake etc (53). As such, displacement may be taken as a sub-category of forced migration. Forcefully displaced people include those who cross international border in search of refuge, as well as those who are internally displaced. Forced migration starts before physical movement - in the form of racial hatred, segregation etc, and for the fortunate, ends with reintegration into the original community or favourable integration into a new one. On the other hand, natural disasters occur with no or little warning, unlike many humanitarian emergencies where there are early warning signs that people will be uprooted. Martin rightly remarks in this regard:

> Forced migration often involves trauma, dislocation and abrupt change in life. At a minimum, the displaced may face emotional problems and difficulties in adjustment resulting from loss of family and community support. More serious mental health problems may arise from torture and sexual abuse prior to or after flight. (65)

Thus, the displaced are vulnerable to different emotional or physical traumas. People who are forced to migrate to another place encounter either transplantation or uprootedness. Displacement, related to migration mainly operates in two levels of transplantation and uprootedness. If the displaced people are transplanted in some other parts of the same nation the trauma of displacement may be mitigated to some extent. Viewing their ancestral land as a place of eventual return, coupled with a desire for restoring themselves to their original location and physically creating homes away from home they try to fulfill their emotional urge to return to their homeland. The sense of anger and distrust intensifies with time if the people are uprooted from their place permanently and if necessary steps are not taken to restore them to their original home the state of displacement becomes unbearable at times (see Brown, Kolmannskog). As such, the phenomenon of displacement refers not merely to mobility across the places, but is also suggestive of partial or complete uprootedness of an individual or a community. Generally, a displaced person is deprived of place, his/her place

taken over by others, of conflicting and powerful forces (see Holborn). Roberta Cohen and Francis M. Deng define displacement as a forced removal of people from their homes through armed conflict, internal strife, systematic violations of human rights and other causes traditionally associated with refugees across international borders (35). Moreover, displacement is not simply a physical dislocation but a total breakdown of the emotional bondage and disorientation of relationship at personal and community levels (see Fussell et al). Like an orphaned child deprived of emotional comfort, scattered and separated families may find comfortable physical settlement elsewhere but fail to find the emotional comfort of family love and familiar social acceptance. Their memories of home are bound to haunt them for the rest of their lives as they always share the intrinsic bond with their natal land. This leads to the creation of an idealized notion of Rushdie's imaginary homeland. The characters in Rita Choudhury's novel *Makam* exhibit this tendency when they re-create home in Canada – a place and space for their shared memories of homeland. They embark on travel from one place another carrying memory of their home and searching for roots and a sense of belonging. The journeys undertaken and distances covered by the characters in all the novels under study are symbolic of the search for roots – a metaphor of life. They occupy a place of belonging and non-belonging. All the novels have characters displaced, internally or internationally.

Structurally, the phenomenon of displacement can be analysed in terms of both temporal and spatial dimensions. When somebody finds oneself emotionally displaced in time past it may be taken as a displacement that happens in time. On the other hand, spatial displacement refers to the phenomenon of physical or geographical displacement. People can be displaced to a different geographical space within the same nation or they can be dislocated to different geographical spaces outside the boundary of the nation. Whatever it may be, departure and arrival are two separate and distant points. This is where the phenomenon of displacement is problematised and taken up as a theme in literature. The commonly accepted notion regarding the literature of displacement is that neither is it bound by temporal and spatial factors, nor categorized under any established generic framework. This liberating experience enhances the scope of this unique literature of the trauma of displacement and encourages the proliferation of interpretation. But at the same time, we should be mindful of the risks of categorization as highlighted by Ali Behdad:

> General concepts of deterritorialization and displacement can function as useful strategies only to the extent to which their specific manifestations are historicized, for without such contextualization they become new universal categories that homogenize minority identities and cultures. (234)

Thus, displacement in its multiform guise becomes a metanarrative for literature. This is pertinent in a world increasingly torn by political and racial conflicts and confrontations. In a political reading, Marianne Marroum approves using this "twofold displacement" as a tool for "comparative analysis of the novels" (492). This has helped critics to look for different problems and suggestions for a solution for problems aggravated by displacement in all its forms that has undoubtedly become a salient feature of the contemporary world. On the contrary, in *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question* (1994), Angelika Bammer also takes a positive stand and voices that the separation of people from their native culture either through "physical dislocation" as refugees, immigrants, displaced, exiles, or expatriates or the "colonizing imposition of a foreign culture" - is one of the "most formative experiences of our century" (XI). Bammer's attitude is suggestive of the process of assimilation and effort at finding a home somewhere else rendering a sense of settlement. Thus, displacement has provided creative writers with the scope of dealing with multiple themes like trauma and related human tragedies. Therefore, displacement becomes a transnational theme in literature and a discursive theoretical site in postcolonial studies. But it is not without the complexities that incorporate postcolonial concepts of métissage, hybridity, and deracination as seen by several post-colonial theorists such as Edward Said, Françoise Lionnet, and Gloria Anzaldúa.

The novelists selected for the present study come together in their creative descriptions of home-sickness and nostalgia, placelessness, displacement, uprootedness and migrancy. The story told in each novel follows a similar pattern of events: the protagonists caught in the complex web of trauma are all offered means of communication that allow them to work-though and, therefore, bear witness to their traumas. Perhaps these conditions indirectly bring about an acceptance of otherness, sustenance of human dignity, and a celebration of life wherever one may reside. However, their narration offers a subtle critique of refugeedom. They lay bare the pathetic state of the exile/expatriation and vehemently

criticize the causes and repercussions of exile. Edward Said's statement echoes this idea simply in these words:

> Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience (173).

This is also suggestive of what Ali Behdad rightfully labels as "the split discourse of displacement" between the intellectuals and writers who "have valorized, if not romanticized, the seductive power of geographical displacement" and the sociologists, political scientists, and historians who "focus on the actual experiences of displacement, experiences that often entail a horrendous sense of homelessness, political and economic disenfranchisement, and even physical and psychological abuse" (224). The representation of the characters in the selected texts of this study shows that being torn between "many allegiances may render repatriation almost impossible" (225). Amin Maalouf maintains that "every individual is a meeting ground for many different allegiances" that he calls "the genes of the soul" (10), some of which oftentimes conflict with one another. The undeniable emotional attachment to the homeland inevitably leads to trauma of displacement post dislocation and migration phase. Characters are shown to be constrained by what Maalouf calls "the vertical heritage," one that "comes to us from our ancestors, our religious community and our popular traditions" (86). They seem to experience a kind of isolation that results in "sickness of home" (Rubenstein 2) after being displaced both internally and internationally. The characters can also be labeled as "transmigrants," who "develop and maintain multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious and political that span borders" (Basch et al 1) as they move. In *Makam* and *Jangam* characters cross the international border while in *Chenabar Sont* and *Ejak Manuh Ekhon Aranya*[1](1986) we find characters that are displaced internally.

However, nostalgic suffering is a common symptom of displaced existence. Soni in *Chenabar Sont* and Mailin in *Makam* suffer from the nostalgia of lost home. They are emotionally crippled by their experience of marginalization and memory of ruins of the past and fail to liberate themselves from that nostalgic constraint. In *Jangam*, characters face this emotional constraint acutely, similar to what Said has called "the crippling sorrow of

[1] Henceforth *Ejak Manuh Ekhon Aranya* will be referred to as *Ejak Manuh*

estrangement" as a result of the "unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home" (173). Their uprooting is not merely spatial, geographical and physical, but the isolation tragically interacts more at personal and social levels. Simone Weil's views are apt to be mentioned in this context: "to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul" (41). For Weil, the rootedness is brought about by place. In the selected novels characters' nostalgia and longing to return to their roots - be it to the past, homes, or land become the central foci of the plot and therefore these novels can be read as narratives of traumatic return. The term "nostalgia" was coined by Swiss physician Johannes Hofer in 1688 from the Greek words *nostos* (return home), and *algia* (pain and longing) and has derived numerous connotations throughout the ages in different languages. For example, in the late seventeenth century, nostalgia was used to describe an organic disease of lethal consequences among Swiss mercenaries and exiles caused by a separation from their native land. It was described as homesickness, a longing to return to the homeland, and expressed in German as *Heimweh*, meaning "home hurt" or "home ache" (Spitzer 143). In the twentieth century, nostalgia came to stand for an emotional disturbance related to "the workings of memory," characterized by a longing for some emotionally significant marker that has been lost (Starobinski 89). Remnants of distant familial and ancestral ties can evoke nostalgia woven through one's existence. The word lointaines [distant] refers to a distance in time or in a relationship and does not necessarily refer to a geographical one. Again, Marianne Marroum, a displacement literature scholar, holds that "the antithesis of distant ties to ties woven through life may just be rhetorical and arbitrary. The same pertains to the ties where one has spent one's childhood and to those of a city where one has lived longest part of their lives" (83). But these ties or bondings are not necessarily antithetic and may stand for roots. It is, however, the reference to a rarely visited ancestral land and to a neighboring land that renders these elements incompatible. Pointing to this plurality of vision of displaced people Edward Said observes:

> Whereas most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, and one home, exiles are aware of at least two. (173)

According to another scholar Françoise Lionnet, for the displaced, the transitory space can "function as a sheltering site, one that can nurture our differences without encouraging us to withdraw into new dead ends, without enclosing us within facile oppositional practices or sterile denunciations or disavowals" (326). Because of this oscillation, the characters are unable to connect to the new place. Instead, they try to renew their ancestral ties; failure of which results in emotional trauma. Gloria Anzaldúa terms this fluctuating identity as new mestiza, a concept that originates from her exploration of the hybrid identities of Mexican American women living in the geopolitical borderland between America and Mexico. Anzaldúa holds that "the new mestiza, a product of crossbreeding, escapes essentialist categories, develops a tolerance for ambiguity, and operates in a pluralistic mode, uniting all that is separate" (102). Here the experience of displacement assumes a positive proportion. In this regard, it becomes imperative to mention postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha who maintains in his seminal work on hybridity that cultures and identities are dialogic and not defined by fixity. He categorizes the plurality of vision and diversity as "difference." Bhabha's concept is explained in this way by Anjali Prabhu and Ato Quayson:

> It is through difference that there is an active processual quality to the generation of hybridity, while diversity allows the coexistence of fixed categories. (225)

Of the novels selected in this study Umakanta Sarma's novel *Ejak Manuh* and Rita Choudhury's *Makam* treat assimilation to a new culture as a natural follow-up of displacement and relocation. Because of the mobility across geo-cultural spaces displacement stands in contrast to fixity, of attachment to roots, which in most cases leads to psychological trauma. And when this is compounded with physical abuse, humans find it hard to cope with present time frame. So, transculturation acts as a healing method and emotional cushioning that unblocks the future possibilities of meaningful existence. Regarding the effect of trauma it should be noted that it can manifest both in the mind and body irrespective of the transculturation. Françoise Lionnet clarifies the concept of transculturation:

> The prefix 'trans-' suggests the act of traversing, of going through existing cultural territories. The specifically spatial connotations demarcate a pattern of movement across cultural arenas and physical topographies which correspond to the notion of

> 'appropriation,' a concept more promising than those of acculturation and assimilation, and one that implies active intervention rather than passive victimization. (13)

Thus, displacement and relocation lead to multiple complications in the lives of people. When people are forced to flee and live elsewhere, away from the emotional comfort of their familiar surroundings, they face the hardship of adapting to the new setting. During the course of movement from one place another they are bound to face disaster and the human body may not be able to survive the hardship of physical travel all the time. Moreover, emotional torture and physical violence lead to the feeling of trauma at the very beginning of the journey itself. But, there are ontological differences among exile, expatriate, emigrant, and refugee. Despite the differences we find that these terms can also overlap. In this context we can refer to Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, who argues:

> In reality the distinctions may be more abstract than real for the causes and consequences of displacement embodied in each nomenclature cannot be separated into neat boxes of exclusive biography; all are forms of exile or rather exile is a metonymy for various forms of dislocation from a physical and psychic homeland. (9)

Home or the space called home does not merely signify a geographic location, but what Sura P. Rath defines "both a concrete location and an abstract space in conceptual realm" (4), and a psychological place where characters feel safe, satisfied and are content with themselves. When individuals are isolated inside the home, they may experience homelessness and this leads to the trauma of being unhoused. Feeling displaced from a home, they seek to carve out their own place in an emotionally dislocated space. This estranged feeling is similar to floating on a blank space without having any marker to convert it to a place. The state of exile is considered as "a definite fall from grace that should be corrected" and suggests an illusory "utopian nostalgia," described by Svetlana Boym as one "that stresses *nostos*, emphasizing the return to that mythical place somewhere on the island of Utopia" (241). This single-minded obsession for homecoming becomes an epidemic that contaminates all the displaced, bringing to mind the debilitating diseases that afflicted the young mercenaries and exiles in the late seventeenth century, whose "homecoming would cure the affliction"

(375). Consequently, nostalgic memory does not help ease the cultural up-rootedness and sense of alienation and is reactionary in its nature. Usually such a memory "sets up the positive from within the world of yesterday as a model for creative inspiration, and possible emulation, within the world of the here and now'" (Davis 35). Otherwise, sometimes, it neither helps transcend the negativity of experience as exile, nor builds "a new communal culture and collective identity" (36). But there are problems when we appropriate the homeland with the notion of a fixed and rooted geography, intersecting the communal and the individual, the geographical, and the emotional. It problematises the whole situation. The homeland stands for one's motherland and hence conforms to the characteristics of the nation as understood by the British cultural historian Raymond Williams, who argues that nation as a term is "radically connected with native. We are born into relationships which are typically settled in a place" and this "form of primary and placeable bonding is of quite fundamental human and natural importance" (45). Nevertheless, we can agree with Said's view to an extent that the "exile can make a fetish of exile, a practice that distances him or her from all connections and commitments. To live as if everything around you were temporary and perhaps trivial is to fall prey to petulant cynicism as well as to querulous lovelessness" (183).

Application of trauma theory in Medical Sciences and Humanities and Social Sciences is not a new phenomenon. In the post 9/11 World, trauma theory has got a new privileging and significant relevance. 'Trauma' originated from the Greek word for wound. It refers to something too painful to be experienced directly and makes itself felt in a disguised or indirect way through the complex mechanisms of the human psyche. *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* describes trauma as an emotional shock producing a lasting and damaging effect. In the early editions of *The Dictionary* trauma is defined as wound, external bodily injury in general, and dates its initial use to medical pathology in the 17th century. But later on, the emphasis was shifted from physical injury to psychical or morbid nervous condition. It is held that experience of trauma is intrinsically related to the human psyche. Because of the high intensity of a sudden catastrophic event an individual faces difficulty in coping with the situation leaving the individual psyche distorted, split and disoriented. The effect is a prolonged numbness and according to Cathy Caruth, responses to such horrible events occur in the often delayed and

uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. The Holocaust, genocide of Jews, the two World Wars, the partition of India, the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the attack of 9/11, the attack of 26/11, America's war against terrorist groups in Iraq and Afghanistan, abuse of women and children are some of the events that shook the human psyche for years resulting in traumatic psychosis. These events "overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life" and "the human system of self-defense becomes overwhelmed and disorganized" wherefrom neither "resistance nor escape" (Herman 34) becomes possible. Recently social scientists and scholars have shown interest in the application of trauma theory to explore these areas. Literature produced as a result of engagement with these events usually draws a thin line between fiction and non-fiction, and also bear witness to the events in turn. Moreover, the texts provoke readers to look at established ways of reading history in favour of some fictional representation and vice versa.

In western literature, the oldest description of symptoms of PTSD, an anxiety disorder, is seen in Homer's *Iliad* written around 720 BC. According to Shay, Achilles was suffering from symptoms of PTSD. However, the inscription of trauma in imaginative literature can be found as early as in classical Indian literature around 5000 BC. The Indian epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are replete with the representation of trauma – in the character of Márícha after the kidnapping of Sita as well as in the *banabas*[1] of *Pandavas*, in the killing of one hundred brothers of Sakuni, even in the great war of Kurukshetra which destroyed the Kaurava dynasty etc. The description of a PTSD-like syndrome is seen in the *Ramayana*, although it was not of course described as PTSD or by any other similar medical term. Ravana's brother Márícha suffers from PTSD like symptoms after being critically hurt by Lord Rama's arrow and is almost dead. This traumatic event threatens his physical integrity. He develops all the symptoms of PTSD-like hyper-arousal, re-experiencing and avoidance. He refrains from his habitual duties of harassing the monk and engages in meditation and austerities and could never recover from the symptoms till Lord Rama kills him:

When wise Márícha heard the tale

[1] Exile

His heart grew faint, his cheek was pale,
He stared with open orbs, and tried
To moisten lips which terror dried,
And grief, like death, his bosom rent
As on the king his look he bent. (Griffith 962)

Again, on another instance Márícha confeses:

In every shrub, in every tree
I view that noblest devotee.
In every knotted trunk I mark
His deerskin and his coat of bark,
And see the bow-armed Ráma stand
Like Yáma with his noose in hand.
I tell thee Rávan, in my fright
A thousand Rámas mock my sight,
This wood with every bush and bough
Seems all one fearful Ráma now. (Griffith 973)

In another ancient epic *Shrimad Bhagavatam*, Maharshi Ved Vyasa describes the symptoms of what is today called Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). The demon King Kansha develops GAD - like symptoms when Lord Krishna kills all his demons and threatens to kill him. He develops symptoms of GAD, like being obsessed with the fear of attack from his arch-foe (Krishna), difficulty in concentration and sleep disorder. Like Márícha, the symptoms of Kansha also last long until Lord Krishna kills him. Moreover, the trauma of Partition remains a major concern of Indian literature after the independence. While the independence was greeted by several poets with celebratory odes, quite a few considered it a false dawn: either because they felt, like Nazrul Islam of Bengal, that the *swaraj*[1] did not bring anything for the hungry child or because it was a divided India. Poets writing in Telugu, Kannada, and Gujarati all expressed the same feelings. The Assamese lyrics of Bishnu Rabha carried the same nuances of a false independence for the downtrodden.

[1] Self-government or self-rule for India

Memories of the communal holocausts are still fresh in people's minds. Perhaps the deepest anguish is expressed by the poets of the Punjab and Bengal who were directly affected by the Partition. From the other side of the new border, Faiz Ahmed Faiz wrote, "this is not that longed for break of a day, not that clear dawn in quest of which our comrades set out" (35). What Urvashi Butalia refers to as the historical "silence over the human dimension of partition," (55) was however always voiced and addressed by various writers, poets, painters, lyricists; genres of art which do not deal with history directly. The trauma of Partition is a major theme in fiction as in the stories of Krishna Chander, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Amrita Pritam, Saadat Hasan Manto, K.S. Duggal or Nanak Singh or in novels like Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1961), Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines* (1988), Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* (1950), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's children* (1981), Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1975) and K. A. Abbas's *Inquilab* (1955), Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* (1973) and Yashpal's *Jhoota Sach* (1958) in Hindi are creations on the same line. A monumental novel like Qurratulain Hyder's *Aag ka Dariya* (1958) in Urdu reveals with rare intensity and immense sweep the experience of Partition that was "a murderous attack on the millennial continuum of Indian history and civilization" (Patole 54). According to citic Meenakshi Mukherjee, while the essential predicament of the nineteenth-century American novelist was that of isolation, the major issues facing the twentieth-century Indian novelists, until recent years, were involvement with the changing national scene, concern for the destiny of the country etc (34). The Independence movement in India was not merely a political struggle, it affected all aspects of Indian life in the 1920's and 30's. No Indian writer dealing with that period could avoid reflecting this aspect of society either directly as a theme or indirectly as significant public background to a personal narrative. Although Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao have depicted the freedom struggle and the impact of Gandhi's ideas in their novels, they do not deal directly with the holocaust of the Partition in their writings like Khushwant Singh or K. A. Abbas or Chaman Nahal does. The trauma of Partition has also stirred the creative genius of such novelists as Attia Hosain, Manohar Malgonkar, Raj Gill, Kartar Singh Duggal, V.N. Arora and Gurcharan Das.

Apart from novels, there are a large number of emotionally charged short stories on communal incidents revealing the anger and disgust of innocent people. There are stories by by writers like K.A. Abbas, Saadat Hasan Manto, Kartar Singh Duggal, Khushwant Singh,

Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, full of lamentation and consolation and bring out the pathos of the situation. All describe an unusually vicious time in which the sustaining norms of society as it had existed in the past are absent. It is as if the partition had not only shattered the continuity of the Partition of the nation in which the Hindus, the Sikhs and the Muslims had defined their individual and communal identities, but had also ensured that it would never again be possible for anyone to recreate a community in which moral and political choices which are valid for all can be made. Many short stories are concerned with the sorrows of displacement, with uprooted people having nowhere to go. The Partition, they know, has made them leave behind a human world that has given them in return only a heartless travesty of community. For example, Manto's story "Toba Tek Singh" reveals the writer's own state of mind. Traumatised by communal tensions prevailing at that time, and persuaded by his wife and family, Manto left Bombay for Lahore in January 1948 and always regretted that he had done so. Likewise in Assamese literature, Umakanta Sarma, Debendranath Acharyya, Mamoni Raisom Goswami, Rita Choudhury, Arupa Patongia Kalita have tried to illuminate the abandoned part of history in their fictions.

Brief History of the Assamese Novel

The division of literary ages depends on several factors for each society. It is clearly seen that the division of ages in Assamese literature is mainly based on publications of different literary magazines that created an era in the field of Modem Assamese literature. From this perspective the scholars, critics and academicians have classified the modem Assamese literature as given below:

(i) Arunodoy Yug (Arunodoy era, 1846 -1888)
(ii) *Jonaki Yug* or Romantic age (Jonaki era, 1889 -1940)
(iii) *Pragativadi Yug* (Progressive era1941-1950)
(iv) *Ramdhenu Yug* (Ramdhenu era, 1951-1960)
(v) *Samakalin* or Post- Ramdhenu Yug (Contemporary era, 1961 - till date)

The roots of modernism in Assamese literature can be found in the periodicals like *Arunodoi* (1846-72), *Jonaki* (1889) and *Banhi* (1909). In the important *Jonaki* period the stalwarts of Modern Assamese literature like Kamalakanta Bhattacharya, Hemchandra Barua,

Chandrakumar Agarwala (who contributed and supplied the most important elements of romanticism of simplicity, humanity and adoration of beauty through his poems like "Pratimā" and "Bīn Barāgī") and the mighty Lakshminath Bezbaroa heralded the dawn of Assamese Romanticism in literature. But the true spirit of modernity was reflected in the literature published in the *Ramdhenu*. Gobinda Prasad Sarma appreciates the style and form of the literature that is primarily shaped by the poets, critics and story writers of the *Ramdhenu*, and eventually, they are recognized as the general characteristics of the Modern Assamese literature. Writers of this period are notably influenced by the divergent literary tendencies of the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century to a great extent. In his essay "Adhunikatar Swarup" (The Nature of Modernity) Hem Baruah has contemplated that Modern Literature is founded upon the "political and economic base" (10 -11). When the whole country is engrossed with different problems, when the whole nation is engrossed in the freedom struggle, when the whole society is immersed in building a new world, no poet, literate can sit idle in his home composing music, whatever quality he may bear as such. The Baptist Missionaries laid the foundation of modern Assamese literature; even the early modern trio of Anandaram-Hemchandra-Gunabhiram did little other than confirming the foundation. The Romantics represented by the next impressive trio of Candrakumar-Laksminath-Hemchandra, might not raise a palace tower on the foundation but has erected at least a decent structure on it.

Historians have unanimously termed the glorious period of the 1940s as the most fertile in case of diversity and scope in modern Assamese literature. This period witnesses the transition of Assamese literature and society from the romantic tendencies of the *Jonaki* period to the experimental tendencies of the modernity. The wobbly political situation of the Second World War and the resulting economic and social unrest, disillusionment, has a depressing impact on the Assamese mindset. The novelists from Bezbaroa to Birinci Kumar Baruah had this inclination to express a subject matter in the form of a well-constructed story. Still, the novels do not lack variety and richness of subject matter. The trail of destruction left behind by two World Wars is further aggravated in India by the political events before and after Independence. Further, the destructive effects of the trauma of World War II smash all the traditional beliefs of the peace-loving society of the undivided Assam. On the other hand, the craze of freedom struggle of the Indian Nation reaches its peak in this

decade compelling mass participation from the Northeastern states including Assam. The plight of common people doesn't change with the false freedom of the Nation; on the contrary, it flares up multiple complexities in the traditional structure of family and society. The disintegration of joint family structure sets in and it is now replaced by the nuclear families under the Western influence. People are now self-centric individuals and on many occasions are traumatically isolated from the rest of the family members and society leading to the compartmentalized emotional spaces or split psyche. Moreover, the ever-growing political consciousness and economic discontent increase the collective anxiety amongst the working class. For the intellectuals, the Marxian ideology becomes a medium that will solve all the problems of the middle class and the proletariat. According to Gobinda Prasad Sarma, the first sign of modernity is revealed in the novels of Prafulladutta Goswami especially in his *Sesh Kot* (1948) although some others consider Birinci Kr. Barua's *Jibonar Batot* (1944) as the first modern Assamese novel. With its delineation of the cynicism and angst of youth, Prafulladutta Goswami's *Kesa Pator Koponi* (1952) becomes one of the finest examples of the modern novel. Baruah's novels put up his trademark revelation of the external and the inner working of the characters which anticipate the stream of consciousness techniques. In almost all of his novels, the unconventional Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya (*Rajpothe Ringiyai* 1955, *Iaruingam* 1960, *Mritunjoi* 1970, *Protipod* 1970) clearly illustrates the nasty political cross-currents of the society as well as the ethnic lives. Other prolific novelists of the period are Sayed Abdul Mallik (*Suruj Mukhir Sapna* 1960, *Aghori Atmar Kahini* 1959, *Prem Amritor Nadi* 1999), Nabakanta Barua (*Kapiliporia Sadhu* 1954, *Kokadeutar Haar* 1973, *Garoma Kuwori* 1979), Jogesh Das (*Dawor Aru Nai* 1955, *Sohari Pai* 1952), Padma Borkotoki (*Manor Dapoon* 1958, *Khabor Bisari* 1959), Lumber Dai (*Paharar Sile Sile* 1960, *Prithiwir Hahi* 1963, *Mon Aru Mon* 1968, *Koinar Dam* 1984), Nirupama Borgohain (*Sei Nadi Nirobodhi* 1963, *Ejon Burha Manuh* 1966, *Dinor Pisot Din* 1968), Lakshminandan Bora (*Ganga Silonir Pakhi* 1965, *Nishar Purabi* 1962, *Bulukat Bijuli* 1969*, Patal Bhairobi* 1968*),* Nilima Dutta (*Akasshbonti* 1967), Chandra Prasad Saikia (*Surjyasnaan*, *Meghamollar* 1963*, Maharathi* 1992*),* Mahim Bora (*Putolaghar* 1971) etc. Like Lumber Dai, Homen Borgohain is one of the most significant modern novelists with his wide thematic variety and inception of Western theories of mysticism, existentialism in novels like *Tantrik* (1967), *Halodhia Soraie Bau Dhan Khai* (1973), *Ostoraag* (1986) etc.

Umakanta Sarma showed his class in handling the preferred historical material of the contemporary novelists in his *Ejak Manuh Ekhan Aranya* (1986). Debendranath Acharyya's *Jangam* (1982) also assume thematic importance like Umakanta Sarma's novel and both of them concentrated on the peripheral subject of worker displacement.

The Student Agitation or the Assam Movement (1979-85) demanding Assam free of all foreigners, especially Bangladeshis, ULFA movement, the separatist movements within different communities like Bodo, Koch, and issues of influx from Bangladesh continue to rock Assam in the next decades. Changes in the mindset of the ethnic people are reflected by the two Arunachali novelists like Rong Bong Terong (*Rangmilir Hahi* 1981, *Miri Jiori* 1985, *Krantikalor Ashru* 2005, *Jaak Herowa Pokhi 2005*) and Yeshi Dorji Thongsi (*Saba Kota Manuh* 2004, *Mouna Othor Mukhor Hridoy* 2001). Other prominent novelists capturing the contemporary societal changes are Silabhadra (*Modhupur Aru Torongini* 1971*, Aagmonir Ghaat* 1973*, Ahotguri* 1973, *Anushandhan* 1987), Bhabendranath Saikia (*Antarip* 1986), Phanindra Kumar Debachoudhury (*Anuradhar Desh* 1989), Kanchan Barua (*Ashimot Jaar Heral Sima* 1945), Medeni Choudhury (*Annanya Prontore* 1972, *Bondukabehar* 1976, *Taat Nadi Nassil* 1977, *Farengadou* 1976), Hitesh Deka (*Natun Path* 1956, *Bharaghar* 1958, *Maati Kaar* 1960, *Eieto Jibon* 1961, *Asol Manuh*1967), Mahim Bora (*Edhani Mahir Hahi* 2001), Lakshminandan Bora (*Jakeri Nahike Upam* 1993, *Sehi Gunanidhi* 1997), Medini Choudhury (*Bipanna Samai* 1996), Dr. Dhrubojyoti Bora (*Loha 2013, Katha Ratnakar* 2007, *Kalantarar Gadya 2012*). Lakshminandan Bora's *Kayakalpa* (2002) popularises the science fiction amongst the Assamese readers. Ajit Barua (*Ekhon Premor Upanyash)*, Debobrata Das (*Dhusoratar Kabya* 2005) and Dr. Padipta Borgohain (*Amerikak Bisari* 2005) exceptionally contribute to the evolution of postmodern Assamese fiction by applying post-modern narrative techniques. The hazy linearity of past-present-future time frame is replaced by a conceptual time-space in this post-modern narrative to symbolize the fictionality of postmodern existence.

The emergence of a group of women novelists in the 1990s enriches the Assamese fiction with their deft representational style and broad thematic variations ranging from gender bias, sexuality, sexual abuse, domestic violence, migration etc. Mamoni Roisom Goswami is recognized worldwide for her craft and clinical representation of the subdued

female psyche in commanding language of her classics like *Nilakanthi Braj* (*1976*), *Mamore Dhora Tarowal* (1980), *Dotaal Hatir Weie Khoa Howda* (1988), and *Dasatharothir Khoj* (1999). Nirupama Borgohain (*Pokhi Ghuri Jai* 1999, *Ekei Jon Ekei Beli* 1994, *Albumot Herowa Sobi* 1997, *Nijor Pora Nilogot*), Tillotoma Mishra (*Loihitya Sindhu* 1997), and Purabi Bormudoi (*Gajaraj, Prem Aru Banditya* 1999, *Rupowali Nadi Sonowali Ghat* 2001, *Santonukulanandan* 2005) contest the idea of female as the other in their novels and recommend strongly for a subject position for female. Rita Choudhury authoritatively travels in the troubled and silenced part of Assam history in her brilliant narratives like *Deo Langkhui* (2005), and *Makam* (2010) asking for a serious investigation of these issues. Equally superb is the exploration of ULFA agitation, Student's stir against illegal influx from neighbouring Bangladesh, and demand for a separate state in Arupa Potingiya Kalita's *Felani* (2003). Other prolific and dominant novelists investigating the contemporary problematic life and relationship are Manikuntala Bhattacharyya (*Bardebojani* 2006, *Debobala* 2009), Anuradha Sarma Pujari (*Haridoy Ek Bigyapan 1998, Sahebpurar Borasun* 2003, *Naharor Niribili Saa* 2005) and others. The fictions of Ranju Hazarika are popular among the masses for their easy thematic access. Bandita Phukan, Nihar Choudhury, Kailash Sharma, Ali Ahmed can be regarded as the major contributors to children fiction after Bhabendra Nath Saikia. Assamese translation literature is enriched by Prafulla Katoki's translation of Western classics into Assamese. Moreover, there are number minor novelists who have fashioned their fictions portraying various other themes from the eighties onwards. The perspectival shift in focus of Assamese writers of the post-Independence period is due to multiple changes ranging from the national consciousness to the more common and ever growing problems of individual and groups. The growing number of separatist groups, the birth of new states including Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram and others contribute to the displacement and migration from neighboring countries including Bangladesh, growing number of unemployed youths and many other factors stirred the consciousness of the writers as well. They are no more fascinated by the romantic ideals of love and sacrifice of the writers of *Arunodoi* and *Jonaki* era. This is true of the writers selected for study here as well.

Trauma Studies

Owing to its multidisciplinary connection Trauma theory has received extensive critical importance in recent years although scholars are at odds regarding their opinion on the scope of trauma studies. One group of theorists led by Cathy Caruth believes that trauma is characterized by un-representability, inexpressibility, and its inability to be assimilated into the narrative. They believe that trauma can only be symbolised in the form of language partially. But for Herman group, the trauma recounting stimulates necessary healing process working through purgation of undigested memories. Witnessing in the form of listening and recounting of those "abnormal pursuing" (Vickroy 23) helps the victim in the path of recovery and normalcy. Clinicians Judith Herman and Laub admit that recovery is possible only "within the context of relationship" (Herman133, Laub 74) of witnessing and listening. Trauma writing thus serves as the major medium to re-view traumatic events and personal stories about people involved in such extremely painful events, as Geoffrey Hartman notes, "literary verbalization, however, still remains a basis for making the wound perceivable and silence audible" (1995, 259). Interestingly, another exponent of Trauma theory, LaCapra sounds cautious against the conflation of structural and historical traumas and the limit of traumatic knowledge by distorting between absence and loss (40) by theorists like Caruth and Felman. Remembering rather than merely continuing to repeat neurotically (Freud 1989) may lead the victim effectively to act upon it, rather than allow it to dictate the behaviour. The structure of trauma can be divided into two different categories: personal trauma and collective trauma. A collective trauma is a traumatic psychological effect experienced by a group of people or an entire society causing collective sentiment, often resulting in a shift in that society's culture and mass actions alike and sometimes "creating communities" (Vertzberger 5). The trauma of displacement also produces a psychic effect as it is experienced individually as well as collectively. Colonial trauma also serves as an example of collective trauma.

Roger Luckhurst argues that "trauma is intrinsically multidisciplinary" (90) because of its complex exchanges with memory, history and the narrative competency in fiction. Dating back to the early 1990s, current interest in trauma studies are generated by a number of groundbreaking works like Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's edited volume, *Testimony:*

Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History (1992); Cathy Caruth's *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), a compilation of two issues of *The American Imago;* and Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1992). This new field of study has seen a rapid growth, with important work generated in psychology, cognitive science, history, and literature, including that of Jennifer Freyd, Bessel A. van der Kolk, Dominick LaCapra, Daniel Schacter, and others looking at the commonality of traumatic phenomena within divergent populations, including survivors of war, domestic violence, and incest. It is now widely accepted that trauma study has an older line of descent. Although the American Psychiatric Association first includes post-traumatic stress disorder as an illness in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) in 1980, earlier diseases such as hysteria and "shell shock" are clearly the disorder's historical antecedents. In many ways, in fact, Freud's work with hysterical women in the late nineteenth century anticipates contemporary theorists' insistence that the victim recovers from the traumatic memory only when the individual is able to integrate the experience into an "organized, detailed, verbal account, oriented in time and historical content" (Herman 177). Trauma study is a pervasively overwhelming area in the contemporary world literature and Stef Craps and Gert Buelens regard it as "reinvention in an ethical guise of this much-maligned textualism" (1). In fact, trauma theory is an umbrella term that encompasses psychoanalysis, post-structuralism, philosophy, theories of memory, the ethical and aesthetic question of the nature and representation of traumatic events. These concerns not only range from the public and historical but also private and memorial. The necessary impetus provided by Freudian psychoanalysis in early stages is now taken over by different multidimensional theories like Feminism, New Historicism, Cultural Materialism, Deconstruction, LGT Studies, Cultural Studies, and Post-colonialism, Marxism in the 1990s. In this unstable and fluctuating postmodern world, "trauma itself may provide the necessary link between cultures" (Caruth 1996: 11). Listening to trauma victims may help in forming a bridge between disparate historical experiences, and can effectively contribute to cross-cultural camaraderie. Recent scholars of autobiography such as Robert Folkenflick's idea of "writing cure" (11) by autobiography as well as James Pennebaker's concept of efficacious "expressive writing" (52) hint at traumatic recounting for necessary healing. This leads Suzette A. Henke and

Whitehead to argue in favour of the concept of "scriptotherapy," indicating "writing out and writing through a traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic reenactment" (xii). With trauma forming a bridge between disparate historical experiences listening to the trauma of another can contribute to cross-cultural solidarity opening the possibility for the creation of a stronger societal cohesion. In the past, trauma studies have been mainly a Euro-centric affair leaving the wide scope of its application to non-western and Asian texts untouched. Thinkers such as Aime Cesaire, Hannah, and postcolonial critics and theorists like Kamran Aghaie, Jill Bennett, Victoria Burrows, Sam Durrant, Leela Gandhi, Linda Hutcheon, Rosanne Kennedy, David Lloyd, and Rebecca Saunders have lately recommended in favour of "theorizing colonization in terms of the infliction of a collective trauma and re-conceptualizing post-colonialism as a post-traumatic cultural formation" (Craps II). Thus, there is a growing demand and necessity for application of trauma theory to the culturally varied non-western and Asian texts. The feminist psychotherapist Laura S. Brown has favoured the concept of "insidious trauma," by which she means "the traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit" (103). Applying the structure of "insidious trauma" the traumatic experiences of people of colour (other than white), women, gays and lesbians, lower-class people, and people with disabilities can be explored which often fly under the trauma-theoretical radar because of the fact that current definitions of trauma have been constructed from the experiences of dominant groups in Western society.

Trauma and Displacement

Trauma's intrinsic spatio-temporal structure explained in Caruth's definition raises issues of representation, memory, and witnessing with specific implication for literary studies. The core question is - how much of the trauma can be grasped in fictional or any other representation? Traumatic experience escapes consciousness and manifests impulsively defying our perception of time and place, and repeatedly returns as intrusive images and obsessive behavior. If it is so, how is this ungraspable experience represented, read and textually worked over in fiction? This question pushes the present study to probe the manner in which the concepts of time and place is worked through in the literary

representation and finding a way out to analyze the representation of the trauma of displacement. Trauma narrative demands what Caruth calls a "new mode of reading and of listening" (1996: 9) by looking at the temporal and spatial facets of trauma. For Caruth representing trauma paradoxically implies re-presenting it through temporal and spatial references such as disruptions, physical abuse, displacements, and relocations. Theorist Anne Whitehead thinks that because of the very nature of its creativity, innovation, literary devices and techniques, fiction is able to represent what "cannot be represented by conventional historical, cultural and autobiographical narratives" (83). The ways in which it can do this include mimicking the symptomatology of trauma, by means of recurring literary techniques and devices, such as fragmentation, ellipses, repetition, recurring motifs, tropes, etc. (85). This kind of a stand slightly counters the idea of the incomprehensibility of trauma experience and its transformation into word form. In other words, it goes against Caruth's view that trauma is characterized by its unavailability to human knowledge and language or the idea that trauma forever remains ungraspable in language. On the other hand, Victoria Best and Kathryn Robson suggest that the irresolvable tensions between the individual and the collective, to which the study of cultural memory draws attention, can be productive in works of imagination, in order to "provide acute perspectives on the interrelation of experience and knowledge through networking acts of memory" (7). Thus, the proposed study of selected Assamese novels to probe these aspects of trauma theory and displacement can gain in stature and range. our societies have experienced a crisis of witnessing due to the traumatic historical events that took place in the 20th century and which required oral or written testimonies in order to be worked through (see Felman and Laub). Pellicer - Ortin believes that "Freud and Breuer's talking cure and Carl Jung's conviction that the healing process begins when the traumatised person is able to transform traumatic events into a chronological narrative are classical examples of the view that the main step for the recovery of trauma is to verbalize the experience of suffering." The same critic goes on to say that same line of argument is continued by Felman, Laub, and Hartman who equate the function of literature to that of the talking cure (6). Drawing on this, Suzette A. Henke has defined the term scriptotherapy as "the process of writing out and writing through a traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic re-enactment" (xii-xiii). Thus, one of the main objectives of trauma writing would be to articulate some unbearable yet irresolvable

emotional crisis that has become unspeakable for the victims, so that what cannot be spoken may be written (xviii). However, critics such as Hartman (2003, 257-74) and Felman and Laub (57-74) consider that oral and written, literary and non-literary testimonies are useful tools for the individual and collective working through trauma as well as for the preservation of historical memories for future generations.

Spatial displacement and forced migration are two issues intricately connected to trauma, dislocation, uprootedness, loss of self-confidence, cultural poetics, ethnicity and identity crisis in both personal and community level. All these experiences of trauma, displacement and identity are empirical and later on repeat the occurrences in multiple ways, mainly psychological, and manifest in various forms like national consciousness, the creation of imaginary communities and inviting the individual to join the community, formation of different institutions of culture, education and politics etc. This phenomenon can be termed as a kind of "return of the repressed" (Caruth 1991: 183). The theory of trauma helps us to explore different symptoms of racial trauma and cultural poetics related to inferiority, silence, frequent repetition, self-denial, hysteria and neurosis. Prominent trauma theorist LaCapra finds that "distinctions tend to collapse, including the crucial distinction between then and now" (699) in recounting and reliving the past with future possibilities. Here, memory becomes a common factor and mediator in the interface of trauma theory and identity formation and re-construction and reassessing the traumatic past both in personal and collective levels. But recreating from memory is always incomplete and remains "unperceived" (Ricoeur 123) for most of the time. It is like a broken mirror or cracked lens reflecting multiple and fragmentary facets of a single object and complex manifestation of diverse return in the racial and ethnic identity construction. Brison appreciably records this phenomenon as "shaped and reshaped in memory over time" (42) leading to collective resistance. Multiple problems faced by multicultural Assamese society standing at the crossroads of erosion of mutual faith among communities are also an apt explication of the complexities of identity formation. Manjeet Baruah considers this as an outcome of "massive spatial re-organisation in the valley as well as due to the socio-economic" (6) re-organisation in the making of this British colonial frontier. The strategic representation of this phenomenon in Assamese fiction demands research.

Theorizing Trauma: Literature and Representation

The question of depicting trauma in literature and related ethical responsibility has received widespread attention in last two decades. How is an untellable event voiced and worked out in literature? Different theorists have forwarded their views of recording or documenting apparently unrepresentable events in literature and bearing witness to it. The emphasis upon the research is propelled by the upsurge of publication of fictional and non-fictional trauma narratives in an increasingly traumatized world. The contemporary trauma theory was initiated in the USA in early 1990 by Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman and Geoffrey Hartman, former students and co-worker of the deconstructionist Paul de Man at Yale University. The impact of this development is immense in the sense that their research changed the way of looking into the relationship between trauma and literature. This development also helped in establishing trauma theory as an important branch of contemporary literary study. The newly evolving genre of "trauma fiction" (Vickroy 2002, Whitehead 2004) testifies to this development in the field of literature. Trauma fiction tries to bridge the gap between representability and non-representability of trauma by way of literary devices and structure of flashback and repetition. Anne Whitehead observes that in the mutual relation between fiction and trauma, "each speaks to and addresses the other" (4) in an effective manner. The problem of translation or transmission of the traumatic memory into meaningful narrative discourse has been dealt in detail by Luckhurst who asserts that transmissibility has surfaced as a major ethical concern regarding the "representation and response to traumatic narratives and images" (17). He goes on to question: "can or should the right to speak of trauma be limited to its primary victims? Who can claim 'secondary' status without appropriation" (17)? However, the difficulty in representation or reconstruction of traumatic memory does not mean that the unresolved question should be abandoned forever in literature. Caruth says that "understanding of trauma in terms of its indirect relation to reference, does not deny or eliminate the possibility of reference but insists precisely, on the inescability of its belated impact" (1996: 115). Felman and Laub (1992) raise this issue prior to Caruth when they refer to the survivors of historical trauma pointing that the crux of trauma lies in the survivor's inability to witness the trauma from within itself. Both the critics pointed out that literature becomes a nonpareil realm of representation for these unclaimed experiences through different symbols and images.

Regarding the use of the image of the wound in literature Caruth reflects that symbolism helps in the reconstruction of traumatic memory that "cries out, that address us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (1996: 4). In an attempt to argue in favour of the inherently literary nature of traumatic representation Caruth refers to Freud who drew on literature for theorizing the phenomenon because "literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing" (1996: 4). Again Caruth argues that "it is at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet" (1996: 3). In his book *Studies in Hysteria*, Freud pointed out how he was amazed to see that, the "case histories I write should read like short stories" (Freud and Breur 2001: 160). For Felman also, the question of representing trauma or "the crisis of truth" (22) that trauma entails, is related to literary language and to witnessing of the event. Dominic LaCapra puts the theory of Caruth and Felman in scrutiny and argues:

> In this view (close to Lacan's), the real or the literal is traumatic, inaccessible, and inherently incomprehensible or unrepresentable; it can only be represented or addressed indirectly in figurative or allegorical terms that necessarily distort and betray it. (107)

But Caruth's edited volume *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) helped establish trauma theory as an interdisciplinary theory because of its incorporation of different fields of study and "acknowledge the unthinkable realities to which traumatic experience bears witness" (ix). So it would not be a high sounding claim if we say that the real is experienced through the literary representation of trauma. Hartman observes that not only is the violence of a culture represented in its literature and art, but also there seems to be something inherent in the study of trauma that facilitates a move beyond the text to the raw world (2003, 259). So the study of the trauma and its representation has the ability to move beyond the textual to the real world and suggest a solution. Moreover, the literary representation of trauma adds to the existing body of knowledge and understanding of the complexity arising out of such critical situations. These works often explain social causes of abuse and offer a social critique of trauma and displacement. In other words, narratives of trauma are concerned with socio-political, cultural, pedagogical, historical, and ethical issues and

functions as well. Trauma fiction may also signal an ethical function: it deals with both the causes for and the consequences of a particularly traumatic experience from a more personalized, integrated, and complete scope than explorations into trauma in other fields may do. But they do not seek to overthrow other fields of examination. We can refer to Laurie Vickroy in this regard who holds that, while trauma-fiction writers draw on historical as well as psychological research, "literary and imaginative approaches to trauma provide a necessary supplement to these studies" because they "bring a kind of socio-cultural critical analysis that helps readers formulate how public policy and ideology are lived in private lives" (221-222). Deborah Horvitz also maintains that, in the process of bearing witness to a trauma, these narratives, obliquely or explicitly, point to the particular socio-historical or cultural context in which the trauma is produced and legitimized. So they help to unmask the repressive ideologies and power structures often responsible for the trauma in the first place and perform a strong voice for the silenced memory.

But how is this representation achieved? The critical discourse on the mode of trauma representation is numerous and contradictory. While some scholars prefer the realistic mode, others favour a non-realistic, symbolic way of representing trauma in figurative language. One group including theorist Kali Tal holds that firsthand experience of trauma is a prerequisite for traumatic representation while the other group considers that novelist can also write trauma of others. Tal believes that only trauma survivors have the right to narrate the experience because the figural language is a part of the power structure of national and cultural myth-making. In the study *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (1996), Tal clarifies that the literary representations of trauma is "mediated by language and do not have the impact of the traumatic experience" (15). Further, she claims that only those writers who have experienced trauma directly as survivors know and can write the signs of trauma, because certain words tend to acquire a different meaning in survivor discourse, and "the traumatic experience is reinscribed as metaphor" (16). Jane Kilby, also, rejects the experimental mode of representation in favour of the traditional because experimental fiction is "more or less language-bound than conventional testimony, and thereby it offers no more or less privileged access to the truth of trauma" (50-51). On the contrary, another group of scholars believes that traumatic representation is more effective when done in symbolic language and speaks in favour of liberating trauma

literature from any restrictions of truth claim of testimony. From this group deconstructionist theorist, Julian Wolfreys views that traumatic understanding is "incommensurable with any strictly realistic representation or adequate knowledge" and that literature bears witness "through the symbolization of what remains unsymbolizable and unrepresentable" (141). Douglass and Vogler too doubt whether realism is "the most effective mode for representing trauma" (32, 33). They express the view which is opposite to Tal and Kilby. They do not consider the firsthand experience as the foremost criteria of representing trauma and allow for the scope of stylistically innovative and non-realistic mode of depicting trauma that mimics the processes of trauma. In their view, the power of successful "cultural representation is not dependent upon direct personal experience or eyewitness of the events represented" (Tal 33) and writers can have access to the traumatic discourse of victims through witnessing. Well-known trauma scholars such as Laurie Vickroy, Anne Whitehead, and Ronald Granofsky all argue in this line. While analyzing works of different writers in the context of subjugation and colonialism, Vickroy concludes that fictional narrative has the capacity to represent trauma effectively like the survivor testimonies. Fictional narrative utilizes symbolism to this effect making trauma integral to the thematic content and "incorporate the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of trauma within the consciousness and structures of these works" (xiv). Vickroy goes on to say that traumatic symptoms like dissociation, shattered identities, and fragmented memories are subtly represented in figurative language and the representation becomes a real one. Anne Whitehead holds the same discourse and observes:

> Trauma fiction often demands of the reader a suspension of disbelief and novelists frequently draw on the supernatural … the more experimental forms emerging out of postmodernist and postcolonial fiction offer the contemporary novelist a promising vehicle for communicating the unreality of trauma, while still remaining faithful to the facts of history. (87)

Ronald Granofsky has a strong conviction on postmodernist genres which present useful techniques for depicting trauma as expressed in his *The Trauma Novel* (1995). Trauma scholars like Ann Kaplan and Deborah Horvitz present a liberal view to the question of traumatic representation. Ann Kaplan in her *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and*

Loss in Media and Literature (2005) makes her stand clear and express as that "the authors find varying strategies through which to communicate what the traumatic events mean to them emotionally" (155) including both realistic and non-realistic strategies. In formulating the ideas of "post-structural realism" or "postmodern realism" Deborah Horvitz probes the process of "how individuals internalize the material conditions of their lives […] through symbols, fantasies, and metaphors in order to build a unique and personalized interpretation of the world" (5). Trauma readers and scholars Kathryn Robson (*The Inscription of Trauma in post-1968 French Women's Life-Writing* 2004) and Laura Di Prete (*Foreign Bodies* 2006) offer innovative ways of representing trauma in literature. They discuss the figure of the body and landscape as sites of traumatic representation. While Robson considers trauma as a bodily wound Di Prete reads psychic trauma's articulation as reflected in the "foreign body" (12). Geoffrey Hartman, on the other hand, has emphasized the symbolic value of place in trauma in the form of what he labels "memory place." In Hartman's interpretation, some authors like Wordsworth are interested in locating the memories of feelings from the past contemplated in the present, in giving them a specific place. Hartman tries to bring this ever-growing and complicated discussion to a conclusion in this way: "on the level of poetics, literal and figurative may correspond to these two types of cognition" and "the symbolic […] is not a denial of literal or referential but its uncanny intensification" (1995, 537-547).

Trauma in pathological or medical terms has been widely studied by different psychoanalysts like Jean-Martin Charcot, Freud, Janet, and Breuer. Their main assumption was that that hysteria is a condition of psychological trauma. It pressed the patients to dissociate themselves from the reality because of the unbearable traumatic events in the past (Herman 12). According to Herman, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) officially documented post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as "outside the range of usual human experience" (33) in the year 1980. Theoretical responses to the problematic of reference and representation are significantly polemical.

One of the leading scholars in trauma studies, Cathy Caruth belonging to Yale School reads psychoanalytic nature of trauma through the filter of Paul de Man's literary theories in her books like *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1995). Analysing the socio-cultural context

Caruth hints at the possible similarity between history and trauma. In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1992); supporting the argument of Caruth, Felman and psychoanalyst Laub explore the limits of interpretative knowledge on trauma in their book on the importance of witnessing, psychoanalysis and the crisis of history in some of the major texts, films and documents on Second World War while developing the poetics of the emerging trauma theory. Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1994) argues that representation in Language or "writing out" is a necessary prerequisite of healing via psychotherapy of trauma victims helping them "reconnect their private memory with the public world." Herman opines in favour of the capacity of language to represent trauma and that narration can tackle the elusive trauma cure and the critical PTSD. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2000), on the same line of Herman, LaCapra warns against the blending of structural and historical traumas by theorists like Caruth and Felman and the perimeter of traumatic knowledge by confusssion between absence and loss. Geoffrey Hartman's "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies," *New Literary History*, 26 (1995) projects writing as a major medium to re-view traumatic events and personal stories in his essay through a deconstructive reading a of Romantic literature and exposition of Derrida's work establishing the importance of remembrance and representation of the Holocaust in the early 1990. Jacques Derrida's essay *The Instant of My Death / Demeure: Fiction and Testimony* (2000) explores the fraught relation between writing and history in his study of Blanchot's story 'The Instant of My Death' (115). The argument is crucial for capturing the problematic of writing about an experience that is not available to one. Anne Whitehead seeks to provide an alternative to the Caruthian notion in *Trauma Fiction* (2004) which introduces the theory of trauma to the sphere of novel writing for the first time and claims that it is capable of representing trauma successfully. Exploring the idea of trauma studies in the themes of novels Whitehead focuses on the response of novelists like Pat Barker, Jackie Kay, Anne Michaels, Toni Morrison, Caryl Phillips, W. G. Sebald and Binjamin Wilkomirski. The very nature of its creativity, innovation, literary devices and techniques, fiction is able to represent what cannot be represented by conventional historical, cultural and autobiographical narratives. In the book *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (2002), Vickroy confirms the representation of trauma in fiction narrative as intense and

engaging while exploring some major novels of modern times including Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and *Jazz* (1992), Marguerite Duras's *The Lover* (1997), Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1992) etc. she explored some of the striking novelists of modern times: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Jazz*, Marguerite Duras's *The Lover*, Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* (2004), and Larry Heinemann's *Paco's Story* (2006) with a view of investigating the complex relationship between sociocultural influences and intimate personal relations. Vickroy's study examines the personalised responses of those authors to these complex events using trauma theories, postcolonial theories and object relations theories enhancing the cultural aspects of traumatic experience that shape relationships, identity formation, and the possibilities for symbolization. In *Memory, Trauma, and History: Essays on Living with the Past* (2012) Michael S. Roth uses psychoanalysis to build a richer understanding of history in these essays and develops a more expansive conception of history to decode the cultural construction of memory. Deborah M Horvitz's book *Literary Trauma: Sadism, Memory, and Sexual Violence in American Women's Fiction* (2002) argues for the literary representation of psychic trauma provoked by sexual violence as exploited by the North American woman fiction who have assumed responsibility of witnessing and testifying to traumatic experiences that are pervasively cultural but interpreted as personal. E. Ann Kaplan's *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (2005) explores the relationship between the impact of trauma on individuals and on entire cultures and nations by arguing that humans possess a compelling need to draw meaning from personal experience and to communicate what happens to others and examines the artistic, literary, and cinematic forms that are often used to bridge the individual and collective experience. Nancy K Miller and Jason Daniel Tougaw's edited volume *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community* (2002) try to seek an answer to the questions like how do we come to terms with unforgettable events? How do we bear witness to extreme experiences that challenge the limits of language? Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin*, *White Masks* (2008) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (2005) are two seminal texts that study the crucial facets of racial segregation in the Western setup. *Black Skin, White Masks* is an in-depth study of the black psyche in a world dominated by white people. Edward Said's

Orientialism (1978) unveils a system of representations forced upon the East by a set of references that deny it any history, culture or identity of its own by the west in this book.

Another major exponent of post-Said theory, Homi Bhabha deals primarily with the colonial discourse of the 'other' notwithstanding his skepticism of his theoretical references like Said, Foucault, Derrida, Fanon and Lacan psychoanalysis in *Location of Culture* (1994). In her important book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak articulates the problematic representation of the subaltern in literature and acknowledges the inherent contradiction in the postcolonial narrative while recommending that the subaltern subject sought for representation from others to capture the time that eludes narration. "Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma Novels" - this article by Craps and Buelens introduces different trauma theorists to the readers and hints at an alternative to the Eurocentric view of trauma representation. The theorists for discussion are Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Geoffrey Hartman, Dominick LaCapra, postcolonial critics and theorists like Kamran Aghaie, Jill Bennett, Victoria Burrows, Sam Durrant, Leela Gandhi, Linda Hutcheon, Rosanne Kennedy, David Lloyd, and Rebecca Saunders. Those scholars have lately suggested theorizing colonization in terms of the infliction of a collective trauma and reconceptualising postcolonialism as a post-traumatic cultural formation. The key argument here is that while the first set of theorists insists on the euro-centric view the later one is the representative of non – Eurocentric view. Sylviane Finck, in the illuminating study, *Reading Trauma in Postmodern and Postcolonial Literature: Charlotte Delbo, Toni Morrison, and the Literary Imagination of the Aftermath* (2006) spotlights the enslavement of Africans in the United States or the attempted extermination of the Jewish people in Europe. Guan-rong Chen also highlights the underrepresented issue of the Asian minority's traumatic experiences in selected eight Asian North American novels in his study *Recollecting Memory, Reviewing History: Trauma in Asian North American literature* (2011). His discussion of trauma covers issues of double consciousness resulting in an ideological dichotomy between East and West.

Lauren Cerretti's *Connecting to Cuban National Identity Through Literature: An Examination Of Memory, Nostalgia, Trauma And Exile in Oscar Hijuelos's Our House in the Last World and A Simple Habana Melody* (2012) is a reading of Latino novelist Oscar

Hijuelos's novels, *Our House in the Last World* and *A Simple Habana Melody (from When The World Was Good)* that illustrate illustrate how Hijuelos uses and constructs memory and nostalgia as a way towards healing of traumatic experiences. Debra Kelly and Gill Kelly's article "The Witness and the Text" (2009) focuses on contemporary French author Louise L. Lambrichs's novel *Journal d'Hannah* (1993), that portrays an unusual psychological response to traumatic experience and tracks the relationship between the private and the public, between the individual and History, in relation to traumatic events, particularly the Holocaust. In his historically informed and theoretically sound book titled *In Migration and literature* (2008), Søren Frank makes thought-provoking reflection on the thematic and formal role of migration in four contemporary and canonized novelists namely Günter Grass, Milan Kundera, Salman Rushdie, and Jan Kjærstad. M. Kamaluddin Ahmed explores the development of Assamese novels in recent times in the essay "Asomiya Upanyas" in the book *Asamiyā Sāhityar Buranji* (1993), Ṣaṣṭha Khaṇḍa edited by Homen Borgohain. In the article "Place and Displacement in Salman Rushdie's Work" (1994) Rufus Cook discusses the issue related to cultural displacement and its turbulence as depicted in the novels of Rushdie in this essay and shows Rushdie's characters are endowed with the double vision and that results in the immigrant becoming the central or defining figure of the twentieth century. Anthony Oliver-Smith, in the book *Defying Displacement: Grassroots Resistance and the Critique of Development* (2011) provides a discussion to counter the problematic of traumatic engagements of uprooting and displacement of indigenous people caused by development projects and modernity. Olivier Bourderionnet examines the work and situations of two francophone singer-songwriters from Africa through the notion of displacement in an attempt to answer important questions regarding language, identity, and the social role of the African pop artist in France and the francophone world in the article "Displacement in French/Displacement of French: The Reggae and R'n'B of Tiken Jah Fakoly and Corneille" (2008). Emily Cappo's "Repression and Displacement in Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans and Never Let Me Go*" (2009) is a psychological reading that researches the ways in which repression and displacement are represented with increasing sophistication and complexity in these novels by Japanese-born British author Kazuo Ishiguro. Bilquees Dar's "The Theme of Partition in Khuswant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan*" (1961) reflects that Singh has realistically depicted the negative effects of the

partition and displacement that changed the life forever for thousands of people across both sides of the border. Sukhbir Singh and Manmohan Singh Gill's article "Social and Psychological Trauma of the Displaced: A Study of Partition of India" has attempted to situate the same problems encountered by the uprooted people at the time of Partition and thereafter at the place of their rehabilitation on the backdrop of the dreadful communal riots, migration, region and displacement. Amalendu Guha in *Planter Raj to Swaraj* (2012) has probed the nature of Colonial Government Exploitation and other allied issues like the hostile resistance of the semi-tribal, semi-feudal peasant Assamese society to alien rule from 1826 to the span of 120 years of colonial occupation. Jayeeta Sharma's *Empire's Garden* (2012) is a significant research into the formation of Assamese identity and impact of various kinds of migration. Sharma cross-examines the idea of Assam as imagined by the imperial force's tea-growing ethnic garden for economic purposes. Manjeet Baruah's *Frontier Cultures: A Social History of Assamese Literature* (2012) discusses how literature can be a source of social history and religious identity formation in the wider context of the historical geography of Bramhaputra valley situating literature in face of regional transformations from a continental crossroad to a frontier. In Priyam Goswami's *Industrialization and Colonial Penetration* (1999), the author reflects on the impact of industrialization and colonial and economic penetration in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam during the 19th century. In this introspective study of the structure of Assamese culture titled *A Cultural History of Assam (Early Period)* (1986), B. K. Baruah highlights Administrative Organisation, Economic and Social conditions, Religious Movements and Artistic Developments attested by the monuments. Nandana Dutta's *Questions of Identity in Assam: Location, Migration and Hybridity* (2012) tries to throw a new insight to the much-debated topic of the formation of hybrid identities in Assam in the post-colonial period in the context of foreigner influx, location, hybrid identity and the decisive demographic changes. Dutta seeks out the link between memory and representation with the application of trauma theory to some of the most traumatic events of Assam history. Hiren Gohain, in his article "Asomiya Madhya Shreni Aru Sahityat Adhunikota" (2010) situates the politics of representation and the polarisation of dialectical variations within the boarder perspective of the emergence of Assamese middle class. Dr. Nagen Thakur's edited book *Exa Bacharar Axamiya Upanyax* (2000), different aspects of Assamese novel and its development is

discussed in a lucid and clear manner by a number of prominent scholars. Gita Bharali in "Development Projects Threat to Tribal Livelihood: Case Study" (2006) explicates the threats to tribal livelihood due to development projects that dislocate people from traditional habitats causing overwhelming trauma to the indigenous folk in this article. Hirendra Nath Gohain in his book *Assam: A Burning Question* (1985) scrutinizes the basic issues of migration and cross-border movements from the standpoint of cultural history. The author's sympathetic attitudes towards the displaced are evident in his discussion on the issues. K. S. Subramanian's *State*, *Policy and Conflicts in Northeast India* (2017) discusses the history of unrest and conflicts in North-East India while highlighting the core issue of failure of successive governments in addressing the issues relating to security and development in this region.

Selection of Texts and Justification of the Study:

The present study is based on the following novels in Assamese:

Chenabar Sont (The Current of the Chenab) by Mamoni Raisom Goswami, 1972

Jangam (The Movement) by Debendranath Acharyya, 1982

Ejak Manuh Ekhan Aranya (A Group of People and a Forest) by Umakanta Sarma, 1986

Makam (The Golden Horse) by Rita Choudhury, 2010

This interdisciplinary study seeks to explore how traumatic experiences such as displacement can be represented, read, and perhaps worked through in terms of temporal and spatial dimensions. This exploration endeavours to show that trauma in Assamese literature is represented, acted out, and possibly worked over, not just through references to time but also to space – geographical, bodily, and textual. The proposed objective demands scrutiny of the characters and the setting of the novels and their role and strategy of coping with the trauma. Moreover, the study will also examine the novelist's handling of different literary devices e.g. metaphor, simile, styles, and narrative strategies adopted to represent the trauma.

By reading Assamese trauma narratives in dialogue with contemporary west-oriented trauma theory, we can see how it contests the predominantly west-centric model of trauma theory. The west-centric model of cultural trauma theory which assumes PTSD as

the central trope in representation is exposed to limitations when applied to the non-western texts like Assamese fiction. The application of trauma theory to Assamese texts may help us develop a definition of trauma which is much localised and contexualised in experiences. Hence the possibility of revisiting some of the established tenets of trauma theory in cross-cultural perspective becomes relevant. Study of trauma theory in cross-cultural perspective enables us to explore Assamese texts in a novel direction. In the introduction to her important collection *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), Caruth writes "trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures in a catastrophic age such as ours" (ix), which proves the importance of analyzing trauma from multiple perspectives.

The selected texts are written originally in the Assamese language, making it available for readers having access to Assamese language only. So, the production of texts and the voice generated by Assamese writers reach only a limited number of audiences. Rarely, the texts are translated into other regional languages or into English. Most of the texts are produced, read and remain circulated in the confines of a few. In this sense, the scope generated by Assamese literature can be counted as restricted. However, the texts selected in this study reveal the spirit of the contestation of the official notion of representation of History. Kailash C. Baral voices this concern of literary marginality and says: "literary marginality, against the grain, contest and problematises some of the universalistic assumptions of literature while factoring in and often valorizing unique ethnic and cultural experience that needs to be examined outside the Marg–Desi divide" (6). Another critic, Zama identifies strong the response of the writers particularly from the states of Assam, Nagaland and Manipur who have been vocal and productive in literary representation of resistance, trauma and suffering that counter this historical silence on serious matters, "voiced through, a rich trove of creative writing" (Introduction, xiii). If we are to realize the politics of silence in core historical issues, then it becomes imperative to probe the relationship of Assamese literature to the larger movements in the area. Manjeet Baruah views that the emergence of a "political literature" (14) that explores the issue of colonial frontier, responded to the moments it experiences. The novelists and their works selected in this study clearly mark a response to the issue of the historical silence on these crucial issues.

These Assamese texts have almost exclusively focused on the trauma involving a group of people in multiple ways. Their intensive studies suspend the chronological barriers of time and space in selecting the subject of the novels. These novels do not glorify the Romanticised version of nation building or oversensitive love ideals of the *Jonaki* period. Instead, they are focused more on the real issues of trauma and isolation resulting from displacement and racial conflicts. Umakanta Sarma's novel presents the plight of people, called coolie, working in the tea gardens and how they are taken to their present location – their struggle and consistent effort at assimilation. Debendranath Acharyya scripts the extraordinary courage and strength shown by the Indian origin people who fled from Burma to India crossing innumerable hurdles en route. Goswami's work is a succinct narrative of the hardworking labourers and their helpless families working under White Master's torture. Rita Choudhury presents the story of the people of Chinese descent suspended during the Indo-Chino war of 1961 in sensitive and metaphorical language. So, some novelists portray events related to Assamese society while others depict stories to unravel the history of convenient forgetting by the dominant class and cultures. They are the few novelists who have tried to explore the real side of society, situations and different problematic of Assamese society. Their novels are based on real situations. These novels document the lack of will and motivation of the dominant class to pay attention to the pleas of trauma survivors. Thus, the texts become a trauma testimony of the victims.

The thesis is structured in the following manner:

Preface and Acknowledgements

Chapter I Introduction: Assamese Novels and Trauma Studies

Chapter II Trauma, Displacement and Labour in *Chenabar Sont*

Chapter III *Jangam*: The Flight of the Displaced

Chapter IV Trauma, Displacement and Community Formation in *Ejak Manuh Ekhan Aranya*

Chapter V A Sense of Return: Trauma and Memory in *Makam*

Chapter VI Conclusion: The Dark Holds Terror

Selected Bibliography

In the first chapter entitled "Introduction: Assamese Novels and Trauma Studies" an overview of the recent trends in trauma theory is presented including discussion on the development of trauma theory from its inception in the medical field. It also states the purpose and rationale of the present study and situates the selected texts within the larger framework of trauma narrative. It concludes with a brief discussion of individual chapters of the thesis.

The second chapter entitled "Trauma, Displacement and Labour in *Chenabar Sont*" takes up Mamoni Roisom Goswami's *Chenabar Sont* which is a vivid depiction of the story of unskilled labourers who migrated to distant places. It is the story of their trauma and pain, unfulfilled desires and unheard voices of people like Soni, Gaurisankar, Burha Rambir, Raghma, Sadashiv, Parbati, Sibanna, and Arjun. That the story is based on reality is confirmed by the writer in the preface which claims the tale to be a real life picture of the labourers working in the private companies of that time. *Chenabar Sont* is the first novel written by the author. She started writing the book back in 1964 and published it in the year 1972. Though the novel was written in her tender age, the story is enriched with her eye witness account of the labourers engaged in the construction of a bridge on Chadrabhaga river of Kashmir. The main character is Soni, a woman labour on the site. The story presents Soni's life and her encounter with different males including her husband in the transit camp. The image of the torn shoe is used repeatedly by the writer to describe the distorted life of labourers, especially the females and the exploitative nature of the Company. The labourers could not fulfill their basic familial desires and they are exposed, wandering helplessly everywhere. It will not be wrong to say that the novel lacks a coherent and well-knit story but multiple fragmented narratives have clustered well to represent the economic and socio-political picture of the contemporary society. The representation of infliction of trauma upon the life of the displaced and unorganized group of labourers, especially females, is sought to be explored and at the same time, different figures and tropes of representation are also scrutinized. The writer has utilized the images of the body, and its interaction and correspondences with nature in the process of depicting the trauma upon the life of the labourers: both male and female. The novel depicts the labourers as being simply reduced to mechanical bodies, performing horrendous tasks in the hostile working environment.

Goswami has also criticized the structures of patriarchy and oppression of women by depicting victimization of women in a most horrid and dreadful manner.

The third chapter of the study entitled "*Jangam*: The Flight of the Displaced" considers Debendranath Acharyya's *Jangam* as a discourse on the trauma that depicts the geographical and psychological dislocation of an Indian contingent in the light of recurrent trauma theories. Geographical dislocation on racial lines is analysed as a psychological and existential crisis that has resulted in madness and amnesia in the life of victims. Displacement resulting from war has become a common phenomenon in the history of man of late. It is especially true of the people from those nations and states which are made the battle ground for the stake-holders of world power equation. In Acharyya's *Jangam* we find the story of a whole race of helpless people chased away from their home owing to their foreign roots. During the Second World War Myanmar (Bramhadesh /Burma) is swayed by the Japanese forces from the English colonialists. This leads to the unreasonable backlash on the part of the Burmese people upon different communities having an Indian origin. The hardcore Burmese rebel group of nationalist fundamentalist unleashes inhuman torture on those Indian origin people to safeguard their "exclusive territorial claims or purified forms of identity" (Robin Cohen 516). These communities were living on Burmese land for generations and suddenly they face the seemingly impossible task of crossing over the dangerous terrains and forests to India. Several people lose their lives on this journey. On the one hand, we have a depiction of the struggle for existence, while on the other hand the precarious journey of the refugees that include Ramgobinda, his son Thanu, Old mother, Ramgobinda's pregnant wife, Father Dr. Berry, Ma-Pu and other villagers – Lasmi, Ballav, Budhu, Dr. Chim etc. The story sets forth from the small village Manku which is situated on the bank of Irrawaddy of Bramhadesh. The younger boy of the *gaouburha*,[1] Nungnau is killed mercilessly by the rebel on the charge of helping the elopement of Indian origin people. The whole novel is the filled with the tragic story of the refugees chased away from Burma. Ramgobinda and his whole family are torn apart by the terrible trauma and he as well as his wife loses mental balance. He loses his mother en route like some other refugees

[1] Administrative head of the Village

due to hunger and related illness. The complex web of trauma and related madness is the focus of the study in this chapter.

The fourth chapter is entitled "Trauma, Displacement and Community Formation in *Ejak Manuh Ekhan Aranya*." Umakanta Sharma's *Ejak Manuh* depicts the story of Tulsi, his community and their strategies of preserving their identity, culture and ethnicity. Tulsi is the protagonist of the story of the one third of the novel though towards the end his son Arjun seems to take over his role. It is a poignant narration of the trauma of forced displacement faced by three generations of labourers working in a tea-estate of Assam and their quest for ethnic identity. They are brought to Assam from other parts of India as the indentured labour by British colonialists. Lured easily by cunning contractors with the hope of a bright future in "the land of gold" (Sharma 5) they are displaced from their place of birth and origin and face inhuman torture en route their journey to the north-eastern part of India. The novel narrates how nearly eight hundred labourers are put together in a small enclosure sans facilities of sanitation and clean food, leading eventually to the death of many including children and women. Tulsi boards the boat with his father Banha, his mother and two sisters when the group of labourers is taken away from Goalanda to Dhuburi. Unable to bear the suffering and diseases, several persons including his mother die during the journey and their bodies are abjectly thrown into the river. Tulsi meets his future wife Kalondi during the journey along Padma and Meghna. The coolies are brought to Rupahijan tea estate. Gradually the industry prospers and this group of coolie tries to assimilate themselves with the local Assamese culture while preserving their uniqueness of culture and identity at the same time. The devastating earthquake of 1897 kills lot of people and destroys a large part of the estate. A hospital is established as a part of the rehabilitation process and a school is founded to educate the coolie children as well. In a fateful boat accident the British manager of the estate drowns and three persons are arrested by the police as suspects. After some days, Bishni, a popular girl of the estate is molested and raped by another British officer Mackenzie. These two incidents appear significant as the coolies try to counterattack and become self-conscious and alert to any attack on their race. Towards the end of the novel the third generation of coolie population assumes the centre stage within the narrative. Unlike their parents they harbour high aspirations and are seriously committed towards development while engaged in the tea industry. Tulsi's son Arjun leaves for higher studies

and the novel ends on a positive note. This chapter applies Trauma criticism and Ethnic studies to explore how ethnic identity can become a strategy for coping with trauma - both personal and collective. It also considers strategies used by subsequent generations for coping with trauma psychosis. It will also analyse how the author has shown the females as victimized and the female body as more prone to physical abuse and trauma.

The fifth chapter is entitled "A Sense of Return: Trauma and Memory in *Makam*" and looks at *Makam* as a novel representing strategies of collective trauma, memory and coping. The study juxtaposes both individual and collective experiences of memory and trauma that the writer has taken into account. *Makam* tells the story of the place, Makum, breaking a silence in the pages of history revealing the collective trauma, tragedy and the feeling of loss of a particular group of people of Chinese origin who have been conveniently forgotten. The title of the text is related to Makum, a sub-division in upper Assam dotted with tea gardens, and with a demography that is closely linked to the introduction of this plantation crop here from South China by the British in the early part of the nineteenth century. The first labour forces are the forcefully displaced from China - compelled by the oppressive situation of poverty and the cruel British overlords. These all-male Chinese displaced people establish China patties in the area, come in contact with Hindustani migrants from the Chota Nagpur plateau, and enter into marriage relations with them. This small, hardy community does everything to get assimilated in the local culture, and endears themselves to the people as expert craftsmen, especially carpenters and is inseparable in the beginning of tea plantation industry in Assam by the British. Jayeeta Sharma, while highlighting this aspect of Tea Industry in Assam in *Empire's Garden* (2011) argues:

> Their processing skills were much in demand ... the normally miserly East India Company had to open its purse to recruit Chinese tea experts ... their superior energy, industry, spirit of speculation, and the ability to calculate profit equalled that of any European. (35-36)

Choudhury, who had researched the subject over five years, travelled across China, Singapore, Hong Kong, Canada, Australia and the US to interview more than one hundred displaced people. In China, she meets Mailin Ho, who was twenty years old and pregnant when she was transported to China. Her Assamese husband was sent back to Makum - and

Mailin never met him again in the real life. The 1962 Sino-Indian war shattered their lives and dreams. The conflict put them in the crossfire. Subjected to insinuations, suspicions and derisions, they were segregated and thrown into distant jails. What happened to them afterwards? Where are they now? This is the subject matter of Rita Choudhury's novel *Makam*, which means golden horse in South-Chinese language (*Ma*-horse, *Kam*-gold). The way in which the author frames her text, in a sense is the history of the place and it reflects the understanding of the situation by the Chinese exiles and their realization of that traumatic past.

The concluding chapter is titled "Conclusion: The Dark Holds Terror." It sums up the thesis and expresses the outcome of the study. The conclusion also suggests future possibilities which this study has generated.

Rationale of the Study

It is seen that the study of Assamese fictional texts in the light of trauma theory and literature is almost non-existent. So far, no study has been undertaken to grasp the nature of fictional representation of displacement and trauma in Assamese novels, from the different theoretical perspectives and possibilities available. The current study intends to bridge this gap by accessing the effect of traumatic memories upon individuals and groups as represented in the chosen novels and seeks to explore whether or not the identity development influences participant perception of and attitudes towards others. While bridging such a gap is an epistemological need in itself, there is a possibility of other beneficial offshoots as well. As the study would bring history, fiction and trauma theory together, strategies for prevention and remedy of displacement and trauma may emerge. This would help teachers, students, government and non-government agencies to frame suitable academic frameworks. This may also help in matters of policy and their implementation. Additionally, the study has the potential to contribute to the discipline of comparative literature, encompassing both theoretical and critical texts. It is important to explore the new facets of trauma resulting from displacement that will emerge from an enquiry into these non-western texts so that an expansion of our understanding of the trauma of displacement may be achieved.

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Chapter II

Trauma, Displacement and Labour in *Chenabar Sont*

> Over time as most people fail the survivor's exacting test of trustworthiness, she tends to withdraw from relationships. The isolation of the survivor thus persists even after she is free.
>
> Judith Lewis Herman

This chapter studies Mamoni Raisom Goswami's maiden novel *Chenabar Sont* (The Current of the Chenab) as a trauma narrative within the scope of its textual representation. The representation of infliction of trauma upon the lives of an internally displaced and unorganized group of labourers, mostly female, is sought to be explored and at the same time, different figures and tropes of representation are also scrutinized. The writer has utilized the images of the body, and its interaction and correspondences with nature in the process of depicting the trauma upon the life of the labourers; both male and female. The novel depicts the labourers as being simply reduced to mechanical bodies which perform arduous tasks in hostile working environment. Goswami has also criticized the structures of patriarchy and oppression of women, by depicting victimization of women. The company men merely take pleasure in entertaining themselves with the performance of the female bodies, like the owner of an animal farm. How do the labourers cope with and defend themselves against the onslaught of trauma in their personal and social life? Or do they really defend themselves? To get the answer to these questions we need to examine the narrative mode and devices employed in the text.

Highly acclaimed figure of Modern Assamese Literature and the Jnanpith Award winner Indira Goswami, popularly known as Mamoni Raisom Goswami, is an authoritative voice to have emerged from modern Assamese literary scenario. Boldly protesting against the social inequalities of all sorts as well as traditional customs and norms, she has created her own style. Her works are held in high regard and critically applauded nationally and

internationally. She tells her own story in *Adha Lekha Dastabej* (1988), an autobiography translated into English as *Unfinished Autobiography*. Famous writer Mulk Raj Anand comments about her candidness in a letter written to her in November 1990:

> I read one-third of your autobiography in one go and find you to be a sensitive and truthful person, who has revealed the feelings, uncertainties, disappointments, and lapses with a candor not shown by many of your contemporaries. (*Mamoni Raisom Goswamir Rachana Samagra* 69)

Her sympathetic, humane portraiture in evocative and emotive language has been crucial in the poignant depiction of the dark realities of life of both the oppressed and oppressor. Use of images and metaphors from nature has added depth and intellectual dimension to her style. Benevolent and sympathetic towards the poor and distressed lot, her life itself is a living testimony of countering pain and suffering, a struggle against destiny. Having lost her husband early after her marriage, she overcomes that challenge of fate and regains her composure in due course of time. Her writing works as a kind of ventilator through which she could release her pain and agony into her thick narrative texture of fictions. In such a dejected state of mind, she uses her pen as a knife with which she cuts a path through the enveloping gloom. She frees herself from the emotional trauma and fits of depression caused by that deep wound, through the repeated cathartic ritual of observing and imaginatively capturing the pain of others in her narrative in a poignant language. From the very childhood, loneliness tortured her and a tender Mamoni herself fails to comprehend this mysterious fit of depression resulting in repeated attempts at suicide later on. Referring to these fits of melancholia that accumulated inside the psyche, Goswami reveals:

> At that time, I was of a very tender age. I did not have to bother about my food and clothing. In that situation every girl of my age would have spent her days in merriment. But my fate was not embedded in this glee. A kind of despair and sadness nested inside my heart. (*Mamoni Raisom Goswamir Rachana Samagra* 73)

She goes on to explain her emotional turbulence at length in her writings later on, which to her surprise is reflected in the difficulties depicted in the life of her characters:

> This idea of suicide sat permanently in my mind for a long time, as a result of this, Gribala, the heroine of my novel *Dontal Hatir Uye Khowa Howda* (The Moth Eaten Howda of the Taskan, 1988) written on the setting of North Kamrup commits suicide. The heroine of *Neelakanthi Braja* (1976), Soudamini too moved towards the path of suicide … prepared myself for the fight against all these curses of the Creator … This task was like getting blood-stained by peeling one's own skin. As if I was preparing to put on another skin after peeling one. (*Mamoni Raisom Goswamir Upanyas Samagra*, *Vol.I* 7)

She herself lives the tragic life of a widow, and no one knows better what it means to be a widow in a conservative Indian society:

> And that is why exactly most of my novels revolve around widows and the adversities they face in Indian society. (*Mamoni Raisom Goswamir Upanyas Samagra*, *Vol. I* 7)

Her personal experience of pain makes her writing more authentic. Mamoni Raisom is now recognized as the writer whose heart deeply aches to witness poor farmers subjugated by their feudal lords, sick labourers terrorized by their capitalist industrial owner, hapless widows deprived of the warmth of humanity, people uprooted in the communal riots, and many such socio-cultural issues. Renowned critic G. P. Sarma holds Mamoni Raisom's expertise in character portrayal in high regard:

> Her early novels were set in central, north and north-western India with characters picked not from the mainstream society of those regions but from the periphery - men and women, half-starved and deprived - living only sub-human lives. And in painting them in highly emotive terms and a startlingly suggestive language, she touched the hearts of her readers. At the same time, developing a fictional craft rich in symbols and imagery, she could also appeal to the aesthetic sense of the readers. (65)

While G. P. Sarma highlights Goswami's ability to grasp emotion in touching language in her writings, Goswami's self-analysis reads thus:

> I never wanted to appease the readers with lies. Whatever I have written is true in my consideration. While writing, I colour the reality with only little bit of my imagination, so I say - I wish to reflect the human life as a reality in my literature. I arrange the events happening in reality into the form of stories. (*Mamoni Raisom Goswamir Rachana Samagra* 27)

This statement brings out the infusion of her real-life experiences into her art and mature skill as a novelist. She has closely watched women, especially widows and the downtrodden, across India and produced novels against the backdrop of different states. It has also contributed to her spontaneity and candidness – to the extent of being brutally frank about the self:

> What is there to hide? How can I depict the stories about other's life if I am not true to myself? That is why I do not hesitate in saying that I drink too - of course, only occasionally. I have never tried to sermonize. I have never alienated my writings from my life - how can I? (*Mamoni Raisom Goswamir Upanyas Samagra*, *Vol.I* 7)

Chenabar Sont is an eyewitness account of the plight of the group of displaced labourers, mostly women, engaged in a project of bridge construction across the Chenab (*Chandrabhaga* in Sanskrit) river in the Riasi region of Jammu and Kashmir of India and the subjugation and oppression they had faced. After her wedding to Madhaven Raisom Iyengar, a young and adventurous Tamil engineer, Mamoni accompanies him to different work-sites in Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Kashmir where he is employed in the construction of bridges and river-dams. It is during these field trips that she collects material on the lives of displaced labourers. Goswami faces the worst moment of her life during this period as she loses her husband in a fatal road accident in Kashmir. This tragedy strikes her at the time when she is preparing the first draft of *Chenabar Sont*, and mercilessly snatches all the dreams of her married life. After being emotionally paralysed for some time, she fights successfully against the tragedy and completes the novel as she moves to Goalpara in Assam to work as a school teacher. The narrative documents the unskilled and unorganised labourers who migrate to distant places and voice their pain, unfulfilled desires and unheard voices of people like Soni, Raghma, Sadashiv, Parbati, Gourisankar, Burha Rambir, Sibanna, and Arjun. The writing period of the novel is between 1964 and 1972.

The narrative unfolds mainly through Soni's perspective and her reading of the complexity of the situation, guiding readers by her responses to the condition of displacement till the end of the novel. Soni is now on the bank of Chenab, living near the construction site in a cottage of the labour line. She is a member of the Kalahandi group from Odisha. The working condition is very hostile; crusher machine, mixture machine, carrying of loads, watering of piers, and frequent accidents make it traumatic. What makes this site worse is the blasting that goes on, often without any warning, sometimes even taking the lives of labourers like Sadashiv. The hostile situation, especially for women, is further compounded by gambling, drinking, physical torture, abusive language, lascivious liaisons and flirtations around which females are reduced to only devalued objects. Soni, the protagonist has already gone through lots of upheavals and remains the desired object of male gaze throughout the narrative. The uniqueness of the pain that tortures Soni arises mostly from the complexity of her relationships. She is wedded to Sibanna when only eleven. Afterwards, Sibanna flees Kalahandi because of the twin disasters of drought and famine; he leaves Soni behind and goes to work with some construction company. Abandoned by her husband, Soni marries Gaurisankar who subsequently dies in an accident by drowning in the deadly Chenab's current while working for the company. A widowed and pregnant Soni, with the child of Gaurisankar, is compelled to live with Rambir, the old father of the deceased husband. There are insinuations about the relation between Rambir and Soni. Parbati even asks her if she shares the bed with this old man. Other women, rather brazenly, eye her swelling abdomen and advice her that she should have come clean – so as to cultivate new relationships. Sibanna reappears suddenly after few years and this compounds Soni's woes. Meanwhile, Parbati's husband Sadashiv keeps a lustful eye on hapless Soni. The gaze and the discourses used by the males for Soni testify that she is sought to be explored like an 'unclaimed territory.' Enraged Sadashiv bursts after receiving a slap from Soni when his advances are rejected by her:

> "… *salli* (slang) you do not have shame. It is not a shame to sleep in the old man's bed! It is shameful to go to Dharamsala! *Salli randi*[1]*"* (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 33).

[1] Whore or prostitute

Earlier Sadashiv gifts Soni a red *orana*[1], which imaginatively transforms into a piece of blood-stained cloth of the small boy whose head was crushed by Crane bucket. She cannot stand the situation and reacts violently against Sadashiv. This is a clear instance of Soni's failure to control her reactions propelled by traumatic repetition or flashback where she confuses present time with the past. In another instance, Soni accompanies Parbati to the military camp where different males assert claims upon this unclaimed territory- the body, which hints that Soni still remains a desired object. Probably Soni allows her 'body' to be claimed and thus expresses her desire to get an upper hand over the male power. It also hints at her effort to gain control over the male gaze by using her body as a shield. But she repents her action immediately afterward in this remorseful soliloquy:

"Chi, Chi! Why has she done such a thing? Why?" (87)

As already mentioned, in most of the novels by Goswami, we come across women who are victims of social oppression and whose desires do not have the social sanction. Consumed by the fire of unfulfilled desire, they are gradually driven towards self-destruction without disclosing their experiences to others. According to Tillotoma Misra, "Mamoni Raisom is undoubtedly one of the rare Indian women writers who dare to portray a woman's sexual needs as a natural right" (29). In this context, we can mention renowned French feminist Helene Cixous who has significantly asserted in her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" (875-893) that women have been "driven away violently" (875) from their bodies as well as their writing because their sexual pleasures have always been repressed. Mamoni Raisom is different in this regard. Goswami has initiated a new trend by writing frankly about female desires and pleasures so far considered a taboo in modern Indian literature right from its inception in the colonial period. Goswami's gesture can be considered as a bold statement because of the fact that she writes in a regional language belonging to a peripheral, non-cosmopolitan location. In *Chenabar Sont* the incident when Soni accompanies Parbati to military camp can be taken as a statement made in this regard, which serves a twofold purpose - her suggestion of asserting the 'physicality of body' and an endeavor at 'self-liberation.' Tillotoma Misra opines that not only in such statements but also through her use of a language which is rich in imagery and metaphors expressive of a distinctly female

[1] A small piece of cloth used by females to cover their head and breasts

eroticism, Mamoni Raisom's writing is marked by what Julia Kristeva calls "the flow of *juissance* into language" (Moi 30). Misra finds that Goswami portrays her women as a tragic generation suffering from a deep sense of guilt and remorse for their inability to rein in their libido. A bold expression of female desire can be found when Parbati, at one point bathes with Soni in the river, appreciating the breasts of the latter, suggestive of some kind of lesbian culture being nurtured silently amongst the females of this group. At the time Parbati has a sudden upcharge of emotion inside her to fondle Soni's breasts:

> "As Soni is trying to wrap her *saree* around her body, Parbati snatches the *asool*[1] from her bosom by pulling it. Startled with wonder Parbati says-
> -I have never ever seen such breasts." (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 20)

Both Soni and Parbati are victims of unfulfilled desires which have worsened their trauma. Viewed as such, Goswami's depiction comes close to a branch of *ecriture feminine*, though she is not a hardcore feminist. In the writings of Assamese women, such a theme has never been explored so boldly ever before.

At the same time, the men on the site – like Sahibs, members of Odia and other Gangs – also fix their sensual eyes upon her as they address Soni as '*Sultana*[2] … *Sultana* amid thorn' (15). This makes her life tricky at this stage – the situation gets very complex and she is forced to encounter multiple tragedies at the same time. She can be also the representative of the displaced people as a whole – away from the geographical, social and cultural terrain of Kalahandi, Kalahandi before the distress sets in. Parbati, Raghma, Rambir, Sadashiv, Gaurisankar, Sibanna share in this traumatic experience with Soni. They share geography and cultural landscape from which they have been displaced and also their common working condition and site away from native Kalahandi. Besides this commonality, each individual's pain may become unique depending upon his or her relation with the others around. This relational aspect makes the pain particular and unique, as against the universal nature of pain associated with a group or the phenomenon called displacement. Such relational, unique pain is best represented in literary texts, not in analytical, statistical handbooks.

[1] One portion of cloth spread with hands to hold something
[2] Queen

Chenabar Sont tells the story of a group of displaced labourers as a whole and the events within it are interlinked by the protagonist Soni's character. For Soni and others, this experience is like a growing and worsening wound. The wound starts with the experience of internal displacement faced twice initially: first, the overt physical/geographical displacement and secondly, the covert psychological displacement that accompanies the spatial displacement. The Kalahandi of a lush green teak forest and river turns into a parched land of starvation, non-availability of food, tamarind seeds, the appearance of vultures, and vulture-like *banias*[1] exchanging hand-full of seeds for ornaments, utensils and other valuables. This extreme condition forces them to flee, lured by company men with the prospect of work and better livelihood. With this the first phase of displacement takes place. Such change and displacement are foregrounded in the first lines of the novel; unspoiled Kalahandi that dreams of better times when *khadad*[2] and *topi*[3] clad native leaders would rule is always at the back of wounded body and psyche of these labourers. This makes their wound aggravating into an ever bleeding painful scar. Not only the body and mind but also their language is corrupted and deformed. Their language becomes something else – coming in contact with people from different linguistic backgrounds. Examples of such linguistic mixup can be found in the text itself, for example, "*utha*, *utha*…*uthhidiu*[4]" (38), "*nejan gar jui numuwar*…[5]" (85). Such loss and distortion of language hint at the possible cause and effects of trauma. Hence Scarry's assertion that "pain destroys language" (22) is justified in the textual discourse of Goswami. This kind of language becomes simultaneously a destruction and inheritance of other. For Soni and other members of the group communicating in their own language and sticking to their culture is not as important as earning some bread and butter. But even in such conditions, the importance of rituals in human life and society cannot be denied. So they organize different rituals like *Pusa Purni*, *Asad Jatra*, *Kartik Purni*[6] etc, which are reminiscent of their life in Kalahandi, their roots as well as an effort at keeping the group intact. Though not arranged on a grand scale, they observe these festivals to bond with a deeper sense of togetherness and unity against the

[1] Business man
[2] Traditional Indian elite costume
[3] Cotton cap wore by aristocratic elite Indian on their head
[4] Get up! Get up! Get up quickly
[5] Stop getting yourself burned
[6] *Pusa Purni*, *Asad Jatra*, *Kartik Purni* are some of community festivals of the labourers performed on different seasons of the calendar year

onslaught of trauma. The festivals also "replicate" their home and lend a sense of "emotional continuity" (Shenar 2004) for the displaced labourers.

Goswami's multidimensional narrative of death, disaster, personal loss and torture can be read as a representation of the objectification of 'body' and its relation to the landscape for recording trauma and its aftermath. The figure of the body is used as a trope and a medium which undeniably memorizes the repressed, concealed, un-representable story of personal loss and trauma. Metaphorically, the body is an agency which registers every wound in detail that metamorphoses into trauma in the course of the narrative time frame. In this context, we can refer to prominent trauma theories of Douglass and Vogler who assert that trauma discourse itself "is anchored in the conviction that special truths can manifest themselves in traumatized bodies" (12); the "body" as the "visible – or representable – site of trauma" (13). The healthy, beautiful, gorgeous human body loses its shape and shine due to overexposure to trauma and turns to something ugly that dispels our look from that distorted and disfigured site of trauma – the body. Thus the celebrated human body becomes an abandoned territory in the discourse of trauma and its aftermath. Here hope and positivity are replaced by abandonment and decay. Labourers, both male and female, are represented as carrying some personal histories of loss, injury in the camp in *Chenabar Sont*. Some of the characters are found to be carrying live scars on their bodies and it catches the eyes of protagonist Soni when she gives a repulsive look towards the injured labourers that speaks of Soni's unwillingness to memorise her past pains. However, Soni's pain finds a symbolic manifestation in the injured body of the labourers as the narrator says:

> "...he raised his wounded leg in front of her eyes. The leg is full of marks of the wounds of dog bites that are healing slowly.
>
> Again, some labours whose hands and heads are bandaged, straight passed Soni ... They were carrying a *khatia*[1] and on it lay a man fully covered with clothes. It was not possible to recognise the face. Then probably this is the man who fell on the pile of rods from the fourth piers." (8)

[1] A makeshift bed made of jute and wood

Thus, past has stored a number of disturbing memories for Soni which make her present existence difficult and tormenting. She cannot get rid of the memory of Gaurisankar's death; and it repeatedly haunts her. Soni now starts showing PTSD like behaviours. She loses her sleep at night, sweats excessively and feels like her existence has become suffocating. Even when she opens her window it brings the reflection of the incident back to her mind. Because of this creepy feeling, she prefers to keep this window closed. The anonymous narrator expresses Soni's wavering state of mind in this way:

> "Whenever she opens the window she can see the wave of Chenab – watch wood pieces floating in synchrony with the waves resembling the head of a crocodile. Different colours of stones are also visible … lots of wood pieces float on Chenab. He could not catch one single piece." (36)

Soni is scared to open the window. Because the visuals of floating wood pieces resemble a small *khatia* from inside her hut "as if it is very easy to hold on to them" (36) if one falls into the Chenab's water. This sight of the river makes her sad and compels her to lose control over her thought. More Soni tries to release her dormant but ever troubling emotion with cathartic effort facilitated by her memory, more she gets entangled with it. Trauma theorist Cathy Caruth compares this kind of return to a traumatic experience with a departure from its original site of occurrence. Accordingly, the complex process of trauma recreation and latency can be understood in terms of leaving/departure:

> The trauma of the accident, its very unconsciousness, is borne by an act of departure. (Caruth 1996: 22)

Soni's return to the river, the trauma site of Gaurisankar's death, is a recreation of the actual happening or the tragedy inside her mind. The visuals of floating woods on the surface of Chenab propel this recreation inside Soni's troubled psyche. Caruth and other theorists like Felman and Freud believe that trauma inherently demands a return for the incorporation of the experience into the psyche. That is why the return to the traumatic moment initiates the process of release from the past and hence a repossession of time precisely because repetition encompasses a possibility of departure. Hence, trauma becomes an experience of leaving. Thus, the complex process of the relation between repetition and trauma can be

illustrated in terms of survival. Flashback is a way to internalize that they have survived the trauma and are able to retrieve it to some extent. This seems to have been the case with Soni's experience.

There are only a few labourers in the worksite whose body enjoys basic form of health. Low on ration and high on malnutrition, they always face hunger and diseases. Goswami's use of the metaphor of a deformed female body runs parallel to the fragmented narrative of uncanny repetition and flashback. The form of repetition is itself an enactment of the traumatic split and psychic encounter with the self. Description of the hostile physical condition of the camp, the bestial fighting amongst the females, the male gaze, the portrayal of the scenes of gambling, the re-enactment of the Mahabharata gambling scene (where Draupadi was put as a bait), the representation of the river as a site of death that devours everything - are the many instances where the writer successfully scripts the trauma of displacement in this novel. At first, we will look at the central character Soni and her countering of traumatic memory. Soni is depicted as a distressed woman fighting her battle alone. We can see her mind and body being disfigured and fragmented as a result of the stress and trauma she is exposed to. Social stigma of sharing the same roof with aged Rambir (deceased Gurisankar's father) persistently taunts her. Her silence and the way she surrenders herself helplessly to God, are all but the outcome of the experience she has undergone and kind of a passive strategy of coping with the social stigma and ignominy. She gets disgusted with her body easily and this behaviour is indicative of a lack of self-acceptance and care. She does not have appetite to eat and neglects her body, which is the site of control, objectification, social categorisation and self-identification for a person. In this conflict of mind and body - her body turns foreign to her. Foreign body and mind can be understood as traumatic memories disconnected from ordinary occurrence of daily life that stays embedded in one's psyche propelling a sudden outburst of emotion at times. The foreign body here refers to a space within the mind that houses memories of trauma. Psychologist Freud links this psychic trauma to physiological phenomena in the form of "Besetzung" or "cathexis" (6) first mentioned in his *Studies on Hysteria* under this term (89). According to him the unspeakable part of experience is articulated through the body as well as through the voice. The notion of "cathexis" refers to the charge of energy in the mental apparatus, which indicates that for Freud, physic is not merely a vehicle for

explaining psychic phenomena, but apparently at the same time he believes in the physiological nature of memory and the mind (194). This view counters Caruth's argument that the trauma is articulated only by the agency of the voice and not by the body. Following the line of argument taken by Freud in discussion about the mind-body dichotomy to the traumatic inscription and articulation, we can say that Soni's apathetic responses at times is an outcome of this conflict. This spontaneous mind-body relation has regained focus in contemporary trauma studies. In the scientific discourse this is visible in Bessel van der Kolk's theoretical works which holds that traumatic memory "seems to affect people on multiple levels of biological functioning" (215). In fact, traumatic memory itself is seen as mainly corporeal; the nonverbal memory of traumatic experience produces a mark of the event on the brain as a neural pathway (van der Kolk and Lisa Fisler 1995). In *Chenabar Sont* the disturbing experience is inscribed in its literality both in and on the body. Moreover, the manipulation of the image of torn shoe allows the narrative to be inscribed in the trauma itself. The private and public trauma is metamorphosed by torn shoe that aptly depicts the deplorable state of labourers' life:

> "Since long they have been used as a pair of tattered shoes by the company. This pair is thrown to the open street after its skin peels out and the heel falls off. They are abandoned neither to be coloured nor brushed again." (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 72)

Once a labourer is out of favour of the company, he is rejected forever. He is no more necessary and remains only a derelict and useless object. He cannot perform the necessary task to be labelled as a useful body and hence should be thrown as garbage. There is no human value attached to this body. The irony that the labourer is reduced only to a body because of the excessive hardship does not matter anymore to the company. Nor is any compensation allowed to them. There is no medical attention to them as well. This aspect is clearly hinted by Rambir while he suggests the apparent lack of an organization to put forward the cause of the labourer. Rambir's banter is full of experience of reality he has seen for years. Nothing is going to change even if Sadashiv and the other labourers start a labour strike:

> "…then you think Company will not be able to use you all like shoes anymore? Start a strike. We too did the same on Zhilam Bridge. We lay in front of Rest House for

two days without taking anything. Because, that time we were five hundred men under the contractor. When the company reached the spot they announced - we have found other men. We lay hungry for two days in front of the Rest House. Then we came out. It is of no gain. Strike is of no use here. They are a team of blood-sucking vampires…" (76)

On another instance Parbati imagines her yet to be born child in the same fits of dejection:

"She is going to give birth to a baby very soon. But she cannot allow the owner of the company to use the tender skin of the baby to be wear as a torn shoe." (82)

Parbati knows that the child has no future at all. It is only a matter of time that this child becomes a useless torn shoe. Even the wives of the company officers are viewed as torn shoe. Their condition is no better, who live constantly under the ignominy and neglect from their husbands. That is why in Soni's imagination Baisaheba turns out to be a pair of 'torn shoes':

"Baisaheba is also a tattered pair of shoes." (80)

Baisaheba is portrayed in the novel as a negative character that provokes hatred, doubt, conflict in the hearts of Soni and Raghma. That is why Raghma's inner self is shaken when Baisaheba's doting figure comes in contact with Sadashiv's muscular body. Even Baisahebas's butter like feet appears to be king cobra in Soni's imagination:

"After a moment Soni imagines the feet of Baisaheba as a pair of king cobra.
But in reality, Baisaheba is a cheated woman." (67)

All of them share the consciousness of being cheated. The depiction of the characters in such a metaphorical way has helped the writer in presenting their deplorable condition effectively by drawing the reader's attention into the gripping narrative. Van der Kolk and McFarlane aptly point out that the PTSD diagnosis helps us understand the link between body and mind in trauma; traumatic stress shapes both biology/physiology and personality (4). Trauma theorist Herman takes a similar line of argument pointing that painful memory may be banished from the mind through defensive dissociation, but the effects of the traumatic experience continue to make the effect felt in the body (108). According to this

theory there is a possibility of liberating the mind from the traumatic psychosis but the body hardly forgets what it suffers and the body has the tendency to store the knowledge of the wound. In this way the corporeality of traumatic memory is embedded in the narrative structure. It is clearly seen that contemporary literary discourses on trauma emphasise the body as a medium for representing trauma in fiction. Another trauma theorist Laurie Vickroy strongly advocates the necessity of this type of representation and its effect upon the readers:

> The visceral qualities of trauma fiction […] not only make the prose memorable to readers but also immerse them in the bodily lives of the characters, helping to create a situation of intimacy between text and reader. (223)

Fictional or literary representation of trauma highlights characters' body to show how the trauma is unavailable for ordinary memory but is remembered instead through the body, in terms of bodily suffering of various kinds. This is emphasized by Vickroy and Laura Di Prete when they suggest that trauma fiction not only exposes and rejects but also interrogates and subverts culturally-inscribed identities of inferiority contingent on Western binary logic (Di Prete 12, 16, 18, 19; Vickroy 10). In the process of invoking the painful experience, the trauma alienates the survivor from his or her body that tends to shatter the mind/body correspondence. The body cannot function independent of the mind and the same post-traumatic symptoms are belatedly played out simultaneously in and through the space of both the body and the mind. Thus, the boundary line between the physical and physic tends to blur. Trauma theorist Brenda Daly cites the case of feminist philosopher, and survivor of a violent rape attack, Susan J. Brison in this way: "if memories are lodged in the body, the Lockean distinction between the memory criterion and that of bodily identity no longer applies" (143-144) which also supports the point made by symbolising through body. Crucial symptoms of PTSD such as hyper vigilance, exaggerated startle response, and sleeping difficulties "resist categorization as either mental or physical" (143). Moreover, several forms of psychological wounding such as sexual abuse and rape are also physical or bodily traumas that violate bodily integrity, and can thus be seen as an invasion of both the space of the psyche and the body. In other words, the author's effort at bearing witness to the repressed and abused female body in the novel (in its very concreteness) tends to refute

the unreliability of traumatic memory. It cannot be easily rejected as a past that is available otherwise but only in narrative form. Although based on Western socio-cultural experiences, this theory can be applied to Soni's perception and analysis of the incidents of physical abuse of labourers, especially females. Soni visualizes Sarbamati's deformed body which draws parallel to a kind of representation of the violation of bodily space to the extent of losing its integrity. The writer applies the discourse of a depressed individual that engages the onlooker and the reader in an emphatic manner:

> "Soni shuts her eyes and the scene vivifies behind her closed eyes ... as if Sarbamati is rushing towards the *gohali*[1] with fury. Her hair is spread over her shoulder; the tattered and filthy *saree*[2] keeps hanging near bare breast and hip. She is hurrying towards a calf clutching a *daa*[3] in her hand…in the meantime the old man Arjun grabs her from the behind." (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 9)

The personal trauma of physical violence has etched permanent scars on the body of female labourers and this is a significant leitmotif in their suffering. Soni reinscribes this trauma as a mapping to find a narrative for the untellable trauma. The metaphor of scars suggests one's traumatic past recorded in corporeal marks. The use of language and narrative in short sentences captures the violation done to the body of Sarbarmati, another female character. Not only her body but the whole figure gets transformed into something ugly and ominously abnormal. Nagma's carrying an extremely painful lump of flesh inside her lower abdomen is another instance of the author taking recourse to representing through body - the traumatic memory of the physical thrashing Nagma received from her husband. The memory may not be available for retelling and recapturing in the exact manner but Nagma's body does not tell a lie. The *lodda*[4] could not be burnt even after the cremation:

> "…the *lodda* did not burn."
>
> Soni was astonished.
>
> "This lump was a heap of flesh that developed inside Nagma's stomach, and showing it, she rolled over the ground in agony - because of this agony she grew old.

[1] Cowshed
[2] Type of garment Indian females use
[3] Chopper
[4] Lump of something

> She lay curled in a corner – like a bundle of bone covered with a black piece of cloth. Everyone including the *khalasis*[1] and the Labour Babu say that the Old Man (her husband) pushed her into this state by thrashing her all the time." (31)

These bodily signs and "the return to the repressed materiality of the body and hence to the body's own participation in the material world" (Conlon 5) account for realising the torture and affliction that are housed in the mind of survivours. This reading positions the novel as a "corporeal narrative" (Di Prete 19), which uses the body as its chief figure in representing traumatic inscription and its aftermath. In trauma narratives that talka about the body, which is "turned foreign, alien, and unfamiliar as the result of traumatic experience" paradoxically "becomes the vehicle through which trauma is told and, possibly, worked through" (2). Even if the mind wants to forget, the body remembers the crisis which leaves visible physical scars. A body that knows this truth, however, is a foreign body because it has been suppressed by the trauma. Goswami's panorama of characters, both male and female, is shown as carrying these signs. These labourers are displaced and distanced from their original site of trauma, and the geographical and temporal distancing has erased some portion of their memory of the tragedy. But, their body has remembered the pains and tragedies of the past. Trauma theorist Judith Herman explains the workings of trauma on human body and psyche that helps us illuminate the difficulty faced by the women labourers:

> Traumatic events violate the autonomy of the person at the level of basic bodily integrity. The body is invaded, injured, defiled. Control over bodily functions is often lost; in the folklore of … rape, this loss of control is often recounted as the most humiliating aspect of the trauma. (52)

The objectification of Parbati's body and subsequent trauma enter Soni's psyche as her bodily integrity is repeatedly challenged by males. That is expressed in the way Soni pondered over the condition of Parbati after she was lost as bait to the brutal Punjabi by her husband Sahadeo. The old Punjabi ripped Parbati's body apart like a hungry tiger devouring its prey:

[1] The man who unloads different materials from a truck

> "Her entire body bears the injury mark of the teeth and nails. The old man's teeth tear one portion of her breast. She was lying for quite a few days on the floor of company hospital." (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 38)

The old Punjabi man is not satisfied by fulfilling his sexual desire but he leaves the scar to affect the traumatic psychosis of Parbati in future. Her husband is a not only helpless witness in this case, but he has the share of violation done to his wife. While the old Punjabi uses his male power to distort the female body, the other male, her husband simply helps him by offering Parbati to him. So this kind of situation cleverly brings out the intricacy of trauma and how the situation converts the character to a helpless victim in the face of company's discourse that legitimizes violence and abuse as normalcy. The female resistance is of no use in such a situation. This degradation and comodification of the women as a bait is another instance of traumatic inscription. Accounts of sex in trauma literature, Marie-Louise Kohlke notes, problematizes the ethical function of the witnessing characteristic of this kind of text. It also puts authorial intention and reader response in question. The representations of sex acts seem to cater to authors' and/or readers' "sadomasochistic titillation-seeking by either pretending to express the humanity that was denied in the moment of violation or compensating for survivors' pain and/or readers' secondary trauma" (1). Thus, the text itself becomes a memory-site not only for remembering and bearing witness to the past traumatic moment, but also for allowing for a working through for both survivor and readers. Yet narrative representation of traumatic experiences has its shortcomings. The trauma in the novel manifests in terms of what literary critic Roberta Culbertson calls "body memories," memories preserved or remembered by the body, and progresses to what Culbertson terms "embodied memory," or "memory expressed through the body" (174, 185). Freud and Breuer indicate that the "dislocated story that the bodily symptoms tell" (206) demands a new approach to listening in the victim's suffering from hysteria. Their collective work, *Studies on Hysteria*, outlines the development of the "cathartic method" by which the dissociated affective memory can be discharged or "abreacted" once it has been made conscious through the "talking cure" (207).

The title of Goswami's novel *Chenabar Sont* refers to the gloomy shadow of the engulfing trauma. The word *sont* has a strong connotation of symbolising power, speed, and

suggests some danger, which is always threatening. The *sont*[1] is linked with labourers' lives in the intimidating working site. Study of such psychological trauma helps us confront "human vulnerability in the natural world and with the capacity for evil in human nature" (Herman 7) and comprehend the trauma to a certain extent. The presence of the strong flow/current of Chenab keeps reminding the characters of the constant threat to their existence. Like the fluidity of the stream, their existence is a replication of the incessant flow of trauma psychosis. Characters have been described as being "possessed by an image or event," and their experience as "a history that they cannot entirely possess" (Caruth 1996: 5). The flashbacks, uncontrolled repetition, horror dreams that are part of their existence, are related to the traumatised individual's effort and ability to connect to the present. Freud's suggestion regarding how "dreams seek to assert control over the stimuli retrospectively" (2003: 71) illustrates the complex relationship between repetition and trauma in terms of survival. This complexity is expressed by Caruth who explains that the trauma consists not only in having confronted death but in having survived, precisely, without knowing it. The knowledge comes only in later phase. Accordingly, the return to the traumatic site in the flashback is not the incomprehensibility of one's near death, but the incomprehensibility of one's survival. So, "repetition, in other words, is not simply the attempt to grasp that one has almost died but, more fundamentally and enigmatically, the very attempt to claim one's own survival" (Caruth, 1996: 64). The flashback brings with it a realization of having survived in the face of death and an attempt to illuminate one's own past. This prevents the victim from further damage while encouraging him/her to confront death and then turn away from it and makes survival a certain possibility. Such a portrayal occurs when Sadashiv recollects his terrorised history of personal trauma in this way while he was walking on the *zhula*[2]:

> "…it is not Chenab's current underneath. It is a rapidly flying arrow; electric current that resembles the edge of shinny *ispat* sword. The memory of Gaurisankar's death suddenly races into his mind. Earlier he would cross this '*zhula*' hopping and leaping like other *khalasis*. But today he stepped very carefully. At this moment there is a newly found love for his life. At each step, he peeped into the Chenab's water twenty feet below. Sadashiv felt that this is not the dreadful current of Chenab – but this is

[1] Current or stream
[2] A temporary arrangement for bridging a gap

an unsteady garland. This is the garland of pallid wild flower that is seen on the way from Jammu to Baishnodevi temple." (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 14)

Here, Sadashiv's flash of memory of Gaurisankar's death is an involuntary action on his part. He is reminded of the spectacle of Gaurisankar's death because of the associative link between the Chenab's terrible and mighty current that accounts for death and the loss of numerous lives. The loss of life is a recurrent phenomenon for the labourers and the river's strong current accounts for the loss of labourers' life most of the time, and thus the labourers undergo the trauma of death. Another aspect of this representation of the darker side of the Chenab's current is that this current symbolizes a kind of flow which is opposite to the static, fixed, marked nature of human habitation. This flow resembles fluidity – the movement of the life, the eternal flow humans has to submit to. So this is akin to the nature of the phenomenon of displacement. Nature does not give us scope for fixity; a static existence is against the law of nature and it follows the course of change and adaptation. Thus, the representation of the river with all its negative attributes and terrors is noteworthy. Displacement may be painful, but an unavoidable condition as shown by the novelist here. The strong current in the river proves again and again that human beings are but helpless in the face of this force. There are numerous references within the narrative to the dreaded and horrible sounds from the swiftly flowing Chenab. It appears that the labourers' life and the trauma cannot be represented effectively without referring to the current. And most of the times Chenab's current is depicted in the negative:

> "On some nights Chenab's soft murmur turns into something ominously terrible. No trace of the pebbles can be found on both the banks. It is only water and water everywhere. Company's soil bags, rods, shuttering plates are washed away. Right at this moment, Soni pitied the labourer who works above this terrible water. All the washed away utensils, dead bodies are dumped at Akhnour." (17)

Thew deaths of Sadashiv, Gaurisankar and other labourers - all appear natural to this terrible co-existence. They are drowned to death in this sont of the Chenab. The deaths of the labourers and their proximity to the river are a link that the writer makes repeated references to. Symbolically, this can be taken as a hint of Nature's response to devaluation and corruption of the landscape. The blasting of the rock on the riverbed kills Sadashiv, which

can be viewed as a murder on the part of the company. But the river is ironically attached to them forever and their life will go on as long as the Chenab flows. Even the last scene of the novel is back in the midst of the river. Giving an ecocritical twist to our understanding of Goswami's representation we can view the multiple deaths in the light of what Kerridge considers as "threatened loss of landscapes," "the industrialization of countries" and health issues such as cancer and "fertility and reproductive health" (5). The depiction of the situation leading to Sadashiv's death makes this point clear:

> "Sadashiv lay on his back upon the *khatia*. There was a stone under the *khatia* weighing only three kilos. The blasted stone hit Sadashiv's abdomen travelling with the speed of a bullet after it pierced the tin shed ... there is no injury mark on his body except the slightly bloated bare abdomen. It appears as if Sadashiv is sleeping very peacefully. But, Sadashiv was no more. Sadashiv died! Sadashiv died!" (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 70)

Sadashiv, the healthy individual is killed, instead of the tattered and disfigured others. The stone did not cause any harm to Parbati, who was sleeping beside Sadashiv at that moment. This is a possible suggestion of the effect of "threatened loss of landscapes" upon human life. We discern the instance of man-made corruption and "threatened loss of landscapes" in the very first lines of the novel when Soni is utterly frustrated with the way the green pastures are diminishing day by day. The loss of natural landscape and greenery has the capacity to affect humans adversely. Soni releases a deep, cold sigh that assumes the proportion of a wound in the beginning of the narrative:

> "Today, suddenly the brass coloured rusted tools that have covered the soft green grassland appeared as an ugly scar to her." (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 7)

It is not for nothing that that the iron tools appeared as a scar in Soni's perception. There are other implications of this scar. Let us consider Goswami's view on such a topic. Responding to a question on human and nature co-existence in her novels, Goswami refers to some of the central philosophical concepts of Hinduism mentioned in *The Upanishads*:

> There is a *sloka* in *Upanishads* which tells one thing - in the relationship that is there between human and nature one should not encroach the other's (space). The world

will be beautiful if that relationship exists. (*Mamoni Raisom Goswamir Rachna Samagra* 574)

Kalahandi, that used to be a beautiful lush green pasture once, transforms into a dull, barren piece of land now because of the human trespassing into nature's territory. This shift in the fortune or reversal of appearance of nature has intrigued human minds, and the peaceful co-existence between human and nature is disturbed. There is an apparent loss of balance that is resurfacing in the troubling memory of Soni. At this moment of emotional wobbling Soni becomes aware of the corruption of the landscape as well as of the abuse of female body. The beautiful landscape that has already disappeared re-emerges in Soni's memory which becomes an emotionally invested space. This becomes a point of connection between the past and the present time, and proves crucial to protagonist's efforts of recalling a traumatic past. Thus, the psychological disintegration of identity inherent in individual trauma is invariably intertwined with the landscape in the novel. Soni tries to possess the memory so that she can own the traumatic experience, the history of a trauma, and convey it to others. This issue of conveying trauma by way of memory is something which has been debated in recent years by theorists like Caruth (1995) and Hartman (1995). But the Western notion of "memory as property" (Haaken 110) can be problematic in the context of trauma as we understand it in the novel. Survivors have been described as being "possessed by an image or event" and their experience as "a history that they cannot entirely possess" (Caruth 1995: 5). Still it is the memory through which the survivor can try to recount. Industrialisation transforms the Greenland Kalahandi to a heap of "crane's bucket, oxygen cylinder, crab, pipes, concrete plate, crusher tools etc" (Goswami 7) threatening fertility and reproductive health of the land. These lines highlight the strong undercurrents of the soreness running through the veins of Soni for years. Whenever Soni talks about Kalahandi, her tone bears sadness equal to the tormenting memory that becomes a persistent scar. The place that she adored once with love and affection has become a fading memory. They are forced out of the place because of the natural calamities. The famine, starvation, lack of basic amenities of life etc. are always there with them. In fact the nature's response to human mismanagement of the limited resources is a bit harsh. The markers of Kalahandi keep haunting them like a nightmare, a persistent memory:

> "What would they do by returning home? They have sold their cattle, utensils. They would die starving if they go back. After the third and fourth round of thunder storm the government has asked them to remove their camp, so they have started leaving the camp one after the other. She has lot more to tell about Kalahandi. But Soni does not tell anything." (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 9)

Caruth opines that trauma demands a return for the incorporation of the experience into the psyche of survivors (1995: 152). The return to the traumatic moment after a gap signifies a release from the past. This can be termed as an effort of repossessing the past and a possible departure from the past. In other words, trauma becomes an experience of leaving. The pertinent question that arises is, whether the traumatic event should be restricted to human infliction of trauma, which tends inevitably to raise issues of evil and moral judgment, or to include natural events as well (Douglass and Vogler 22).

Is it plausible to compare catastrophic events such as environmental toxicity with human-induced trauma? Do we respond in like manner to survivors of natural disasters and environmental degradation as to those of human-initiated violence? Judith Herman answers in the negative because human-induced trauma invariably raises the spectre of blame and responsibility. For Herman, "when the traumatic events are of human design, those who bear witness are caught in the conflict between victim and perpetrator" (7). However, recently with increased awareness of the human responsibility for many environmental catastrophes, the boundaries between human-inflicted suffering and natural events have started to blur. Some natural calamities are sometimes the result of human intervention. For example, an environmental catastrophe, which in turn may be linked to political or economic forces, in which trauma frequently has its origin. In *Chenabar Sont*, the death of Sadashiv is a clear instance of the side effect of human interruption of nature's force, which shows human vulnerability in the face of nature. In the words of Herman:

> To study psychological trauma is to come face to face both with human vulnerability in the natural world and with the capacity for evil in human nature. (7)

Present day trauma theorists put emphasis on exploring the connection between social issues and trauma and what can be referred to as cultural-political dimension of trauma. The

cultural and socio-political aspect leads us to explore the environmental aspect of trauma as well. Human beings often put the blame upon nature for social problems like displacement induced by drought, famine, starvation etc. But in reality, numerous social problems lead to environmental degradation and critical issues beyond repair which may accumulate to serious threats (Bennett 2001: 33; Garrard 29; Rigby 155; Coupe xi; Buell 2005: 8). So it becomes imperative to broaden our focus and highlight man-made artificial environments in order to do justice to the link between human oppression and manipulation of nature. Ecocritic Greg Garrard correctly points out that "literal and irreducibly material problems," should be identified as it are no more necessary that "scientific problems are never separable from cultural and political ones" (168). The devaluation of both nature and women can be viewed from this perspective. This is what the writer suggests through the figure of Neer Amma, the first victim of Kalahandi's famine. She works as a housekeeper with a Thakur family. When an unknown and mysterious disease infects her she is chased out from his home by Thakur. Her hands and legs dry up and gradually she appears like an aging vulture. Her skin comes out in different parts as if she is suffering from leprosy. Neer Amma epitomizes the fate of the entire labour class and their endless miseries. There is no escape from the fate she is destined to - *fota kotha*[1], soot like dark mosquito net, "resembling a vulture groping a dead, rotten, lacerated cow whose innards lay scattered everywhere" (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 77). Sarbamati and Neer Amma testify to the deprecation of women as bodies exposed to the violation in the text. It will not be wrong to say that all the females in the novel face the same kind of fate - neglected, terrorized, victimized but with a difference in degree only. Even the white Baisaheba is depicted as a deserted figure in the novel:

> "She is a deprived woman! Although the beauty of every part of her body transformed deceptively into sublime successfully concealing her cries…her face could hide nothing…Sibanna has not seen such a face." (67)

Deformed bodies and corrupted landscapes are not the only tropes used by the writer; the repeated reference to death is another specific design used in the narrative structure. Death of another labourer Gaurisankar works as a leitmotif woven into Soni's memory that focuses

[1] Ragged blanket

on her fluctuating state of mind and the overwhelming nature of trauma. While Soni is brooding over the behaviour of the gang leader towards her, named Met, she tries to compare Gaurisankar's demise with the old father of the Met who died during last famine:

> "His father died during last famine due to starvation. The old man died without harming anyone; but why did Gaurisankar die? A strange agony starts writhing up inside her heart. But she is not a woman who will yield to this agony. She tries to remember Kalahandi, she is reminded of Sarbamati." (9)

Again:

> "The wage Babu tells Soni in a very rude but realistic tone: Take it, attend the duty properly from tomorrow - people die, no one can stop ... go, you will also die one day." (11)

Death becomes a mundane reality and ordinary occurrence; death does not terrorise the labourers anymore, but starvation does. They are scared to face the loneliness, aftermath of the death of their near and dear ones, though it has become a normal situation for them. So they say indifferently - "people die" (11). This realisation comes from their experience of watching death from close quarters, though images of death can become a paralysing experience for the witness and hampers daily life.

Goswami suggests that female jealousy is an indispensable part of their existence at the working site. The fellow women in the novel do not show any sympathy for Soni. Rather they keep on tormenting Soni with their scathing comment and ridicule. The woman devoid of any motherly care and warmth is shown as an aberration here. It can be another manifestation of their excessive exposure to a traumatic and distressing situation which has squeezed all the humane qualities from the females. The sense of attachment to a particular place is lost as they rolled from place to place – not only with the place they have lived once but also with their fellow human. This is an utter degradation of human nature. Another instance of such behaviour is found when Shanti cannot hide her banter while she sees a pregnant Soni and she almost shouts:

> "You returned from Kalahandi without doing anything? You should have come clean. Now you will realise how many hurdles you have to cross carrying this bag of salt within you." (11)

But the absence of a proper family life makes Soni a resolute woman. Soni does not abort the baby. It is a kind of defence against the patriarchal setup and norms that have been imposed by fate. Defying the shame element and fighting the adversity of life – these two qualities have made her strong as a character. Shame has traditionally shaped the experience of Indian women under patriarchal setup and links it to low self-esteem and depression in the sufferer. Soni, on the other hand, is able to fight the trauma associated with shame. This is also a symbol of the willingness to fight the trauma on the part of the character. Moreover, Soni is alienated from her surrounding and considers her fellow labourers as something 'other'- both male and female. Whether it is Parbati, Raghma, Rambir or Sadashiv, she cannot be open to anyone of them. Because of this demarcation as the other, she does not find a listener to whom she can relate her innermost feelings in the most candid manner possible. So, she gives vent to her soliloquy as testimony. Trauma theorist Shoshana Felman defines testimonial act in this manner:

> To testify ... is more than simply to report a fact or an event or to relate what has been lived, recorded and remembered. Memory is conjured here essentially in order to address another, to impress upon a listener, to appeal to a community ... To testify is thus not merely to narrate but to commit oneself, and to commit the narrative, to others. (1992: 204)

The readers are only the recipients of an emotionally charged testimony recorded by the writer through the character. Soni's behaviour and response to her present condition are the testimonies of painfully transmitted shocking events that she recreates in her memory. Dominick LaCapra explains that the "working through" of trauma starts when the survivor is able to arrange chronologically the fragmentary pieces that come to the conscious mind as nightmares or flashbacks (21-22). On the other hand psychologist Freud and Breuer, regarding their studies on hysteria opine that original traumatic event must "find a way out through speech" in order to incorporate it "into normal consciousness" (68). Both these theories hold that trauma must come back to one's psyche to gain some control over it. The

traumatic event is not fully assimilated on its first occurrence, so it must be repeated to comprehend, at least partially if not fully. According to the psychiatrist Judith Lewis Herman (1994), there are three stages in the healing process: safety, remembrance or mourning and the reconnection with ordinary life, which are embodied by characters in *Chenabar Sont*. Soni's disinterestedness and reluctance to talk to anybody can be related to her loss of confidence in relationships. She has only seen disoriented families that hardly attach value to the cultivation of a healthy relationship. Her first husband Sibanna deserts her and she cannot come out of that initial jolt thereafter. Whenever this name comes to her mind she feels an intense hatred and disgust running inside her for Sibanna. This feeling makes her crippled as an individual and she digs a well in herself where she could sink into her inner recess. This may be an effective strategy on the part of Soni, but unknowingly she distances herself from her fellow worker. The writer uses the image of *mohura*[1] to explain Soni's inner turmoil:

> "Soni raises her head. But she could not smile – neither could she pronounce a word. Parbati tried a lot to make her talk while they were returning home. But Soni could never be easy again. She has found a large *mohura* so that she can plunge into her 'self'. Parbati had no idea exactly how long Soni has travelled with the thread of the *mohura.*" (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 20)

This habit of immersing deep into one's own psyche overpowers her again in "peculiar and uncanny way" (Caruth 1996: 1) when she is alone. She is sitting alone on a big flat stone by the river. And she ponders:

> "At this time while she sits on, usually one woman emerges from inside her and immerses into Chenab's water looking for something. Today also that woman comes out from inside her and enters Chenab's water to search something." (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 18)

Soni fails to tell her trauma and it remains as "non-symbolizable wound" (Ronell 324) in her unconscious. Like a specter, her past repeatedly haunts her in the form of trace or sign in her memory. According to Ronell, the crisis of verbalizing ones thoughts, "consists in the fact

[1] Bobbin

that trauma can be experienced at least in two ways … as a memory that one cannot integrate into one's own experience, and as a catastrophic knowledge that one cannot communicate to others" (313 – 14). Slavoj Žižek puts it in other words: "what repeats is the very failure, impossibility even to repeat/recollect the trauma properly" (36).

The physical displacement has led to the degradation and degeneration of the female nature of love and care. They have lost the capacity to feel and sympathise with the sufferer. They interpret Soni's helpless condition in a negative way without any sign of empathy or sympathy. Crossing all the limits of ethics and morality they hint at Soni's illicit relationship with Rambir and when Soni objects to this they reply arrogantly. The narrator puts the taunts in this way:

> "Like a whipped dog they started snarling. What wrong are we saying! The world is watching with whom you reside. And you say we have sinned! You bitch!" (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 11)

The image of the disfigured, spoiled childhood – the lost innocence, is another recurring motif throughout the narrative. Parbati's children are malnourished and always cry for food. The basic amenities like education and hygiene are a far cry for them. Physically they appear dirty and pale, devoid of the tenderness and beauty of childhood. They are narrated in that way so as to make it realistic and that the representation remains true and achievable. Nowhere does the narrator say that the child suffers from the trauma but has described the scenes and the trauma that the child undergoes and this description is really vivid. For example, if we examine the piece of narrative where the two children are portrayed we will find the dominance of negative attributes attached to childhood:

> "Raghma's two naked boys Channu and Chattu who resemble a devil came close to her mouth and started snatching the rooti that she was about to put into her mouth. They even tried to snatch from inside her mouth."
>
> She growled edgily:
>
> "Why do eat roti, you beast? – Rather you must devour me." With these words, she pushed Channu by his arm. He fell down near Soni's ankle and started crying. (22)

The children do not have enough food; neither do they get enough love from their parents. Food is a basic need for the children, and hungry children cannot have a carefree childhood. Here, the need for a mother's love is transferred into the craving for food. The way Chattu keeps peeping into others' homes for food is a manifestation of the lack of love and the search for it. Theorist Christine Lorre indicates that the "perspective of the children is limited and the world they depict is often a small one, as opposed to that of the grown-ups. It is a world of sensation rather than analysis, of play and imagination rather than reality" (72). The labourer cannot afford a life with minimum quality that offers play and imagination for their children. But, unlike other women in the novel, Soni has not lost her humanity amidst the overwhelming presence of brutality and she lifts Chattu carefully:

> "His hair is red, straight, unkempt and neglected. It was a skin hanged to a skeleton. It is like the dry straw of *Taal*. She puts a piece of rooti in his mouth. He stops crying immediately. Chattu has a habit of peeping into other's home in search of food." (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 22)

Towards the end of the novel the writer hints at a better future for Soni and other labourers when he says:

> "There is no trace of Kalahandi's famine here … the monkey too eat grapes here … wear silky watches." (81)

But this better future will only materialize if the labourers are able to fight and gain some control over their trauma and suffering.

Thus, Goswami's *Chenabar Sont* becomes a memory site for trauma within its textual space where the links between the trauma inflicted upon human by human and trauma borne out of corruption of nature is represented. We come across different tropes like female body, spoilt landscapes, distorted human body and psyche; the abuse done upon it is also foregrounded in the novel. This study argues that literary fiction such as *Chenabar Sont* not only calls for an interpretation that pays attention to the cultural context in which the trauma is produced and perpetuated but also opens up a space for reading trauma belatedly that allows for a working through for both protagonist and reader as emphatic witnessing. In other words, trauma fiction can replace physical or geographical places as sites of memory

and witnessing; as Jane Smiley herself puts it, “You don’t write a novel to salve a wound, but to bear witness” (8).

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Chapter III

Jangam: The Flight of the Displaced

> They have come out after covering a small section of this huge *Chakrabehu*[1] of Nature – a major portion of it is still left in the depths of Hukawng valley.
>
> Debendranath Acharyya

> Unlike other forms of psychological disorders, the core issue in trauma is reality.
>
> Bessel A. Van der Kolk

The fast-changing political scenario and reversal of world power equation during the World War II affected one and all across the world and Bramhadesh was no exception to it. World War II is one of the major tragedies that have shaken human civilization and left many questions unanswered. Large-scale violations of human rights, acute poverty, innumerable deaths, dislocation of people in massive scale are a few amongst many crises begotten by World War II. But all the events that have happened during World War II is not documented in the history of that period and the "forgotten long march" (Tinker 5) is one of the least documented events of this period across genres. This forgotten long march or the neglected chapter of human predicament refers to the infamous exodus of estimated 450000-500000 Burmese Indians to British Indian colony during World War II. Historians like Martin Smith and R. K. Ranjan Singh have opined that this exodus is a result of a long-nurtured hatred for Indian origin people, mostly the *Chettiar*[2] moneylenders that have inhabited Burma since the British colonial era (see Smith, Singh). Large numbers of Indian origin people belonging to different socio-economic backgrounds have migrated to Burma in search of better livelihood since its incorporation into British Indian state in 1885. Some of them migrated voluntarily while others were forcibly taken as indentured labours by the

[1] A Strategic war formation of clusters of defenses where each interleaving position would be increasingly difficult to pierce

[2] Various mercantile, agricultural and land owning castes in South India especially Tamil Nadu and Kerala

shrewd Britishers and "Indian migrants and settlers were the most visible faces of the colonial dominion of Burma" (Pandian 182) leading to a steady growth of anti-India feelings amongst a section of Burmese nationals. This hatred soon transformed into an anti-India riot that attained its peak after the Japanese attack of Myanmar and subsequent British retreat. Indian origin Burmese settlers ran back to India in panic and almost 50,000 people died during the forgotten long march or the death march to India. Debendranath Acharyya's novel *Jangam* (The Movement) depicts this horrible journey of Indian refugees towards a place called Ledo in Assam through the hilly passes of the Hukawng Valley. In this chapter, an attempt is made to examine Acharyya's *Jangam* as a discourse on the trauma that depicts the geographical and psychological dislocation of the Indian contingent across the international border in the light of recurrent trauma theories. Geographical dislocation or cross-border expulsion on racial line is analysed as a psychological and existential crisis that has resulted in madness and amnesia in the life of victims. It would not be wrong to say that displacement resulting from war has become a common phenomenon in the history of man of late. It is especially true of the people from those nations and states which are made the battleground for the stake-holders of world power equation.

Historically, Acharyya's *Jangam* is a crucial text written in a neat style and compact with the "thickness of perception" and "enhanced hybrid gaze" (see Das). The plot realistically depicts the historically unacknowledged march of the Indian nationals from Burma to India braving the inhospitable nature, displaying indomitable human spirit to survive. This march is termed as 'death march.' It is the story of a whole race of people chased away from their home owing to their foreign roots. During World War II Myanmar (Bramhadesh or Burma) was won over by the Japanese forces from the English forces. This led to the unreasonable and mostly violent backlash from Burmese people or the supporter of particularistic/singular nationalism on different communities having an Indian origin identity. Although the magnitude and loss of human lives during this exodus was almost similar to the humanitarian crisis of India-Pakistan partition of 1947, it hasn't received much attention from the historians and academicians alike; it has gone largely unnoticed in national narrative of history as well, except Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Place* (2000) and Siddhartha Deb's *An Outline of the Republic* (2006) that have included brief segments about this deadly march. Amitav Ghosh himself admitted the silence on the massive exodus from

Burma. However, with the publication of Ghosh's novel *The Glass Palace*, there has been a "slow but steady trickle of memoirs in English about this harrowing trek" (A. R. Baishya 177). On the other hand, the genre of cinema has made a passing reference to this sheer humanitarian tragedy in the past in films like *Shabnam* (Hindi 1949), *Parasakthi* (Tamil 1952) and *Dhumuha* (Assamese 1957). Perhaps, Debendranath Acharyya's *Jangam*, in Assamese remains the only text in Indian literary history to record this tragedy in detail in the fictional narrative in any language. But unlike Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* which concentrates basically on the Indian and Burmese bourgeoisie in urban centers like Rangoon, Acharyya, in *Jangam*, has shifted his focus towards the unfortunate Indian contingent while they march forward through the treacherous and dangerous forest from the fictional hamlet of Manku near Mandalay across the Hukawng Valley. This chapter will study how Acharyya has used the tropes of madness and traditional family structure to convey the trauma psychosis in the characters that has led to an existential crisis for this estranged Indians. However, Acharya is perhaps wrong in making such generalized statements like "hardly any signs of this massive calamity that faced humankind (WWII) registered in our literature" (Foreword to *Jangam*). Some of the novels that depicted war experience prior to *Jangam* are Jogesh Das's *Dawar Aru Nai* (1955), Birendrakumar Bhattacharyya's *Iaruingam* (1960) and short stories "*Netaji aru Ingaijong*" (1962) and "*Agyat Japani Sainik*" (1962) and Jyotiprasad Agarwala's play *Lobhita* (1942). But these texts do not make any reference to the forgotten long march, and thus Acharyya's *Jangam* remains the only novel to document the massive human exodus details in fiction – the forgotten long march. Renowned critic Tillotoma Misra says that Acharyya has achieved a skillful combination of history, realism and allegory in *Jangam* (Misra 14).

An engineer by profession Debendranath Acharyya (1937-1981) is among the few novelists of Assam who showed rare artistic brilliance in a short literary career. A B. Tech graduate from IIT, Kharagpur and an aluminous of London University, he has written important novels namely *Anya Yug Anya Purush* (1970), *Kaalpurush* (1976), *Raktorag* (1982) and *Jangam* (1982). His first novel *Anya Jug Anya Purush* depicts the upcoming changes in the rural society of Assam in the contexts of modernization. This novel along with his next publication *Kaalpurush* establishes him as a novelist of repute; the later one wins him Assam Publication Board Award in the year 1978. His craft attains its full maturity

with the publication of *Jangam* and he is awarded Sahitya Academy posthumously in 1984 for *Jangam*. Ex-president of Assam Sahitya Sabha and Sahitya Academi Awardee Chandra Prasad Saikia regards *Jangam* as one of the "best Assamese novels which demands uniqueness in subject matter and narrative style" (Saikia, Preface to the first edition of *Jangam*). While analyzing Acharyya's craft renowned literary critic Gobinda Prasad Sarma admits that had Acharyya written only *Anya Yug Anya Purush*, he would have been rated highly as a novelist (150). All his three novels take its material from history and illuminate some unrecorded events from history's repository. His novels bear this extraordinary capacity in incorporating sagas from history into his plots and enlighten them not only with a rich repository of information about our past but also pointing out the ambiguities in our approach to historical narrative forcing us to see through the layers of manipulated truths. His *Anya Yug, Anya Purush* takes the subject matter from the history of places near Jorhat town from the Burmese invasion to the Second World War where Beng Bellester as the protagonist. *Kaalpurush* records a witness's account of a segment of Ahom history from the *Battle of Saraighat* (1671). These two novels, along with *Jangam* tell the life of "characters unacknowledged by history" (Acharyya, *Kaalpurush* ii). Among all his novels *Jangam* stands tall because of his treatment of the largely untouched saga of violent human displacement with its incorporation of omniscient third person narrative style. In Assamese language, *Jangam* literally means movement, unceasing movement. Settled human life is put to a temporary thaw in this movement that can be treated as the dynamic flow of history – the displacement. Often this flow catches individuals/families and communities in its eddy and sweeps them away, from place to place causing violent displacement. Poverty, armed conflicts are but agents of this cosmic flow, primordial movement. *Jangam*'s narration is packed with horrible, moving images of death and mutilation during the fleeing death march that can be taken as quite common given the political scenario of the period. This perspective is quite usual while approaching the theme of the traumatic legacy of war upon the individuals as well as communities that provokes reader's powerful identification with the characters. *Jangam* is an example of this, in which the trauma of displacement that constitutes the refugee experience is essentially one of loss of home, loved ones either left behind, killed, or who have ended up in alternative destinations in search of a home. In this process, they are constantly trying to negate the feeling of homelessness, destitution and

loneliness, but only in vain. This chapter investigates how the theme of *Jangam* conceptualizes trauma of geographical and existential dislocation as the reference point for multiple spatio-temporal co-ordinates at the same time.

In *Jangam*, trauma is intricately connected to the ambiguities of war. The crux of the story of *Jangam* lies in the backdrop of Japanese force rescuing Bramhadesh from British imperialistic force during World War II and subsequent displacement of Indian origin families by the young Burmese rebels who are mostly a group immersed in the discourse of hardcore nationalism and safeguarding "exclusive territorial claims and purified forms of identity" (Cohen 516). The setting of the story is the fictional hamlet called Manku near Mandalay on the bank of Irrawaddy during the time of World War II. The storyline starts with the anonymous third-person narrator briefing the readers with the dark history of bloodshed and terror entangled with age-old superstition and uncivilized cultural practice or rituals relating to Ava and Amarpur, the two abandoned capitals of Burma near Manku. The narrator's comment upholds writer's portraiture as he says that "the capitals borne out of superstitious dream and prediction have decayed. The foundation stone of human sacrifice and brutality is covered with mosses" (Acharyya, *Janam* 21). Manku is inhabited mainly by poverty-stricken Indian farmers resembling "*guri poruwa*"[1] (7) and wretched Burmese landowners who have already mortgaged everything to Indian *Chettiars*. The co-operation and harmony between Indian origin people and Burmese people are foregrounded in the metaphor of *poriyal*[2] - with the Burmese as *kokai*[3] and the Indians as *bhai*[4]. The World War II has already started and rounds of rumors about the war and Burmese rebels terrify the poor Indian farmers in Manku. The panic-inducing quality of rumors divides the two communities into ethnic lines and Indian farmers set out towards British India with only a few possessions with them "because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order" (OAU 1969). The Indian settlers are living on Burmese land for generations and now suddenly they find themselves at crossroads of forced displacement lurking over and indicating the apparently

[1] Tiny red ants
[2] Assamese synonym for family
[3] Elder brother
[4] Younger brother

impossible task of crossing over the dangerous terrains and forests to India. Here is an excerpt from *Jangam* that introduces the prevailing gloom and panic to readers:

> "Groups after groups of Indian people are absconding to the villages from cities that are being bombed. Still, they are not spared. The Burmans have inflicted brutal torture on them. Several hundred of people are killed, property of thousands of people are looted"- Nitu gave a detailed account of the chaos and death that prevailed in Rangun, "killings and looting are happening in broad daylight in Rangun's royal streets. To add to the chaos jails and lunatic asylums are flung open. Lunatics, killers, thief-dacoits are moving on the streets." (Acharyya, *Jangam* 41)

After this initial depiction, the dreadful journey of Indian origin people including the family of Burmese-Indian Ramgobinda and his fellow-villagers through dangerous forest and treacherous topography assumes centre stage in the plot. During this Death March many people die due to fatigue, diseases, hunger and lack of other necessary amenities. The less fortunate do not get any chance of fleeing and are killed mercilessly by Burmese rebels. Rest of the plot is woven around Ramgobinda and his family. Years ago Ramgobinda's parents are forced to leave their home and hearth somewhere in North – Central India, and move to Manku in Bramhadesh. The cause of this migration is extreme poverty. Manku is a village of twenty-odd families which is a mix of both Burmese and Indian living peacefully as a *poriyal* of "*kokai – bhai*" (7). People like Ramgobinda have never been to India, the land of their ancestors and neither has he had any information about to which part of it they belong. However, the local Burmans have also been displaced by poverty from the Northern reaches of Irrawaddy River. In this sense the local Burmese are also displaced, geographically dislocated from different parts of Bramhadesh. This common experience of displacement and poverty explains the intimate bond of co-operation between the Burman and the Indian families in Manku. Remembering this bond, and the love and affection he received from the Indian families when he was a child, Nungnao helps them flee Bramhadesh and cross the river Irrawaddy, and pays dearly with his life. Interesting point to note is that Nungnao, a supporter of Burmese nationalism is punished by the rebels because of his empathy for the poor Indian families. This fire coupled with the late bloom of nationalism and anti-Indian riot spares none, not even Nungnao, the local Burmese youth.

The disruption of the settled life of peace, if not prosperity, is again disturbed by the Japanese invasion and bombing and the British retreat during the hardship of Second World War. It is the time when Burma becomes the battleground for both the forces. The young Burmese nationalist rebels use it as an opportunity to snatch Burma from these exploiting Indians – the *Chettiars* and *Mahajans*[1], Indian moneylenders who have exploited the Burmese landowners. In the wake of the rise of Burmese nationalism poor peasants like Ramgobinda have simply become scapegoats. Ramgobinda, his aged mother, pregnant wife Lachhmi, son Thanu, Ballav, Budhu and his old mother, Chinti, Haricharan, Nitu - all leave Manku secretly at night with whatever they could carry. This unfortunate group starts its ill-fated and extremely dangerous journey towards India after crossing the Burmese border through dangerous terrains of Hukawng valley towards Ledo in Assam; and with a thin hope in their heart of staying alive and fighting destiny at the same time while moving slowly, mostly at night. They undertake this hazardous journey through forests and over hills and across many rivers, often without water, food and with the persistent danger of being ambushed by the hostile villagers – whether Kachins, Chinas and Burman – is always there. Ramgobinda and Buddhu's aged mothers and Ballav fail to survive the terrible journey. On the way they are overwhelmed by the sights and sounds of death and destruction and reach the border of Assam in about a month. On the way, they are joined by Father Berry and a young Anglo-Burmese woman called Ma-Pu, alias Marry. They are also fleeing the war zone. During this Death March, Ramgobinda and Thanu get separated from Lachhmi with her newborn son. Devastated by the loss of his family members and overwhelmed with sights of death and terror, Ramgobinda loses his sanity and shows symptoms of amnesia.

Besides death and destruction, this second displacement or re-displacement caused by war, results in a more devastating and dehumanizing condition of the loss of memory and sanity. It can be termed as re-displacement because the second generation of the displaced (settled for a moment) is forcibly uprooted again to start the journey back to the place of their forefathers, who were the first generation of the displaced in search of safe and secure place. The second generation of the displaced can be termed as refugees while their forefathers are migrants. Here at this point we should note that Ramgobinda and his fellow

[1] Land owner

movers are not the type of refugee that denotes a person who "owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality" (OAU 1969). On the contrary, they are refugees or people moving back to their country of origin seeking refuge from the country of their present dwelling on account of these events. For the first generation displcement is a voluntary activity – a movement in search of better life and economic prosperity, while refugees are fleeing war zone, they cannot return home safely. In military hospitals and camps insane people constitute a big crowd. One of them is Ramgobinda and the other is Lachhmi. In this dark narrative of despair, death and destruction the hint of romantic love between Ma-Pu and Chinti provides a kind of bright spot. Traumatic pain, in general, results from loss and leads to losses. When the pain of loss is too much - it deranges man - leads to the 'loss of memory and sanity' because trauma is more of a psychic phenomenon, than somatic**.** Lachhmi and Ramgobinda suffer this loss of their most essential asset as human beings - their memory and sanity. This is the worst and most terrible effect of any traumatic experience. Ramgobinda and Lachhmi, in the end, become an epitome of such traumatic experience. But their cat Mini - gets going with the flow of time without showing any change of behaviour. What is more interesting is that, quite unlike humans the cat shows extraordinary capacity to identify its owner, Lachhmi. Trauma has the potential of dehumanisizing, but, animals like Mini are shown as living a normal life untouched by the war at the same psychic level as humans do. At the same time, for the capitalist Chettiars like Jagat and Mahajans - displacement is of little consequence. In fact they hardly suffer at in the same level as the other characters and they seem to have taken it as a mere change of business location. What is displacement for Ramgobinda and others is relocation and business as usual for Chettiar moneylenders like Jagat. In this narrative - the loss of property, of native place, companionship, homeland and of life caused by displacement is pivotal to the understanding of the characters' response to trauma they face. As mentioned already, in the case of Ramgobinda's family, displacement happens twice - first displacement occurs when his parents leave India and second displacement is faced by Ramgobinda, the second generation, when he is chased away from Manku with other Indians. In addition to this, he experiences psychological displacement

from the emotional comfort and sense of belongingness to his private and emotionally invested space called home. The worst sufferers of displacement are shown to be the women – Ramgobinda's aged mother and his wife Lachhmi, Buddhu's mother, and even Ma-Pu are only few to mention. References to Abbha, Amarpur, Mandalay and Rangoon – the capitals, the Kings, the human sacrifices on a massive scale – make this movement spatio-temporal; as well as eternal and universal. The author's knowledge of history and geographical location is also noteworthy. Love, separation, depression, river bank civilization, superstition, dream element - these are other aspects upon which the writer has highlighted to represent trauma in this novel. This meticulous description of a tragic tale of the estranged Indian contingent towards Assam is rated highly by different critics including Chandra Prasad Saikia who says that the novelist has depicted the story of this "historical migration in a lively manner where the novelist's imagination has come alive" (Saikia, Preface to the first edition of *Jangam*). On one side there is the struggle for existence of wretched humans, on the other there is proclamation of triumph of the eternal flow of human emotions of love. These are part of a rich tribute to Acharyya's talent in handling of historical details and moulding them into a novel.

Many times human civilization has been torn apart by catastrophes such as wars. Major historical events have important material, geopolitical and economic consequences for human society that challenge a society's self-confidence. In this regard, one is drawn back to the numerous definitions of trauma pointing at an overwhelming state of feelings of depersonalization, fragmentation and disjuncture derived by theorists like Caruth, LaCapra etc (see Caruth, LaCapra). In *Jangam* we can see how trauma invades the life of all the characters, burdening them with the feelings of loss, isolation, and leaving them grappling with the experience of displacement at both physical and psychological levels. *Jangam* becomes a trauma testimony of such disorders as disorientation, insanity, depression and severe anxiety disorder that metamorphose into an existential crisis. Thus, this study will address and discuss two correlated questions: how does Acharyya fictionalize the experiences of trauma, memory, and identity in the novel? And, in what ways is such representation significant in living through the dislocation and the horrible journey across difficult and threatening geography during the World War II?

Acharyya has made use of the trope of madness and a symbolic family structure to elucidate how trauma can tear apart all the protective layers of the human psychic mechanism leading a helpless human to insanity in *Jangam*. Love, compassion, togetherness, and family bonding all act as psychological cushioning during the time of tragedy in human lives. Even after horrible and catastrophic events when the displaced people cross national borders it is seen that "transnational families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity" (Bryceson and Vuorela 3). Once dispossessed of all these attributes humans are vulnerable to any kind of external threats. Loss of memory and sanity of the protagonist after his separation from his wife is central to the theme of *Jangam.* Moreover, Acharyya has shown the structure of the family of the protagonist through the lens of separation and reunion which has validated the importance of these traditional institutions in countering the sense of homelessness during the time of traumatic dislocation. Love and family support equip the protagonist in regaining his sanity and thus help tackle his existential crisis effectively. In his study of *Jangam*, A. R. Baishya examines the use of the family structure in Acharyya's text by placing it with a "pre-existing narrative framework of familial separation/re-unification" (Acharyya, *Jangam* 177) common to many partition narratives in this way:

> In *Jangam*, the separation and partial re-unification of Ramgobinda's family becomes a metonymic device that facilitates a temporary disengagement from material history and initiates a play of desire seeking to resolve the traumas of separation and mass death. (177)

Critic Anirban Baishya says in his reading of post-Independence Assamese cinema that the use of the theme of the separated family has been seen earlier in other genres as well. Anirban Baishya finds reference to this death march in Phani Sarma's film *Dhumuha* (1957). But it will not be proper to claim any similarity between *Jangam* and the cinematic narrative of *Dhumuha*. Rather *Jangam* stands out on its own in the treatment of the forgotten long march and explication of trauma that these people have gone through in their lives. A. R. Baishya thinks that Acharyya has given it a unique spin by portraying the destinies of a particular family that gradually transforms into a universal-human family. The familial

meta-narrative of *kokai-bhai* is no longer valid in Manku in the wake of the ideological invasion of Burmese nationalists from outside the village. The external force is ironically referred to as *borbih*[1] (26) - the venomous ideological import from outside Burma that destroys the idyllic relationship of *kokai-bhai* and impedes the age-old inter-community peaceful co-existence in Manku. This rupture in the inter-community trust propels the atmosphere of gloom and trauma in the hybrid space that has been peaceful so far. In this regard, the interesting point to note is that in *Jangam* the narrative does not start in the middle of trauma. But, thematic concern with self-other identity constructions of nationalist discourses gradually unfold through short conversations amongst characters in the initial pages of the text where the nationalist ideologies of Nungnao clashes with the humanist outlook of the village elders during this buildup to trauma phase. After returning to Manku from Mandalay, Nungnao empathizes with the Indian origin people, but at the same time, he has great convictions upon the imported Burmese nationalism referred to as *kaalzui*[2] (Acharyya, *Jangam* 24) by the third person anonymous narrator. In Chapter III Nungnao argues from his peculiar insider-outsider position with his village elders and accuses them of destroying the cultural heritage, economy and the future of Bramhadesh by being a bunch of lazy dwellers:

> "Severe damage is done to the country during the British rule. Foreign traders, Mahajans, servants and daily wage earners have impregnated the whole Bramhadesh. The indigenous people have become very poor - the foreigners have become richer after exploiting Bramhadesh. No foreigners will be allowed after the King's rule is established this time. Yesterday there a meeting of local young people was held at Mitukan's school room - a secret conspiracy is under way to chase away the British." (17)

This unforeseen urgency shown by the young Burmese rebels are resented by elders like Ba-Mao who expresses displeasure saying that "still your ways are cruel, inhuman'' (35). According to Ba-Mao, "achieving the goal is not all; right path has to be chosen for that. You all are looking for peace through turmoil (unrest), dreaming of constructing through

[1] Very strong poison
[2] Fatal fire

demolishing. You have pushed an unfortunate country towards destruction" (35). Thus, an agitated Ba-Mao reprimands Nungnao of dire consequences. Ba-Mao considers this to be an ominous sign for the whole country and warns that everybody will have to pay heavily for this later on. These are early examples when the writer gradually prepares the readers for the upcoming intense traumatic journey that the poor farmers have to undergo. However, the younger Burmese people think otherwise and for them, the development and prosperity of Burma depend on Burma being freed from all foreign elements emphasizing what Primorac calls "the long overdue reclaiming of a key national and spiritual resource and thus a glorious act of final decolonisation" (2), elsewhere. This ideological polarization of the old and the new generations have received prominence in the first few chapters of the novel. Essentially Burmese people were good in nature until they are intoxicated by inter-ethnic divide, referred to as *borbih* by the writer that has entered from elsewhere into Manku and moreover "there is no end to their disgust and hatred for the British" (22).

Written in the third person, the narrative conveys the uncertainty and increasing gloom of the initial Burmese ideological demands of "a search for essential cultural purity" (Ashcroft 40) and then subsequent horrendous journeys undertaken by Ramgobinda and the estranged group that represents the self/other dichotomy or polarization. Beginning with the community's dispossession of their land and home, followed by a tragic / painful exodus on foot to an ancient destination called India, the land of their forefathers, and culminating in arrival at different military camps, the journey is graphically depicted and charts the story of repeated displacement amidst death and decay, loss of humanity in the valley of death, tells about panic situation, disdain, isolation, contained within the confines of a limited rations, and unsure of their future. As a historical example of transnational border crossings, nowhere is this dislocation more keenly felt than in the ambivalence and tension experienced by the displaced. Ramgobinda and other Indian families are advised to evacuate Manku as soon as possible by Ba-Mao and his speech in Chapter IV is full of tragic undertone:

> "There is a hope that you may stay alive if you flee - that may be otherwise if you stay back. We people are living only under the urge of hope - otherwise, we have been sitting idle spoiling our past and future long ago." (31)

But, "is absconding easy?" because, the path is "Hilly, and full of forests, where shall we go with our children, wife and bits and odds? What shall we do?" (3) Thus, Ramgobinda's voice speaks for the overwhelming fear that has already gripped the poor Indian farmers of Burma. Moreover, they feel that they "are the inhabitants of Bramhadesh; we are born here, have our home-hearth everything here. We are also local here - like you all" (22). The sense of belongingness that they have developed makes displacement more critical as the text clearly explicates how attachment to objects impacts on patterns of loss, most effectively demonstrated in the textual illustrations, for example, attachment to pets like the cattle and cat saddens Ramgobinda when he has to part with them unwillingly. In Chapter VIII his sadness and sense of loss are evident when he sets his cattle free:

> "You all will not be having any owner from today … I am leaving you on your destiny from today onwards." (53)

Thus, Ramgobinda murmured in the ear of the white bull. The harrowing context of displacement includes crossing precarious Irrawaddy, treacherous terrains, avoiding the bombardment, journeying at night, intense hunger and thirst, and toil in the tropical Asian forest. Acharyya's narration is realistic in this context. To make it appear raw Acharyya has created the category of non-human other that abounds in nature which makes the human self appear more vulnerable to trauma in contrast. The various non-human images of otherness that this metaphysical category is pitted against include "animals, insect life and machinic forms of being … that proliferate in the text" (A. R. Baishya 177). In the first few pages, the poor farmers of Manku are compared to forms of living dead" in order to emphasize their mechanical existence, sans any excitement or happiness of living and overwhelmed by needs. For example in chapter I the narrator says:

> "Every morning a procession of cattle, their withered frames glittering, would sprawl their way ... Moving alongside them were the herdsmen … skeletal, withered like their cows … The cattle and the herdsmen combined were a group of hungry, quiet souls - as if all their desire and will to survive had ceased a long time ago." (Acharyya, *Jangam* 6)

This metaphorical representation of human and reducing it to the category of machine or animal finds another expression towards the end of the second chapter again when the farmers are compared to *guri poruwa*[1]:

> "A group of people forced to work incessantly for the sake of survival - like some wound up mechanical dolls; *guri poruwa* working by force of habit." (7)

The rebel Burmans are also degraded to the *soga-pok*[2] that will burn themselves in their quest for a purified, exclusive Burmese identity. This self-reflexive dialogue by Jayanao speaks how the Burmese rebels have started a self-destructive mutiny. The analogy works effectively here while conveying the traumatic atmosphere in the self-other binary:

> "Have you seen how the *soga-pok* jumps into the fire and dies in the month of *Kati*?[3] That kind of death does not have any value; there is no sense of pride. That is a coward's death." (23)

The reduction of human existence to the level of insects and animals helps in pushing the narrative forward and at the same time keeping the grip of trauma firmly over characters. Right from the beginning of the narrative from Chapter I the narrator has realistically described the waste and shameful degradation of human life in stark language. In the first part of Chapter I, we are introduced to the poor farmers of Manku as not-so-human. We come across similar portraiture in Chapter II when Ramgobinda is shown to be comparing himself to the insignificant tiny ants and mourns: "the only job of these tiny animals is to keep themselves safe from the mouth of enemy and struggle endlessly by collecting food for living," he thought and released a sigh, "actually human does the same" (13).

The metaphor of a claustrophobic *bichitro*[4] *Chakrabehu* (65) is employed by the writer to convey how nature has devised ways to demolish high sounding human claims of conquering Nature. Immediately after entering the realm of *Chakrabehu* the refugees discover that it is almost impossible to come out of it. In Chapter X, Major Polwell of Shabo's military camp clearly states his inability to help the displaced in reaching their

[1] Tiny red ants
[2] An insect that burns itself by jumping into fire
[3] One of the sacred months according to Assamese calendar year
[4] Wondrous

destination and from his version of deaths; the displaced become even more traumatic gradually leading to the buildup of *Chakrabehu*:

> "According to the information that we have received almost ten thousand people have already died there on that street; the dead bodies are scattered like pieces of paper on the streets. Cholera, malaria, in addition to that there are starvation, the hardship of the journey, after all, it is human body how much more would it bear?" (70)

The ever-increasing "ambient discomfort" (Conlon 1) of misplaced order characterizes the narration of deaths lurking in the forest and an extremely dangerous topography helps in building the traumatic atmosphere for the readers and "supplies an ominous figuration of an exterior nature that encroaches upon human biological integrity" (7). The compact sentences and apt metaphor with graphic detail are extended in the visual depiction of hostile nature with ghost-like figures of the displaced. The multiplicity of the huge plants, insects and the mechanical images begin to reveal the richness of different analogies from nature in numerous such passages:

> "Clusters of leeches stuck in the long and slender leaves of grass that wrapped themselves around their legs; at the slightest indication, a group of chameleons chased them determinedly and speedily with long strides, their fans raised. What irrepressible will to survive these tiny creatures have - what a magnificent inspiration for survival!" (Acharyya, *Jangam* 65)

Stephen Mulhall suggests that monstrous episodes like this reminds us about "human carnality and hence finitude; in Freudian terms, they represent the return of the repressed human body, of our ineluctable participation in the realm of nature" (20). Readers would feel like they are moveing across a really treacherous forest inhabited by venomous snakes, blood sucking leeches, speedy rivers, steep hills and numerous hidden dangers including unknown Burmese villages and heavily armed Japanese Army. The journey, full of such dangers itself becomes a metaphor for trauma. Like the trauma it has no end, any danger can befall without giving any warning. Trauma is a journey, journeying is a trauma.

LaCapra's W*riting History, Writing Trauma* (2000), examines historiographic testament literature as well as fictional representations of the Holocaust in terms of a group of categories derived from Freud's work. In particular, he categorizes literature into texts that deny trauma, texts that act out trauma and texts that work through trauma. LaCapra draws on the dichotomy between history or historiography and literature but suggests that the two may weave together to create texts that deny, act out or work through trauma. In this regard, he distinguishes between writing trauma and writing about trauma and the impact these have on trauma texts. According to him, texts that write about trauma form the broad study of historiography relying on the testimony of survivors or witnesses of trauma to present firsthand accounts of experiences from either recorded material or from memory in an attempt to show what really happened in the past. *Jangam* offers us such a perspective of writing trauma. Though the writer has not mentioned any recorded document that he has resorted to, it is possible that he has made use of war documents and history extensively in an effort to recreate the past, and the account is not a firsthand experience though it is recorded for the first time in fiction. "Writing trauma," as opposed to writing "about trauma" according to LaCapra, centers more on literature – on the metaphorical impact of violence so that writing creates a sense of distance from the event itself (59). The focus in writing trauma is on the aesthetic, philosophical and/or political factors that impact the narrative. The novelist and writer who "writes trauma" does so from a particular perspective: he recreates historical events or alludes to them and guides the reader to feel particular emotions. In this equation, even though *Jangam* is placed within specific historical settings, we must assume that the text is not "about trauma" but rather have issues and conflicts of trauma, creating a specific historical setting ("writing trauma") in order to develop the conflict for the progression of the narrative and the growth of its characters. In this case, *Jangam* becomes a trauma narrative that uses the death march as a metaphor. In fact, unlike the other three texts examined in this study, *Jangam* is the mapping of the intimidating phenomenon of trauma in the making. We can see this in action within the novel as it charts the events from the very outset of the tragedy and then develops the plot to its culmination. Rather, as we have seen the writer chooses to give the picture of a universal family of *kokai-bhai* living through communal harmony and relative peace in Manku in the first chapter of *Jangam* progressing towards an unfortunate shattering of the family bondage leading to the

death of members. In this aspect, Acaryya's *Jangam* is different from other three texts of this study. In the other three texts, we find that the narrative starts when the characters are well in the grip of trauma. Rita Choudhury's *Makam*, for example, starts with the description of severe poverty in the remote Chinese provinces and how the poor farmers are fighting amongst themselves for food and survival. This existential crisis compels the farmers to sell even their children in open markets. Umakanta Sarma begins his *Ejak Manuh* with the narrative of terrible river journey of the family of Tulsi and his parents from Goalanda to Assam. We find a Lonely Soni pondering over her pathetic condition that is killing her silently in *Chenabar Sont* of Mamoni Raisom Goswami. Unlike in these three texts, *Jangam* begins the textual narrative with the description of the lovely atmosphere of Manku; the fictional village which is an epitome of inter-community harmony.

The indeterminacy of destination is another aspect which seems to be plotted to intensify the trauma psychosis in *Jangam*. Assam as a destination appears only an illusion for most of the villagers like Ramgobinda. In the beginning of the novel, we come across the section when Ramgobinda is found discussing the fact that he knows nothing about his ancestor's homeland, which is India. Ramgobinda has never been to his ancestor's village and "the idea of returning surfaced out once or twice while his father was alive – he could remember little bit" (Acaryya *Jangam* 12). His vague idea of the village is derived only from the patchy description given by his mother - a green village somewhere in central India surrounded by serene and peaceful nature, crowded by poor, hungry but lively people. This section of the text narrates all the images of hunger and poverty. The "anxiety-producing condition" (LaCapra 57) of displacement for Ramgobinda and the group is deeply rooted in their lack of knowledge of their past – the space called homeland. Ramgobinda is rendered liable to be chased by the anxiety, which according to LaCapra can be termed as "structural trauma" (57), and that is exemplified when he "screamed like an insane person" (Acharyya 22). The homeland Assam was absent earlier, and now Manku, their adopted homeland, is going to be lost with the displacement of the group. The second generation of displaced people like Ramgobinda has lived their entire life in this country called Bramhadesh and that is why it has been their homeland and shares a strong bond with this country. They have never imagined India as a homeland for themselves. So, the present situation has put them in a no man's land. The conversion of absence of their homeland to something that is lost leads

them to look for a new land that they can call home - a space with which they can identify themselves and generate "the hope that anxiety may be eliminated or overcome" (LaCapra 58). In this way, the traumatic episode affects the individual's life in totality in *Jangam*; it remains indefinable, leaving the person unable to differentiate the specific circumstances of the trauma.

When Ramgobinda and the group start the journey to their newly imagined homeland called India everyone is sure that they need to reach India if they want to survive, though all are perplexed. That gives them a kind of assurance or a sense of fixity about the destination. But, as they progress through the deadly forest panic starts gripping and the destination gradually becomes hazy, like the mirage and indeterminacy sets in. This mirage-like quality and indeterminacy of the destination are termed metaphorically as Chakrabehu (Acharyya, *Jangam* 177) – the experience of time's passing and the absence of destination in this Chakrabehu is captured in Navaro–Yashin's term "stunted temporality" (7). The group is entrapped in a Chakrabehu like natural formation within forests that leads them to face an existential crisis. In a repetition of mechanical image the writer compares the group to a funeral procession as if somebody is pushing them from behind, "the group only continued its lifeless, lazy journey as if they were machines that had been wound up - no one knew where, which way, why" (Acharyya, *Jangam* 140)! Which part, which location of India do they belong to? This decisive question makes their destination problematic and vague at the same time. Arriving at this point they are now lost in search of another destination. To survive they must continue relentlessly like the wound up machine in this no man's land. Trauma as well as the journey has no end, no destination and it persists forever. In the end of the narrative survivors are left confused as to what is their destination. At the end when they are reaching Ledo in Assam, readers are compelled to think that India as their destination is only a temporary consolation. It is because now the displaced are faced with another crucial question - which place of India should they call their home? And the death march resumes once again. The whole text is a journey of trauma - from normalcy to madness, symbolized by the death march itself. Moreover, this return trip to India across dangerous terrain seems so impossible at times, yet again and again it is made possible. Some people die, many lose hope of living, only a few sustain the hardship of the journey. It is as if the trauma has a repeated appearance, symbolized by the repeated displacement of the group, first from India

then from Bramhadesh. Trauma has no end, so also the journey. Even after reaching their primary destination, characters are left baffled about their future, where should they go now? They do not know their roots, their long-forgotten homeland. It is this journey to their homeland where the injury develops itself into a wound; a scar that bleeds forever and readers become another witness to the whole episode. Readers are reminded of Cathy Caruth's idea of the anguished voice of trauma emerging from the wound as mentioned earlier in this study (181). And ironically, the body - the human agency of receiving pain becomes foreign to them. Theorist Richard Kearney extrapolates from this idea the existence of latent fears that the human body is itself alien, insofar as it is the site of a repressed and sublimated materialism which, on return, threatens to destabilise identity (50). According to LaCapra's categorization we can proceed to say that the reader's reaction in this instance becomes a response to Acharyya's artistic merits rather than to the raw, historical facts of the traumatic episode itself - the deadly march in *Jangam*. The writer portrays the situation in such visual and graphic detail that readers feel the trauma and can easily imagine the condition and intensity of the panic at such moments. In Chapter XIII the group reaches the town Unthaw which is compared to a *pretpuri*[1] (Acharyya, *Jangam* 103) and the narrator sighs out, "Unthaw is abandoned, Unthaw is a graveyard" (103), crowded solely by violent and cannibalized stray dogs. There is no sign of any human dignity amidst these cruelty and horrifying degradation and hunger-related cruelty are at its peak when the dogs devour its weaker kinds in an "unquenchable desire to live, never-ending thirst" (107), and the sharp, grinning teeth of the dogs metaphorically symbolizing death, which is sure to engulf all – both human and nonhuman other. In contrast to the dogs, the refugees resemble more a spectral procession with no desire to live, "what is the meaning of trying so hard to live? What will be the benefit of living at all?" (109). The image of horrible and imposing Nature as against overbearing human anthropocentric desire is shown to be defeated repeatedly in Chapter XIX again when the refugees reach Manchi which has turned into an open exhibition of waste with dead bodies scattered everywhere:

> "Numerous dead bodies and their disjointed parts lay scattered on the streets. Many dead bodies lay inside the houses also. Baring a few watchdogs other dogs are also

[1] An erry place occupied solely by ghosts and evil spirits

dead. The living ones are snatching the dead bodies that lay on the edge of the streets. (125)

It is in this chapter we have the first glimpse of the narrator introducing us to the gates of Hell - the Hukawng valley:

"This section of road from Manchi to Indaojee is very horrendous. Beyond that Hukawng valley resembles the gates of Hell." (125)

The city, Manchi resembles a space occupied by ghosts and the "air is filled with burning smell - streets wear a deserted look. People close their shops and run everywhere – it is an empire of breathless silence and loneliness after the flow of life has ceased all of a sudden" (124). Continuing their ghastly procession the thirsty group of refugee arrives at the plains of Indaojee. Ironically, though nature has given them plenty of food, still they can't be consumed and pathetically they have to remain thirsty and hungry, that compounds their woes: "the water of Indaojee is toxic" (133). This is a reversal of what can be termed as nature taking full control of and pushing us to the extremes of trauma because there are "uncountable number of refugees died on the bank of this Indaojee" (135), as if Indaojee is turned into another example of captivity and claustrophobic existence for the group inside jungle - the lethal *Chakrabehu*. Moreover, there are tropical monsoon rain, fever, snakes, cholera and *grohoni*[1] (135) - all agencies of torture and death. Death would have been a liberating experience for them from this *Chakrabehu* as expressed by Father Berry, "what is the meaning of trying so hard to live? What will be the benefit of living at all?" (109) they are not only running away from the Burmese rebels but also fighting hostile nature as well. The scenes of killing and decay reach their climax when the group reaches Shingbwiyang and resumes their *kaaljatra*[2] towards Tagun hill through "*norokdwar*[3] of Hukawng" (166) where they encounter proliferation of death that can put anybody in severe trauma psychosis:

"An uncountable number of corpses lay prone in various positions in the spaces between the pathway and the edges of the hills ringing it - they grinned at the people

[1] Dysentery
[2] Fatal journey, last journey to meet the end
[3] Gates of hell

moved by. Almost all the corpses were swollen, and scores of brightly-colored butterflies illuminated them further covering them like a shroud. There was no other sign of life in those virtually insurmountable hills … In fact, birds too were absent." (170)

The images of butterflies sucking the liquids that ooze out of the mutilated and swollen human bodies add to the macabre scene. While the refugees walk along the Tagun Hill through Hukawng in the tropical monsoon season they come across several ugly, "grinning corpses" (170), skeleton and decaying, bug-infected remains of refugees who succumb to death amidst hostility from Nature. The most disturbing of them all is the commingled "dead bodies of a mother and an infant on her lap on the act of sucking her breasts reclining to pillar of a house" (171). Another was the "half-delivered baby whose body fused with the mother" (171). These are the scenes where we can see nature's hostility exposed through the images of human death and decay. Here nature shows how demonic can be its *Chakrabehu* by revealing its uncanny, macabre side to human.

It would not be wrong to say that a fictional trauma text like *Jangam* is controlled, constructed and molded by the novelist himself in line with the historical facts. One cannot dispute the fact that in reading fiction which writes the trauma, the impact of the trauma is perceived purely as an indispensable literary device, with the focus perhaps on other aspects of style and literary critique rather than the victim and the incident. In this instant, the role of the novelist and historian is markedly different in the way they represent trauma. An author engages the readers in narrative stylistically by rendering a moment in the fiction for character identification. By doing so, readers are engaged to help construct, or even reconstruct experience as writers present them. Readers are witness to, at times, the complex individual choices facing the fictional parallel intentions offering a platform for trauma discourse pertaining to real-life scenarios. This is more relevant in historical trauma recreated in fiction. Moreover, LaCapra opines that the power and effect of both historical and fictional forms of texts are attributed to the fact that they "represent tragedy in all its immediate horror and raw form" (63). Trauma in these instances is represented as irresolvable with the suggestion that once such a traumatic event occurs, the survivor is trapped in a constant state of anguish. Working through trauma, however, the person can

partially gain critical distance on a problem, that empowers the individual (as victim or observer) to separate the traumatic episode from his/her present life. Such a person then is never entirely trapped in the past. The character of Father Berry in *Jangam* is not shown to be trapped in trauma in the same manner as the other members of the contingent. His religious orientation may have given him such an emotional disposition by which he can look forward to future while going through physical and emotional trauma during the deadly march:

> "It is unfair to indulge in that kind of thought - that is sign of a coward - all of us have a responsibility in life, whether big or small as fixed by the God. One day or the other everyone shall die, that is true, but we are not born only to die. God has given each of our lives a responsibility and duty - after completing all these responsibilities God will recall the lives given by him on time. We cannot do anything then, nothing is left to be done." (Acharyya, *Jangam* 109)

Father Berry's words fail to console other characters and Ramgobinda expresses his total lack of hope for future, his dismay. For them God has ceased to exist:

> "I came out with lots of hope in my heart - in this gloomy road I have lost them all one by one." (109)

Prominent trauma theorists including Caruth, Felman, Laub and others hold that trauma can never be fully mastered but only be partially comprehended in its recognition and trauma victims never move over their specific tragic event. This entrapment is seen in the character of Ramgobinda in *Jangam*, who could never overcome his displacement from his home in Manku. On the journey he is struck by multiple tragedies - his aged mother dies, before he could recover from that jolt, he suffers again from the loss of his beloved wife and the newborn child. So the multiple tragedies are too much for him to bear and he starts showing symptoms of madness. LaCapra's proposition offers us an explanation of the anxiety that Ramgobinda and the group encounter as they prepare themselves mentally to leave the conflict zone. Everyone including Ramgobinda is utterly distressed, scared and almost devastated at repeated warnings from the Burmese villagers to run away from Manku to India as if it is the last resort left for them. The departure from the normal mode of

behaviour to the tendency of pushing one to the periphery of madness on the part of the local Burmese people compels Ramgobinda to scream like an insane:

> "Asking us to flee? By saying to do something you are telling us to flee, isn't it?" Suddenly he screamed like an insane and said, "the country is burning, what other ways can be left for us?"
> "But where shall we flee to?" (Acharyya, *Jangam* 22)

The journey, in *Jangam* is endless, so also is the misery in the life of the characters. Trauma haunts them forever, except a few characters for whom religion has offered a reprieve, for example, the two Christian Missionaries. The journey metaphorically stands for the trauma that the victims suffer endlessly. Acharyya has hinted in the preface that *Jangam* should be read as a tale of ordinary human trapped by Nature – universal human condition. Critic Sailen Bharali believes that the "journey conducted with unimaginable physical and mental agony seems to be a symbol for the endless, forward-moving journey of human life" (39). Another critic Prufulla Kotoky opines that "it is as if … (*Jangam*) is a priceless history of humankind that, in every age, conquers thousands of unsurmountable obstacles and emerges victorious over nature" (Acharyya, *Jangam* VIII). Both the critics have similar views and take the long march as an allegory of human suffering itself. But this kind of reductionist reading would be simple if we consider the fact that *Jangam* also talks about complicated issues of human displacement across international borders and limitations of nationalism.

On the other hand, in *Jangam*, loss is represented through a specific historical event that is the forgotten long march; which becomes synonymous with the loss of human lives as well as properties. Through the unfolding of the narrative it is shown that when a person is separated from his family, friends and personal belongings during a catastrophe, he/she is bound to feel a sense of detachment and loss - a void which leads to the development of a vacuum in his psyche. Unable to move with the personal belongings during catastrophe adds to their sense of loneliness during repeated displacement that compounds their trauma, since he/she shares an intimate bond with the personal belonging. Mobility is a quality associated only with bodies of human not their belongings. This kind of situation offers twofold possibilities for the displaced group. If they succeed in retaining their composure and dignity sans any material objects they can attain the mentality or dispassion of a Father Berry,

whose existence is not dependent on any material help from outside. Since this is a difficult task to achieve for the ordinary human being and they end up nowhere and in such a failure the next possibility leads the displaced to a state of collapsing. In *Jangam* we observe that the characters are constantly fighting this human reality. While they prepare their journey they are advised to take only the necessary food and few clothes. All other things including money, jewelry and valuable become an additional burden on the human body on the move. Worried Ramgobinda knows the hardship of the death march and asks his aged mother and Lachhmi to pack only the essentials and carry minimum weight with them, as a preparation for the journey. Anything else that they have, the belongings, the things they have collected over the years are of no use at the moment of crisis:

> "Why have you collected all these? Who will carry the load?"
> "Things of daily uses," his mother uttered throwing a sad look to the heap of material
> "I understand that; but how shall you carry?"
> "We will flee through the forests like thieves."
> "Take a pair of cloth for each, your pair of *kharu-moni*[1] and the *gorom sador*[2] in the tin box. Put as much rice as you can there. That is the real companion on the way." (50)

At the individual level, Ramgobinda's frustration is expressed in the manner he talks to his wife Lashmi. After the onslaught of trauma, his change of behaviour toward his wife comes as surprise not only to Lachhmi but also to himself. They dispose their personal belongings before and during the journey, so that, they do not have to carry unnecessary weight and light on their feet. After the disposal of all material belongings, they are bare human bodies with essential clothes and scanty amount of food.

The traditional Indian family structure and the intimate bonding that the members shares amongst themselves are shown as indispensable in human life by Acharyya. Lack of love and care of family can intensify the sense of loss during thre overwhelming trauma of displacement. After their expulsion from Manku, Ramgobinda's aged mother dies on the way in Chapter 11 and his wife Lachhmi with the newborn baby is lost in Chapter XII while

[1] Assamese traditional ornaments worn by females on their arms and around the neck
[2] A warm cloth wrapped on the body during winter

she, along with Buddhu's mother is taken away by British military officials on medical emergency. It is exactly at this point of the narrative when the structure of "national family is irretrievably broken with the expulsion of the Indians," and the "narrative engineers the formation of a universal-human family" (A.R. Baishya 180). While we will not look into the formation of a "universal-human family," we will try to examine how the irretrievably broken national family affects the patterns of aphasia/memory loss and sanity. Here the national family refers to the traditional family structure exclusive to Indian culture. After the losses, Ramgobinda is left only with his seven year old son Thanu. At different relief camps of Maingkan, Shingbwiyang and eventually when the group arrives at Assam Ramgobinda searches desperately for Lachhmi and the infants but fails to get any clue of their whereabouts. Gradually he loses hope and the trauma of the journey and the consecutive setbacks, severe anxiety leads him to lose his reason very fast. It is already very late when Lachhmi is found in a mental asylum and Ramgobinda, by now, is completely mad. Now, a dejected Ramgobinda "struggle against the defenses" which the victims naturally create "to protect themselves from their trauma and the desire to heal through speaking about it" (Anderson 10); which leads him fast towards insanity. It is this predicament of 'geographical and psychological' displacement that has turned into serious existential questions for Ramgobinda and others. The mental stress of these absences and losses causes hallucinations of missing loved ones which isolate victims as crazy social outcasts. As Kaplan says, "the authors find varying strategies through which to communicate what the traumatic events mean to them emotionally" (155) and one of the favourite tropes is the creation of patterns madness in characters. In Nampang's refugee camp Ramgobinda keeps shouting and wailing, even falls unconscious at times. Gradually his behaviour becomes abnormal the word used in Assamese is - *pagol*[1](Acharyya, *Jangam* 186). Suddenly he would jump and grab mini, the cat, and identify the cat as his son Thanu. In his traumatic fits of madness he perceives the cat as Thanu:

> "That is my son Thanu! Yes - I got it," showing the cat to Padri, Ramgobinda says - "it has returned from the hospital - how would stay without me? My Thanu has returned." (186)

[1] A person who has gone mad

He would press the cat more tightly against his bosom and howl:

> "Now I do not need anything else … Lachhmi, you better stay in the hospital. You do not come – if you come my Thanu will go away." (186)

Ramgobinda sets the camp on fair and says:

> "Fire, fire! How is it? Run and run - everything will burn into ashes!" (188)

With a total lack of reasoning ability he fails to comprehend the reality and has imagined a surreal scene where he talks to a non-existent being. This is what trauma does to a human. Only in such a state human beings behave illogically and really goes mad, because it is widely accepted that "more overt and perhaps more common indicator of trauma, is madness" (Anderson et al 80).

One of the main effects of traumatic madness is a difficulty to decide whether what is going on is real or not. According to theorist Leudar & Phillip trauma breaks apart the intricate linkage between the "logical relationship" and "human relationship" (1). In such a situation, the self and the world become binaries, and a profound mistrust in the future sets in, which leads to loss of hope in general. Ramgobinda, in his insanity, is running amidst all the frightened people and clapping his hands, and goes hysteric that fire will engulf everything now. Is Ramgobinda acting out perpetrator trauma here? Arguably this can lead us to another aspect of his psychotic behaviour inside the camp. In philosopher Dylan Trigg's reappraisal, the coinages "alien flesh" and "traumatic embodiment" are designations for symptoms of "the tension between corporeal and cognitive experience" (232) that open up space for trauma in the individual as well as groups. The fact that Ramgobinda rejoices to see others in pain tells us about the complexity of traumatic madness. He wants others to go through the same experience as he himself has passed in last few days. His traumatic psychosis is due to the trauma of displacement and loss, but in very next moment he gains a little bit of sanity as he says:

> "I have set them on fire. What is the use of all these? Lachhmi is no more - Thanu is no more - everything should be finished." (Acharyya, *Jangam* 188)

Ramgobinda, during his utter hallucinations, thinks that Thanu and Lachhmi are dead, but in reality, they are not. When he fails to find his missing wife and their infant boy, he wails:

"Everything is finished - nothing of mine is left." (177)

Now Thanu is seriously ill and Lachhmi has gone mad and is put in a lunatic asylum of Nampang. Separation from his family members and the utter hopelessness about the future has cost him his memory and sanity and he oscillates rapidly in the world of sanity and insanity, reality and hallucination. The excessive exposure to trauma has forced him to "confuse objective and subjective, real and imagined, and seen and forgotten" (Leudar 1). Displacement form homeland and separation from family members and near and dear ones can shatter one's faith in life and reality that hampers the stability of human brain. It obstructs the logical functioning of the brain resulting in alteration of interpretations of events. The capacity of the brain to analyze things logically is constricted and the person sees hopelessness and negativity everywhere. Thus, the error of perception such as hallucination sets in accompanied by numbness and the victims oscillate with liability and incomplete control of one's emotions. In Chapter XXIII we can see Lachhmi behaving in the same way as Ramgobinda and she could not even recognize the names of her husband and son.

Moreover, the traumatic pain is so intense that all memory of what has caused it is erased. Hallucinations, in this light, can be understood as visions or voices, occasionally similar to a flashback, whose purpose is to make the person remember that he or she is ignoring and avoiding a lot of pain that needs to be confronted and accepted in order to heal. However, madness can also be devised as a strategy to avoid certain situations that the victim finds difficult to face and in such situation "it is sometimes an appropriate response to reality to go insane" (Phillip K. Dick 15). Is Ramgobinda trying to avoid reality or he is too scared to face the trauma? Ramgobinda's behaviour is not beyond scrutiny in this regard. In an act of burning the refugee camp, which is seen quite deliberate on the part the madman, he seems to have gone through an inversion of his confusion while recognizing his son and wife Lachhmi. Moreover, in an effort to master a trauma, the quest for revenge and a scapegoat are commonly seen behaviours. In *Jangam*, Ramgobinda and some of his inmates of the refugee camp are insane. A notable syndrome identified in the wake of severe trauma

is post-traumatic stress disorder; which in case of *Jangam* is better addressed as a complex traumatic stress syndrome, as defined by Hermann in 1992, indicating a constant repetition of the event at present. The memories may not be possible to put into words at all, but are expressed non-verbally, encoded as bodily experiences – burning is one such association in *Jangam*. Dissociation comes closer than repression to describing the variety of ways in which knowledge becomes confused and disavowed in traumatic states, a complex web of trauma.

So, the question that arises in this context is the authenticity of Ramgobinda's madness. Has Ramgobinda devised madness as a defense? He knows what he does and the burning scene is the proof of his deliberate act. By feigning madness, he may be avoiding his responsibility as a father during Thanu's illness. We know he felt guilty once he saw Ma-pu taking more care of Thanu, which he himself fails to do. His madness can be as politicized as Hamlet's. Is he capable of regaining sanity, or is it irreversible? Thus, Ramgobinda's madness is open to interrogation in this politically unstable space.

Moreover, characters in the text are shown to be behaving as if they have suffered from split personality disorder. Forces beyond their control have taken away everything except bare bodies. Moreover, which is worse is that the displaced do not get the window period that can heal their wound – either at personal or collective level; and they face the same fate repeatedly that make their condition critical. Successive displacements have changed the family dynamics of Ramgobinda and the severe consequence of the shock is the traumatic insanity. As explained by LaCapra, if one acts out the trauma one can continue to relive the event of the past in the present and the cycle of anguish associated with the trauma never ceases. Conversely, if one works through the trauma, LaCapra asserts, there is a possibility that one can gain critical distance which is necessary for moving on (51). Conversion from absence to loss gives anxiety an identifiable object of fear and generates, but does not remove, the awareness of that anxiety. Thus, we can differentiate the role of novelist who writes trauma in history or writes about trauma as a backdrop to more personal developments of fictional character. In Acharyya's *Jangam,* the manner in which literature intersects with history offers an excellent opportunity to explore issues similar to historical, autobiographical and testimonial representations of trauma. By his depiction of the theme,

the writer symbolizes that the absence of a permanent homeland leads to the loss of sanity of the characters in *Jangam*. Ruth Lays's concept of "mimetic" and "anti-mimetic" theories of trauma may be a great use in our study of *Jangam*. When considering the theories developed by Leys, two concepts prove to be useful in this analysis of *Jangam*. Leys confirms in an argument, where it is claimed that the concept of trauma has been, and continues to be pivotal between two juxtaposed theoretical stances: "mimetic" theory and "anti-mimetic" theory. According to Leys's "mimetic" theory, trauma or the experience of trauma, involves "a kind of hypnotic imitation" (40) so that the traumatised victim has a regressive identification with the original traumatized event. There is a tendency for a compulsive repetition of violence in the form of nightmares, actions and imitation which disable the victim to gain distance from the original moment of horror. Violence and horror subsequently become normative codes of behaviour replacing any former pre-traumatic behaviour. Perhaps we can cite the examples of this normative behaviour as opposed to somatic when Ramgobinda sets the refugee camp on fire and in his insane outburst that everything is finished in the war, bombings and devastation. Ramgobinda mixes up war bombing with his deliberate act of setting the camp on fire being the common association between the two. At this point he sees life in terms of loss; the trauma has forced him to perceive life in terms of negatives:

> "I came out with lots of hope in my heart – in this dark road I have lost them all one by one', Ramgobinda releases a sigh, 'perhaps I may stay alive but there is no hope that I will ever get my Lachhmi back – mother is already gone." (Acharyya, *Jangam* 109)

Ramgobinda wails at times as if he is insane, after he fails to find his missing wife and their infant boy:

> "Everything is finished – nothing of mine is left." (177)

Trauma of displacement, separation from family members coupled with an intense sense of loss therefore tugs at Ramgobinda's psychological endurance and seems to have exposed his alienation from his surrounding so that he starts behaving like an insane. The

depersonalization leads him to breakdown of his sense of identity because of an "internal assault on the ego" (Caruth 8).

In *Madness and Civilization* (1961), Michel Foucault's discourse suggests that the history of madness has been the history of the other. When Lachhmi and Buddhu's mother suffer insanity after the accident they were put separately in an asylum for the mad as other, away from the normal refugees. This is considered as safe practice for the patient as well as for the other refugees in the camps. Thus, in *Jangam* insane people constitute a large number of crowds in the camps, and there are people who show psychotic behaviour during the journey as well. As the number of the guards is very few in the asylum, some insane go absconding and Lachhmi and Budhu's mothers are few amongst them. Father Berry fails to locate the two females in and around the camp and Ramgobinda confronts Father with the familiar question: "Where is my Lachhmi? Where is my Thanu?" (Acharyya, *Jangam* 185) Ramgobinda is showing psychotic or schizophrenic behaviour by now. He confuses between the reality and unreality, and appropriates the cat Mini as his son and the world around him has lost its meaning. Whatever he does during this period are all the symptoms of delusion due to the shock. This shock and the continuing trauma of social stigma of exclusion hamper the knowledge production mechanism of his brain. At this moment Chinti's words elaborate the social stigma about the madness. Chinti says when he sees Ramgobinda crying and shouting:

> "He gained conscience only today evening – since then he is shouting. He is trying to get out somewhere again and again."
> Then coming close to Father he whispers in his ear:
> "Most probably he has gone mad. We shall have to keep him in chains if necessary." (186)

Though the members of the group are sympathetic towards Ramgobinda's loss of family, they are not willing to risk his company anymore and put him in an asylum. Since trauma victims' experiences have become part of their personal identity, and society often shows a lack of understanding, a strict rationalization or a denial of these experiences, the traumatised go through an identity crisis with regard to their position in society. Sylvia Huot suggests that:

> Madness and sanity are alike, to a large extent, in the eye of the beholder; that the behaviour patterns classified as pathological will be different in different societies, and that concepts of both madness and identity are specific to the culture that produces and politicizes them. (3)

In *Jangam*, too, madness is seen as specific to culture and society and the responses of the members of the society. All these confuse Ramgobinda about his identity and his surrounding reality. Seeing this entire imbalance in Ramgobinda's behaviour Nitu confirms his madness:

> On this side perhaps Ramgobinda has gone mad … Buddhu's condition is also same. (186)

When Ramgobinda is in need of utmost care and sympathy, he is deserted by the members of the group. Ramgobinda, in this way, loses his importance for the group and this confuses him even more about his identity. Thus, the writer reflects society's common attitudes towards a person who is finding it difficult to comprehend the reality he is facing. He tends to forget about the self and his relationships to other. Here we find Nitu talking to father Barry: "this one (Ramgobinda) has appeared again … ok, let us leave now" (185). Thus, Ramgobinda is driven fast towards insanity and his companions are trying to push him aside. He stops Nitu and the Father and says: "where are you going?" (187) and suddenly rushes away from all of them. But Nitu and Father Barry do not try to trace him and remain unmindful of the fact that Ramgobinda needs attention, and Ramgobinda sets the camp on fire a few hours later. Only Father Barry warns Nitu:

> "It is not sure what kind of accident he causes late at night. Keep an eye on him. Sleep near him if you can." (188)

In the camp Doctor Chimor could identify the cause of insanity of Ramgobinda, so he explains it to Father Barry:

> "… the man whom you have brought in the morning – his insanity has started … due to shock. He shall be treated for few days." (193)

The doctor is hopeful that after treatment Ramgobinda and his wife may recover faster from insanity if they are kept together. The writer has focused on the insanity of these two characters only, the two protagonists of the story and other characters are left with simple references.

Regardless of whether the social alienation of the madness is the cause of suffering or loss of freedom, what can be understood from both viewpoints is that the mad character undergoes an identity crisis, with regard to his self as well as to his position in society. This crisis emerges from the madman's troubles in finding his place in a society in which madness is considered the antithesis of reason. In "Grafting and De-grafting Mental Illness: The Identity of Madness," Alvise S. Tarabochia writes that "the identity of madness is precisely what reason needs to exclude in order to define itself" and "mental illness is understood not as an organic dysfunction but as a modification of the patient's being-in-the-world, or, in other terms, as a different modality of existence" (68, 71). Furthermore, this identity crisis of the fictional madman like Ramgobinda is perceived by Feder as the repercussion of more general identity crises caused by modern society where "the increasing sense of aloneness in an indifferent universe and an amoral society is symbolically transformed into assault on the notion of an autonomous self" (279). The fact that the fictional madman's self is not in full control of his own actions here serves as a means to testify the social consequences of modern capitalist culture. These consequences consist of a marginalisation of minorities, shattered social identities through different subcultures in modern cities, i.e. asylum, and the feeling that society is amoral and indifferent. Through literature, however, these consequences can be denounced or made public, giving both the mentally ill and social critics a medium of speech.

Trauma scholar Kirby Farrell remarks that trauma is not merely a clinical notion but also a cultural trope. Farrell concludes that as a trope, "trauma helps account for a world in which power and authority may seem overwhelmingly unjust. The trope may be a cry of protest as well as distress and a tool grasped in hopes of some redress" (14). This study explores the traumatic displacement of innocent humans caused by major historical events and alteration of the world power politics. The story of repeated displacement is presented through the disorientation of an Indian family and a group which consists of individuals of

various nationalities and a number of cross-cultural relationships. The tug of war for the supremacy and various kinds of discrimination: racial, national, religious have been the reasons of displacement here that also includes talks of imperialism, colonialism and dislocation. Despite all the tall claims of humanity, enlightenment, culture and civilization the standards of judgment for us and them are still as different as they were when the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to "save Americans' lives" or in recent history when the whole Afghanistan was bombarded with daisy cutters by American Air Force. From World War II to War on Terror innumerable lives have been affected. All these wars have resulted in massive displacement which in itself is a great trauma. Thus, "communication of the experiences of the displaced people" lies at the heart of the discourse of displacement (Ashcroft, Bill et al 1994). As discussed here, and through the representations of traumas and memories associated with the war trauma of displacement through the use of different tropes of madness, victimization, memory loss and their impact on the life of the protagonists, Acharyya poses some important questions related to writing about an experience which does not comply with any conventional or linear type of narrative. Indeed, the traumatic experience by its nature defies linear time through interruptions and the interference of flashbacks and other disorders. The novel can be perceived as trauma fiction in the sense that the novel focuses on a particular traumatic event which involves a violent act. Here, the traumatic event in the novel is both culturally and politically constructed.

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Chapter IV

Trauma, Displacement and Community Formation in *Ejak Manuh Ekhon Aranya*

> We are threatened with suffering from three directions: from our body, which is doomed to decay ..., from the external world which may rage against us with overwhelming and merciless force of destruction, and finally from our relations with other men ... this last source is perhaps more painful to use than any other.
>
> Sigmund Freud

Unlike Mamoni Raisom Goswami in *Chenabar Sont*, Umakanta Sarma has depicted a labour community settled permanently in a tea estate and which intends to assimilate into the host place. In Mamoni Raisom Goswami's novel, labourers live in temporary arrangements and transit camps, where the idea of home or sense of belonging cannot be nurtured. Moreover, Goswami's characters are always fighting a kind of restlessness; they are not sure about their future and this compounds their woes and trauma. But in Sarma's novel, the sense of trauma seems to have mitigated slightly as the labourers are partially sure about their future and life. That is why they can think of a home. This chapter demonstrates Umakanta Sarma's representation of traumatic condition and the multiple counter strategies adopted by the labour community as a whole in his novel *Ejak Manuh Ekhon Aranya* (*A Group of People and A Forest*). Sarma's narration is focused more on the indentured labourers of a tea garden in Assam as an organised community and has a well-knit story constructed around a compact plot which charts the trauma arising out of displacement and migration in terms of the binary forces of self and the other. The conditioning of the labourer as coolie and their exploitation by the shrewd British authorities within the tea garden constitutes the theme of the novel. The labourers suffer immensely in their day to day life and they are distanced from the cultural discourse of mainstream society as well. This study applies trauma criticism and Ethnic Studies to explore how ethnic identity can become a

strategy for coping with trauma, both personal and collective. It also considers strategies used by subsequent generations for coping with trauma psychosis. Sarma has also shown how the females are victimized and the female body is shown as more prone to physical abuse and trauma.

Ejak Manuh is a poignant narration of the trauma of displacement faced by three generations of labourers working in a tea estate in colonial Assam and their quest for retaining ethnic identity. They are brought to Assam from other parts of India as the indentured labourer by the British. Lured easily by cunning contractors with the hope of a bright future in "the land of gold" (Sharma 5) they are displaced from their place of birth and origin and faced inhuman torture during their journey to the north-eastern part of India. Living a wretched life of extreme poverty, these poor people hope that one day their life will be better. Crooked *sardars*[1] take advantage of their poverty and trap them with the dream of a better future. When they arrive at tea states they realise that they are only running after a mirage. Their life becomes pathetic and they have to live life at the mercy of British managers. They are humiliated, beaten, tortured and are hurt both physically and mentally. In the process, they lose their self-respect as human beings, which is sad indeed. This feeling of being cheated gradually transforms into trauma in later stages of their life. The beginning section of the novel narrates how nearly eight hundred labourers were put together in a small enclosure without facilities of sanitation and clean food, leading eventually to the death of many including children and women. The dehumanization and torture confronted as a group help them foster a sense of togetherness and unity while they formulate their strategies of survival and coping with the trauma and displacement. In particular, this chapter argues that the labourers' attempts to cope with the trauma of displacement included negotiating between efforts to assimilate with the local culture and simultaneously protecting their ethnic identity and cultural practices. It also explores the transformation of aspects of self and identity in the characters as a consequence of this negotiation. This discussion will also illuminate Sarma's use of different tropes for mapping the labourer's revolt against colonial authority, migration, trans-generational trauma as witness and victims. Tea tribe or *cha-*

[1] A person who acts as leader of a group of labourers and controls their movement

bagania community's socio-economic problems are related to their terrorized past and they house both witness and survivors of the transgenerational trauma.

William Safran, while discussing a variety of collective experiences faced by immigrants and diasporas in terms of their similarities and difference from a defining model, comments:

> Expatriate minority communities that are dispersed from an original center to at least two peripheral places, that maintain a memory, vision or myth about their original homeland; that believe that they are not - and perhaps cannot be - fully accepted by their host country; that see the ancestral land as a place of eventual return, when the time is right; they are committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland and of which the group's consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by this continuing relationship with the homeland. (4)

Safran's definition is based on experiences of diasporas in the late 20th century, which is why he takes up "expatriate minority communities" (4) in his discussion. These are people whose movement is dictated by a desire for better working conditions, and in some instances, a hostile political environment. They nurture a desire to be restored to their original centers and have no intention of assimilating to the host country. The emerging impression here is that the people defined are desirous of the immigrant condition that they are in (83-4). In contrast, Sarma's representation shows the labourer striving for "final assimilation and integration… into the canvas of larger Assamese society" (Parag Moni Sarma 28) that provides a liberating and positive experience. However, the trauma of dislocation and displacement stays implanted forever within the collective consciousness of this dislocated ethnic group – the *cha-baganias*. In fact, this sense of shared traumatic past helps them evolve as a distinct ethnic group and at the same time creates a space for themselves within the greater Assamese society. The collective consciousness is instrumental in transforming themselves from one state of cultural consciousness to another and acquiring numerous traits of survival as well as countering hegemonic forces. Glazer et al express the same view:

> Man is a choice-making creature who is motivated not by primordial drives but by his own best economic and social interests and his desire for survival. (26)

However, the factors responsible for traumatization can be multiple and varied, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and class distinctions etc which contribute to the inter-discursive nature of trauma. So the interpretation of trauma cannot be confined exclusively to the retrieval of traumatic memories. Guan-Rong Chen believes that the literature of people hailing from racial, gender, class, and sexual minorities, who suffer from prejudices and discriminations, often reflects their traumatization and discontent as the others (9). The dominant section of the society compels them to construct their identity as other and this hegemony is contested in the novel.

Umakanta Sarma is a well-known literary figure of Assam and abroad, a brilliant alumnus of the University of Calcutta and later the University of Illinois. He was the Director of Education of two States, Assam and Meghalaya. He has written several significant novels which have enriched Assamese literature. He won the Assam Valley Literary Award commonly known as The Magor Award in 1997. His literary creations cover a wide range of genres like drama, novel, criticism, short story and translation. His novel *Ejak Manuh* is an epic narrative that depicts the story of the integration of labour or coolie community into the mainstream Assamese society and their hardships.

Sarma's novel begins with the anonymous third-person narrator's announcement that Tulsi has reached Goalanda on the evening of June 12, 1886 and introduces Tulsi as the protagonist of the novel. The omniscient narrator is silent about the origin of their journey and we do not know whether this minority group comprises one linguistic community or many. Study of the history of tea garden labourer in Assam reveals that tea garden population includes people originally speaking Hindi, Santhali, Mundari, Oriya or Tamil languages or dialects. According to Kar, tea garden population has developed its own distinct character and identity after living for several decades in Assam (80-95). The British traders started tea plantation in Assam as early as the 1830s. After the discovery of indigenous tea in India in 1834, the Assam Company, an oppressive subsidiary of the East India Company, creates and controls plantations first in the regions of Assam and then Bengal that microcosmically resembles the exploitative practices of the East India

Company, and by extension, the colonial rule as a whole. The worst example of the exploitation of indigenous peoples under Company Rule occurs within the realm of labor recruitment and management. The local people are not ready to work as labourer in this unfamiliar venture due to various reasons which force the Company to coerce labourers from distant places across the subcontinent through different deceitful means. In the formative years of Company Rule, these Empire's gardens create and sustain a hierarchical plantation structure in which labour is acquired through an indenture system, characterized by "mobilization of a large unskilled labour force through on-market mechanism, low wages, extra-legal methods of control and large-scale production through labour-intensive, low-skill methods" (Behal 19). Force and threats become a necessary precondition to run such a venture by a small number of British managers on a large class of oppressed Indian workers. To combat the high rate of absconding labourers, the Company enforces "strict control through penal laws, floggings, illegal confinements, and the *chowkidari* system" (19), a system in which the British employed watchmen and guard dogs to prevent desertion and disobedience. It follows stratified wage system among labourers of which female and child workers are the worst victims. The workers have to pass their lives in unhygienic and inhumane conditions and such lifestyle would infect them with severe diseases frequently. The migrated labourers are not in a position to go against the orders and whims of the authority. This and acute poverty experienced by them in the past do not encourage them to go for protest. As the Rege Commission mentions in 1946, the condition of these illiterate and poor labourers are miserable as their destiny depends on the whims of their owners. Being brought far away from their homes they feel insecure and hopeless while the planters utilize these emotions to establish their domination over the workers. The most obvious tool of subjugation is the discourse of being dominated by foreigners and that the trauma of being subjugated for the rest of their lives.

Sarma's novel depicts the story of Tulsi and his community countering trauma of displacement and their strategies of maintaining their identity, culture and ethnicity is the face of colonial exploitative discourse. Tulsi is the protagonist of one-third of the novel though towards the end his son Arjun takes over his role. Banha and his son Tulsi are the direct witness and sufferer of the trauma of displacement. They survive the horrible journey to the plantation site in Assam. The untold, suppressed, silenced memory of trauma is then

transferred to their next generation – to Tulsi's son Arjun and other children of the coolie community. Moreover, Arjun and other children of this community counter the self and other binary conflicts as they are introduced to the world outside the estate. Banha and the other members of the group are brought to Assam in the year 1886 from distant parts of India as indentured labour by British planters to work in the Empire's garden called tea states spread over several tracts of upper Assam. The novel narrates how nearly eight hundred labourers are put together in a small enclosure where there are no facilities of sanitation and clean food, leading eventually to the death of many including children and women. Tulsi is in the same boat with his father Banha, his mother and two sisters when the group of labourers is taken away from Goalanda to Dhuburi. Unable to bear the suffering and diseases, many including his mother, died during the journey and their bodies are thrown into the river like garbage. Tulsi meets Kalondi on the journey along Padma and Meghna. The shared sense of trauma and mutual attraction matures into love and eventual marriage in the course of the novel. This group is brought to Rupahijan tea estate and they are constantly labeled as coolie. Gradually the industry prospers and this group of coolie tries to assimilate themselves with the local Assamese culture and environment and at the same time seeks to keep their ethnicity and culture alive. The Rupahijan estate has ten labour-lines inhabited by nearly five hundred labours. Within the estate, it is customary that people speaking the same dialect and hailing from the same origin live as neighbours in one single line for their mutual advantage. The oldest batch of the estate is from Bengal, followed by batches from Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Madras. The devastating earthquake of 1897 kills scores of people and destroys a large part of the estate. Soon afterwards a hospital and a school are established as a part of the rehabilitation process and to educate the coolie children in vernacular Assamese language. After some days, the British manager of the estate is drowned in a fateful boat accident and police arrests three persons including Bhola, on the charge of murder. Chaos strikes the Garden again when Bishni, a popular girl of the estate, is molested and raped by Mackenzie, an Asst. Manager of the Estate. Significantly enough these incidents help develop the group consciousness as well as the cohesiveness of this hardworking community as they fight the exploitation and humiliation. Both Fredrik's wife and Asst. manager Mackenzie take perverted pleasure by physically abusing the coolies. On one instance Fredrik's wife shows her authority and unlawfully

whips little girl Dugga. When Tulsi protests the incident, he too receives the beating. Towards the end of the novel, the third generation of coolie population assumes centerstage. Their forefathers were not allowed to mix with the people outside the tea estate. But the times are changing fast and the change in the attitude can be seen when Arjun attends high school outside the tea estate. Simultaneously readers see glimpses of Indian Freedom struggle touching the estate; this is clearly not a good sign for the Plantation authority, they are apprehensive of this development, which may totally sabotage the designs of the oppressive Company. Over and above this they prevent the coolies from coming in touch with the local people so that they can be kept ignorant of their rights. Fredrik as well as Finley is concerned to see Tulsi emerging as a leader in the tea state and fail to hide their despair when the labourers disobey their request and follow Tulsi. This is a sign of coming to the realization about the self and identity on the part of the coolies despite carrying the burden of a traumatic past. Tulsi's son Arjun nourishes high aspirations and shows more concern for development and education than getting himself into coolie mould. Arjun leaves for higher studies and the novel ends on a positive note.

The term coolie is itself derogatory and insults human beings as slaves. Coolie, used as a common category for the unskilled manual worker offering services for hire, has various pre-colonial lineages with negative connotations. In the late eighteenth-century colonial capitalist world, the term is attempted to be recast through discursive constructions and material practices for labour degrading human beings to the level of working animals. In particular, "the coolie labour system organised in a period of abolitionism, is often depicted as a solution to the problems of the labour shortage. The etymology of the term is sometimes traced back to the Tamil word *kūli*, signifying hire wage, and also to the ethnic group (*Kolī*) performing menial tasks in Western India" (Burnell and Crooke 250).

This tale of subjugation and exploitation can be studied in the light of trauma theory and colonial discourse. Trauma theory has assumed critical importance in recent years and it shares some common thread with ethnic studies and identity politics. In fact, trauma theory is an umbrella term that covers different other issues as well. Spatial displacement and forced migration is an issue related to trauma, ethnicity and identity in both personal and community level. Without going into much elaboration we can say that all these experiences

of trauma, ethnicity, displacement and identity are empirical and later on repeat the occurrences in multiple ways, mainly psychological, and manifest in various forms like national consciousness, ethnicity, creating a community and inviting individual to join the community, formation of different institute of culture, education and politics etc. This phenomenon can be termed as a kind of "return of the repressed" (Caruth 183) or discordance between cognizance and experience. The theory of trauma helps us explore different symptoms of racial trauma and ethnicity related to inferiority, silence, frequent repetition, self-denial, hysteria and neurosis. Another leading trauma critic LaCapra comments in this regard in "Trauma, Absence, Loss":

> Indeed, in post-traumatic situations in which one relieves (or acts out) the past, distinctions tend to collapse, including the crucial distinction between then and now wherein one is able to remember what happened to one in the past but realise one is living in the here and now with future possibilities. (699)

According to Caruth forgetting is inherent in the traumatic experience and it is through the forgetting that survivour attempts to gain control over his/her trauma, which is otherwise elusive. The "inherent forgetting" (182) suggests that the subject has come to know or experience his / her trauma for the first time. The failure of cognitive facilities of the mind leads to an apprehension about the reality. Here, memory becomes a common factor and mediator in the interface between trauma theory and ethnic identity formation of a community and re-construction and reassessing the traumatic past both at personal and collective level. But recreating from memory is always a complicated process which is incomplete and partial and remains "unperceived" (Ricoeur 123) for most of the times. The picture created from memory resembles an image reflected on a broken mirror or cracked lenses. However, traumatic memory is different from narrative memory. Van der Kolk and Van der Hart distinguish between narrative memory and traumatic memory in this way:

> … in contrast to narrative memory, which is a social act, traumatic memory is inflexible and invariable. Traumatic memory has no social component; it is not addressed to anybody; it is a solitary activity. In contrast, ordinary memory fundamentally serves a social function. (164)

Traumatic memory resists full translation into social narratives and thus social history. This is of central importance for writing, literary and otherwise, that seeks to integrate traumatic experience into social narrative. The narrativisation of traumatic memory is the process of making traumatic experience part of social and historical narratives. This process also works against the alienating effects that the experience of trauma can have on individuals and instead emphasizes the social significance of trauma. Traumatic memory is inflexible and invariable, resisting integration into a narrative through which the individual might gain some control over the traumatic material. This resistance to integration is also characterized by a repetitive confrontation with the traumatic material in an effort to master it. However, fiction writers have tried their hand at translating traumatic memory into narrative structures. An individual cannot remember everything from his past as has happened to him in reality. The temporal distancing creates gaps and holes in memory. These holes or gaps are then filled by the dynamic memory in the process of retrieval to create a complete picture which reflects only a fraction of the real (Kolk and Hart 159). The erasure that creates the lag remains unfulfilled. So a novelist has to represent trauma through various tropes that symbolize the return in the process of constructing their racial and ethnic identity. Ethnicity, in this context, denotes a shared feeling of flexible cultural description loosely based on an attachment or a perceived sense of belongingness to any or all of the categories signified by ideas like homeland, cultural heritage, belief system and language. In this case, memory is a collective one which would help an ethnic group offer substantial resistance to any traumatic event. Thus shared memory help a society collectively confront a traumatic event that is "culturally embedded" (Brison 42) and further it is "shaped and reshaped in memory over time according, at least in part, to how others in the survivor's culture respond" (42).

As already mentioned, the novel explores these issues relating to trauma, labourers' ethnicity and identity both at personal and community levels. The group of displaced labourers depicted in the novel shows exemplary courage and power to cope with the trauma as the story progresses. The successive generations adapt and develop useful strategies for coping with ethnic conflict and traumatic past by educating themselves and keeping in contact with outside world defying the colonial designs. The labourers start their voyage as a fragile and vulnerable group and this is an effect of forced migration by the cunning British

authority. Eminent historian Amalendu Guha elaborately discusses this issue of the inhuman condition of forced displacement and their deportation to Assam:

> Conditions of recruitment were inhuman. During the periods of two years from 15 December 1859 to 21 November 1861, the Assam Company brought 2,272 recruits from outside of whom 25 or 11% died on the way … Of 84,915 recruits for Assam between 1 May 1863 and 1 May 1866, 30000 died by 30 June 1866. The high mortality did cost the planters … Men, women and children were enticed, even kidnapped, and traded like cattle; absconders were hunted down like runaway slaves. Under the workmen's Breach of Conduct Act of 1859, Section 490 and 492 of the Indian Penal Code (1860) and the Labour Act of 1863, as amended in 1865, 1870 and 1873, runaway workers could be punished by the Government alone. Yet the planters themselves generally disciplined such workers, inflicting upon them punitive tortures of all kinds. For labours was too precious to be sent out of their tea gardens to police and jail custody. (18)

These groups of indentured and internally displaced labourers are weak and feeble and severely shocked once their dream of "golden land of Assam" (Sharma, *Ejak Manuh* 5) is shattered when they arrive at their destination. This is quite similar to what Vertzberger opoines on collective political trauma:

> As a shattering, often violent event that affects a community of people (rather than a single person or a few members of it), and that results from human behaviour that is politically motivated and has political consequences. Such an event injures in one sharp stab, penetrating all psychological defensive barriers of participants and observers, allowing no space for denial mechanisms and thus leaving those affected with an acute sense of vulnerability and fragility. (864)

The demystification of the utopian space and their gradually fading dream of the "golden land" (Sharma, *Ejak Manuh* 5) immediately sets in once they set foot on the tea estate called Rupahijan and they are more than sure that their condition will be the same as ever. Some of

them die without food, medicine; their daughters are taken away by managers and sardars to be used as sex objects. During the journey itself they are repeatedly labeled as *Golam*[1]:

"You slave - daughter of a slave, and what a foul mouth." (49)

The colonial rulers bring to India a system of labour recruitment that was previously a familiar way of recruiting labour in other European colonies until the first half of the twentieth century. However, in India, this system is first introduced in the Assam tea gardens in the year 1859. Under the system, planters establish contacts with licensed contractors having their headquarters in Calcutta. In course of time, the city emerged as the largest center of labour recruitment industry to these plantations. These contractors are mostly European and they again have agents who are referred as *arkatti* or professional recruiters. These people are villagers, both men and women, and their task is to transport workers either by convincing them or by making false promises and luring them to work in these plantation sites. There is a popular belief that such people would drug the villagers unconscious and smuggle them off to new locations. Once the "*arkattis* are able to dupe poor people into entering the contracts of planters, the workers become the victim of circumstances and is forced into a subservient life as diverse means and ploys are employed by the planters" (De 277) to confine workers in their mesh of lies and deceits. This system has often been related with the feudal modes of labour employment and has been seen as a semi-feudal system under the veil of capitalistic rationale. Hugh Tinker's study on such labour recruitment system leads him to compare it with the system of procurement of slaves in the past. In the novel, the labourers like Tulsi and others are repeatedly addressed as slaves and not as workers. After sometimes they feel like they are really slaves and there is no end to their miseries. The word slave is so dehumanizing that it becomes synonymous with trauma, which becomes a fear psychosis. The *Dafadar*[2] sells the collies to earn extra money and thus, out of 754 recruits, they could only count 682 of whom about 60 were seriously ill; at least half of them, if not all, were sure to die on the way. The anonymous narrator recounts in the Chapter III of the novel:

[1] Indian word for slave
[2] Company agents

> "Each of the five *Dafadars* had a list of men recruited, containing the number of men, women and children separately. Of total 184 women, 21 died of cholera and 3 others either deserted or were forcibly taken away. Of the 50 children, 11 died. Of 80 minor girls, 6died; and of 84 young girls 3 died, and 7of them disappeared. Of 250 elderly males, 4 died, of 84 youths 2 died, and 3 out of 77 boys died. Thus in the coolie depot at Goalanda 50 people died in just 2 days, and 22 boys were missing, besides 3 girls." (Sharma, *Ejak Manuh* 20)

This kind of process of recruitment and labourer transport is a replication of the slave trade prevalent in the European countries earlier. Tinker's arguments for such a comparison may have been prompted by the fact that workers within the tea plantation industry are forced into certain oppressive contracts which isolate them from their roots as well as their normal lives under the mercy of plantation owners (Bhowmik 237). These labourers are never expected to return as they are forced into contracts which are either constantly renewed after their expiry or they are forced to work even after the termination of such contracts. The *arkattis* would stoop to any level to lure people away from their homes to the unhealthy tea districts. Young people and unhappy and deserted wives are given false promises of better marriage prospects. Through lying and trickery, they would get some people excommunicated from their villages, leaving them no alternative but to go to Assam. Wives are kidnapped from their husbands, and husbands from their families, leaving people destitute and poverty-stricken. In the novel, *Ejak Manuh* Banha's elder daughter is lured away deceitfully by the *sardars* and Banha fights the *sardar* only to be whipped mercilessly. After sometimes he develops some mysterious symptoms and he would sit lazily for hours brooding over his past. Magho's young wife is taken away forcefully by the cunning traders from the transit camp. When Magho protests this, he is also thrashed unconscious by the *sardars*. In this way, Sarma's novel shows that recruiting the labourers with forceful and oppressive measures create a racket of human trafficking and sexual abuse simultaneously. This pushed the coolies to a pathetic and terrible situation, which is overwhelmingly traumatic. Tulsi experiences all this while he is still a child. And his hysterical aberration, later on, testifies to his sense of traumatic past. Such tragedies are heart-rending which "can rack every one of the most sacred feelings of a human family" (Hoffman 158).

In the novel, the mapping of the condition leading to the death of Banha is an instance where the writer describes different trauma symptoms. Banha's dreams and hallucinations exemplify complicacies of hysteria and neurosis born out of the trauma which he witnesses as a participant. He has survived the trauma but it has permanently crippled his abilities. The narrator says in Chapter 9 of Part II:

> "Banha started to laugh, all alone and without any reason, he laughed and laughed until he chocked. Then suddenly he felt a heavy weight on his chest and leaning against a wall he was sniffling...Drowsing he saw a vast limitless ocean with tremendous waves rising high as hills aided by violent storms. He found himself floating on the water about to drown ... Shortly he sees something fall upon the waves which begin to wail piteously. He could recognize it- it was his wife." (Sharma, *Ejak Manuh* 105)

Another character Bisnath also shows PTSD like syndrome. He is moody and severe all the time, as if "suffering from mental stress" (170). Bisnath turns into a "recluse of a sort" (170), not mixing with people, nor gossiping, and always isolated in a work. On his way to Assam, he loses both his parents and his mother dies in utmost pain and misery unattended by anyone else except Bisnath. Moreover, their dead bodies are left for Bisnath alone to dispose of. This trauma stays with him forever and later on his sister, who is used by two men simply as a sex object, dies. All these transform him into an ascetic and there is no way out for him but to be engrossed in work. Trauma theorists like Charcot, Freud, Janet and Breuer opine that hysteria is a condition of psychological trauma that causes patients to "dislocate themselves from the reality because of unbearable traumatic events in the past" (Herman 33). Banha and Bisnath's behaviour testifies these symptoms. Later on Banha's son, Tulsi also suffers from the same symptoms. As a small boy, Tulsi witnesses all the tortures and victimization of his community members and also experiences it himself especially within the Tea Estate. Moreover, the community is concerned about the security and welfare of the children as their future is bleak if their children are not nourished properly. Healthy children symbolize a healthy community. But, coolie children like Tulsi, Kalondi, Bishni, Timki have seen too much of trauma to live healthy, idyllic or carefree childhoods, and they do not possess the maturity to process or make sense of trauma. In

addition to this, the children are more likely to live in poverty, ill health for a longer duration, and to be negatively stereotyped. The scariest of legacy they have from their forefathers is the transgenerated psychological trauma which they are forced to carry lifelong. They have witnessed their father's powerlessness to save the women they loved from being raped and their humiliated frustration at being unable to protect the little ones. As children bear witness to their parents' pained helplessness, they are of course deeply disturbed. This hampers their progressive understanding of the reality and render the social structure fragile, unstable and deeply at risk. In literature, the child's existence and behavior carry a symbolic meaning, such as innocence, freedom, and gentleness, as opposed to adulthood virtues of wisdom, responsibility, and strength. Certain patterns occur in writings about children, such as "abandonment, wholeness, the mutual transformation of the protégé and mentor, as well as the unity of time" (Byrnes 33). In this sense, children in literature are represented not only as a physical presence but also as tropes and symbols. Sarma has presented the children as living a substandard life under constant threats and dark realities. Ultimately, the traumatic memories these children inherit from their forefathers are compounded by their own personal experiences of victimization, powerlessness and humiliation. As a child, Tulsi is deeply hurt to see his elder sister as well as Magho's younger wife being taken away by the *Sardars* simply as sex object. His father Banha is flogged by the *Sardars* in front of his eyes. In spite of overwhelming terror and pain, Tulsi shows his bravery and challenge the *Sardar*. The anonymous narrator puts Tulsi's condition in these words:

> "Tulsi could not sleep anymore. He felt like crying. He did not get any beating from the *Sardars*, yet he felt as if he was thrashed until he knew no pain at all." (Sharma, *Ejak Manuh* 9)

The dream where he feels himself to be beaten is a symbolic recreation of the scenes of violence done upon labourers' body, is implanted in their psyche. All are doomed to the psychological arousal which "causes trauma victim" like Banha and Tulsi to "immediately access sights, sounds and smells related to earlier traumatic events" (Hartman 545) in the latter part of life. Tulsi's character shows an exceptional maturity like the elders, but he suffers silently and the trauma cripples him forever. Tulsi raises his voice against the

humiliation he receives from Fredrik's wife when he protests the wrongs done upon Dugga by the Manager's wife. Manager's wife beats Dugga mercilessly for no fault of hers, and this hurts the self-esteem of coolies even more. They are witnessing this sort of atrocious behavior right from the start of their journey. The journey itself epitomizes the torture and terror upon the body and mind of the labourers, children and elders alike. The following lines from the text can be cited as examples of how trauma has become a devastating phenomenon in labourers:

> "Banha had no anger, no regrets. He had not learnt to be angry. Rage, anger these are the property of rich only. Banha and his flock toil hard only to be rebuked and thrashed. The homeland, motherland is only a name for him. That place was familiar for him. The earth was dry there ... with the field of maize and rice … he had left behind this familiar land in search of a land of gold. The suffering is customary of the journey." (Sharma, *Ejak Manuh* 5)

In these lines the author visualizes the shattered and dejected psyche of the coolies who have taken everything as normal. This meek "acceptance of the torture and silencing of the self" (Eagleton 12) is reflecting their identification with ages of trauma, a wound that hardly heals. Although trauma is repressed, Banha cannot control the repetition of the suppressed emotions. So in a moment of frightened self analysis during the journey he questions:

> "But why so much pain? Why so much of misery? How many more days will be needed? How far is that land of gold? As if Banha is losing his enthusiasm. Beside him, countless people lay near each other. Is there a vast land to accommodate so many people?" (Sharma, *Ejak Manuh* 5)

Banha is deeply pained for the dark future of his children heading towards which puts him in a spell of "angry rhetoric," or "traumatized muteness" (Eagleton 13). He has already lost his elder daughter. At this point the deaths, unhygienic and filthy state of labour life, starvation, beating, thrashing, violence upon females are all portrayed vividly. They have lost all hopes of living. Moreover, they receive further wrong treatment from the British who always consider them to be dirty, and their females as sexual objects. Bereft of any option they run after a mirage - the "golden land" (Sharma, *Ejak Manuh* 5) of Empire's Garden in Assam.

Coolie children live with undressed wounds of victimization and loss of identity and dignity from the long past of their ancestors, and now they are experiencing it in their own lives. For many in the labour community, the perpetual re-victimization leads to a collective sense of psychosocial powerlessness and isolation. And this collective experience of deep psychological trauma provokes intense emotional pain. If the internalized aggression located in raw and infectious mental agony is not attended to and checked, it becomes a potential threat that can derail the structure of a society. This collective sense of victimization and bitter levels of wounding resurface in varied manner in different individuals - from silent to violent ways. It is undeniable that generational transmissions of psychic, emotional and dispiriting trauma have a sure influence on multitudes in a community. The cycle of traumatic memories, experiences and transmissions among the groups and their children continues - unaddressed, cumulative and boils over into mental aberration and uncontrolled repetitions. Representation of childhood traumatic experience of characters offers an interesting perspective to understand trauma of racial minorities or coolies for that matter. In Freudian psychology, childhood experiences play a crucial part in the formation of an adult's personality and psychological foundation, and influences his or her ego. Children's understanding of reality is different from that of adult as it is not filtered by the adult's psychosocial judgment, and its representation needs novel method as Rocío G. Davis points out:

> "Asian American Childhoods enact subjectivity through a complicated mesh of dispositions, associations, and perceptions that are represented through a singular selection and ordering of the accounts of events and persons who have played important roles in their distinct processes of selfhood." (166)

Children's perception of reality constantly changes and adjusts accordingly carrying the belief into adulthood. So, childhood forms a significant period of people's construction of relation between their self and surrounding. In coolie children, worldview is constructed around the feeling of trauma and loss both from the past and present in the *cha-bagan*. Tulsi, the child experiences the trauma of loss, understands the change of life caused by the external social, economic, political factors, and follows the rites of passage to adulthood through tumultuous physical and emotional journey. Tulsi assumes the responsibility of

protecting his loved ones from the *Sardar* fully knowing that it is an impossible task. Utter disgust makes way for trauma and he perceives the reality in terms of extremes of compounding woes:

> "Tulsi is angry with his own father Banha. Why did they leave their village, what lured him away, why so much of pain, so much thrashing? Everywhere there is lots of murky water, mud, human excreta, and garbage. Here the … human bodies looking like the scorched and corrugated skin of frog in a dried pond, men sprawled upon men, urines overflowing urines, excreta dumped upon excreta." (Sharma, *Ejak Manuh* 14)

Slowly he comes into terms with the reality as he integrates life into the reality that formulates his subjectivity and sense of ego. His development into maturity exhibits his process of relieving the trauma over the loss of loved ones. Sarma has used a child's point of view to project the multiethnic environment and offer his/her critique on racial discriminations in the hostile working environment. Cultural assimilation is shown as inevitable and that is why he has depicted Tulsi and other children easily adjusting to the diversity of a multicultural environment in a foreign land. They also foster multiple identities. Roberta Culbertson notes that children are more "sensitive to violence and threats of death than adults" (181) and we see Tulsi, as a child respond to incidents in a direct manner without the emotional filtering and sophistication of adults and in a body different from that of an adult. Culbertson argues that children are well conscious of their world in all its limitations, a world that is different from their imaginary fantasy land. Culbertson remarks:

> For a child, especially a young one, the lines between life and death, ordinary and non-ordinary, reality or states of consciousness, and the inner and the outer dimensions of experience are all more fluid than they become in later life. (181)

She goes on to explain that in the child, these experiences mix with his generally incomplete information about the ordinary, and with his often nonverbal knowledge of the transcendent, to create memories of terror and powerlessness that are at once "disgusting and arresting, banal and transcendent" (181). For example, in child Tulsi's perception, the death of his

mother along with many others and the humiliation of his father make him cautious about the impending danger around them. His zeal to fight the *Sardar* shows his strong will to survive at the "win-or-die" duel with the *sardar* when he throws handful of mud at the sardar. The torture and humiliation that he suffers as a child continue to haunt him in his mature years and this long exposure to oppression impairs his reasoning abilities, testifies in his daydreaming and hallucinations inside the jail. It bears a partial testimony of trauma and its uncontrolled repetitions, in subconscious state:

> "He was sweating like a pig and breathing fast. His mouth frothed ... he gibbered something which none understood, as he was still in a delirium." (Sharma, *Ejak Manuh* 212)

Before this incident Tulsi is beaten mercilessly by the police, and his whole body aches with unbearable pain because he participates in a political discussion with his fellow coolies, which is strictly prohibited by the British authority, and Mackenzie takes the opportunity of teaching a lesson to the collies. However, the inability to comprehend the situation makes the labourers liable to mysterious behaviour. The displaced community is kept on their toes with this kind of pressure tactics. Now, Tulsi's body and mind become a manifestation of post-traumatic symptoms:

> "Almost unconscious after thrashing, he was lying on the *pucca*[1] floor, along with other convicts. He dreamed in his disturbed sleep, but how could dreams be so horrible, he wondered! Perhaps something had gone wrong, pitiably wrong with his brain - he concluded." (215)

The turmoil inside his mind is nothing but the resurfacing of dormant memories of the torture that he had witnessed as a child. The symptoms resurface because of the psychological association that he makes between his past trauma and present physical abuse or overlapping of past and present time. He becomes an individual carrying the burden of his past failure to release his emotion in a normal manner as trauma survivors do not have control over traumatic neurosis. The symptoms can reoccur at any point of time. This happens to Tulsi which not only tells the truth about him but also interprets his past to others

[1] Made of concrete

and also for others. Tulsi achieves "a process of disembodying memory, demystifying it, a process which can only begin after memories have been remembered and the mystical touched by a buried self seeking its own healing" (Culbertson 179). For him and other characters - Bishni, Timki, Dugga, Bhola, Magho trauma becomes a phenomenon "in which a person feels utterly helpless in the face of a force that is perceived to be life-threatening" (Brison 40) and deals "… a blow … to the tissues of the mind … that results in injury or some other disturbance" (Erikson 183). The life-threatening nature of the trauma of displacement is also applicable in case of Tulsi's father Banha. In this traumatic reenactment Tulsi visualises his mother, he runs and runs, and confronts Janardan Thakur - a figure of torture in Tulsi's perception. Tulsi considers himself as a helpless individual who can only watch the village girls being taken away by Janardan Thakur to fulfill his bodily needs. Unable to help anybody, he sinks into his aberration and hallucination where past time is intertwined with the present time. He is thrashed badly by police just before he goes into delirium. So, in pain and agony he lies there falling on the pucca floor and has all these disorientations until someone awakes him. The narrator puts Tulsi's condition in these words:

> "Tulsi lay in a stupor, as his tortured muscles ached and groaned on their own. He slept fitfully while his pains stayed fully awake. His hands and legs jerked aimlessly and a painful whine lisped through his mouth that was agape. On his back just above the waist, blood had oozed and congealed…" (Sharma, *Ejak Manuh* 209)

He is only seven years old when Janardan Thakur unleashes the furry in the village. That incident flashes in his memory and he sees Janardan uttering these words with a spiteful glee:

> "So here, where will you go again? Come, move a few steps. Then enter the pit that is dug for you. A fire is blazing there. In the heat of this fire stone from distant hill blasts. And what you are? Come, precede few steps more." (212)

The introduction of the character of Janardan Thakur is crucial in the narrative that epitomizes trauma and disturbs Tulsi with all the panic that Thakur unleashes upon the villagers when he is only a child. It helps us realize the intensity of trauma that a child

suffers as a witness that reappears haunts him in his mature years. The author shows that the boundary line between the past and the present is blurred for Tulsi, testifying his vision when Bishni rebukes him for he fails to save her. The flashbacks of Tulsi's memories take readers back to "both the truth of an event, and the truth of its incomprehensibility" (Caruth 183) and triggers the healing process. After sometime Kury, who is already killed in the earthquake, appears in his reverie. There is a vast temporal gap between the two events in reality, and it resurfaces to haunt him time and again that confuses the present time frame. The figure of Janardan Thakur and the series of torture unleashed upon the labourers resemble the magnitude of the earthquake that kills Kury and many more. Now, these two events are interconnected in Tulsi's psyche and Kury murmurs to him:

> "Were I somewhere alive, I would have attempted living through you or in you. But I died before I could try. Dead now, I am still feeling you throughout." (Sharma, *Ejak Manuh* 211)

After Kury, another woman appears, whose "nails are long and sharp, teeth long and pointed and her full lips were crimson red. She laughs without sound, and her belly was bare" (211), and her tongue thrust out as she danced around Tulsi, who is horrified to see spikes sprouting out from her back. She shouts at Tulsi:

> "Can you recognize me? ... But I know my prey well. I will catch it and take it along, and you can't do a thing about it. Frightened? Are you? ... Are you worried for Kalondi? I know the little thing she is carrying in her womb, but you don't ... I want you to worry and suffer ..." (211)

As it frightens Tulsi immensely the apparition continues to torture him in a macabre situation and Tulsi keeps shivering like anything:

> "Can you hear that terrible sound? That's the sound of a hillock being blown up and shattered. I know it well, but I won't tell you. I want you to keep thinking, worrying, and suffering." (212)

Another significant thing to note in this respect is that the words uttered by the female figure that followed Kury's apparition echo Tulsi's concern regarding his tragedy of

not having a child even after three years of his marriage. Tulsi's symptoms remain unintelligible for other members of the community. It is through these re-enactments that Tulsi attempts a possible reconciliation at present. In other words, it is also an attempt to gain control over the self through re-enactment of the past. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud explains that, after the period of latency, the traumatized individual starts to repeat compulsively the original traumatic experience (44). Dominick LaCapra takes up this idea by formulating various symptoms of this compulsion to repeat or "act out" (22), such as nightmares, a general state of anxiety and unknown fears that can lead to self-mutilation and other forms of self-punishment etc. Tulsi does not engage in self-punishment and self-mutation, but other symptoms are clearly visible in him during this period of latency. LaCapra says that the subject's sense of temporality becomes distorted, so that "in acting out, tenses implode, and it is as if one were back there in the past reliving the traumatic scene" (21). Sometimes these flashbacks can create a break in the logical flow of telling in the trauma victims. At this moment we may find the victim wondering and moving back to the period of latency. This happens in the case of Bisnath who is lost in his own world, keeps wondering and seeks refuge in work only. Trauma theorist Herman says that people who survive atrocities often tell their stories in a "highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner which undermines their credibility and thereby serves the twin imperatives of truth-telling and secrecy" (2). When the truth is finally recognized, survivors can begin their recovery. But far too often secrecy prevails, and the story of the traumatic event surfaces not as a verbal narrative but as a symptom as we can see in Banha, Tulsi, Bisnath and others.

Towards the end of the novel, the author has shown Tulsi's son leaving for higher studies after he completes his matriculation from Topodhan Bora High School. This incident bears significance as it breaks the traditional barrier that the community perceived as invincible till now. His girlfriend Rumni comes of age and readies herself for matriculation examination. These are progressive aspects of a gradually evolving ethnic group towards development. They remember their past, interpret it in the present context and see hope in the future. This is quite evident from Tulsi's conversation with Chitta:

> "What a surprise Chitta ... I am beginning to understand the meaning of words spoken so often by Arjun, Rumni, Gulabi and their co-peers. In fact, our own son Arjun is now a stranger to us, to Kalondi and me ... They have ceased to be coolies in the sense we have been. Isn't it queer, that they don't disdain work, they love to work, and they accept work as Honurable? They are so different, - in all respect ... this is not to say we are all washed out, - lost. No, there is no place for pessimism in our life. The point is, although our own sons and daughters are still living in these very labour lines, they have gone out far, - far into a wide country meeting a wide range of people. It is almost a magic - a miracle." (Sharma, *Ejak Manuh* 352)

For a community oppressed for ages, a child going out for higher studies from such a background can assume the proportion of a miracle. The process of assimilation is the result of years of the correspondences between the labour community and the host Assamese culture. Assimilation with the local culture provides them with necessary cushioning to resist and cope with their past trauma. Assimilation does not hamper the labour community's uniqueness and cultural identity; in fact, it strengthens the cohesiveness as well as distinctiveness. That is why the coolie children are clear about their ethnic/racial difference from others. Arjun has a clear identification of his cultural heritage and belief. As long as his firm identification as a member of the minority remains, the assimilation will not create conflict with his ethnic identity. Assimilation does not always suggest the loss of one's cultural identity, but can also lead to hybridity as well. In this context, we can incorporate the distinction between organic and intentional hybridities pronounced by Bakhtin that allows for space to theorize the simultaneous coexistence of cultural change and resistance to change in displaced communities. The relation between Assamese people outside and the coolie of the Rupahijan Tea Estate in *Ejak Manuh* is a significant leitmotif in the novel. In one instance Bhola responds in a furious manner when Chitta, a local boy questions his integrity towards Assam, which carries the strong undercurrent of pain and sense of otherness inflicted upon them:

> "…don't make a big claim. You are born in this land; Ramu and I are also born here. Who asks from which country your ancestors came? Who asks about Ratan's history? I am a coolie. If anyone wants to know it is written on my body. It is not so

in your case. You are not a *bagania* coolie. That's it. Anyway, you don't have to tell repeatedly that this land is yours." (201)

Tulsi's words echo the same abhorrence for the local people when he says, "I won't talk with these Assamese people. Whenever their names come up I feel annoyed" (201).

However, Tulsi has developed a friendship with both Ratan and Chitta and he doesn't dislike them in particular. He is confused whenever he confronts an outsider inside the *Bagaan*. So his deep-rooted anger is not for any particular Assamese individual but the host in general, "I dislike Assamese people. But I do not dislike anyone specifically. What is it? Of course, I hate Cheniram. I would have very likely shoveled him if he used to stay in the garden" (203). This hatred has developed from the ages of neglect and distancing. Still, he saves a local boy from drowning, learns and converses in Assamese, puts his son in Assamese school (of course he has no choice). Tulsi has shown maturity and comprehends his situation well. Thus he can say:

"However, regardless of our liking or disliking, we are staying here. We are living here; you all are living here too. Our rules are different, yours are different. We work in the plantation, get whipped, and lay rolling (slouch) on the earth. We are coolies, you are *Babus*. What will happen in future?" (203)

It is futile for him to think of a distant future. Their conditions will be the same forever. In most cases, male and female respond in different ways to the onslaught of trauma. While the males sink into the deep recess of psyche, the females seek a kind of self-defense by accepting the reality of trauma instead of silencing it inside. This logic is clearly expressed in the speech of Bishni when she tries to analyze Chitta's definition of human suffering:

"…the pain and suffering that are constantly attached to us are not accepted as such by people. The pain that comes suddenly one day and then goes, or supposed to be gone in future, people accept them to be pain and that is why they are hurt … because this is only the beginning of pain and misery. In one single life of ours, there will be no end to it. That is why these are not pain at all." (371)

This seems to be a naive but effective way of coping with trauma as shown by the writer. For the *bagania* coolie, pain and misery are a constant and over a period of time the trauma loses its sharp cutting edge. A rape victim, Bishni can be an exemplary model of countering trauma in this regard. Defying such a violent physical abuse that alters her bodily integrity and self-respect, she lives a normal life. She is a contrast to the newlywed girl that could not survive the trauma of physical abuse inflicted by Fredrik. Chitta is also an example of a good human who marries a rape victim and helps her overcome the trauma. She sees hope in their future, wants to celebrate it with wine and dance. Unlike others she has accepted the social change in the labour community as natural, though there is an undercurrent of sadness in her acceptance, which is quite identical to the coolie ethos:

> "I can sense that this one will be our last dance. We have fallen far behind. Kalondi, Timki are alive too, they are also people from the past. A new society has come out of our wombs. Like the newborn calf of cows and goats, they have acquired the energy to walk and run minutes within their birth. We have fallen behind." (374)

In general, the community cannot easily accept the change in the mindset of their children; they perceive it as a kind of threat to their cultural identity. They carry a dualism that confuses and traumatizes the coolies generation to generation. As time passes Tulsi's son Arjun finds himself in a tricky situation; he becomes a stranger to his own people who start viewing him as the other. This problem starts with Arjun gradually progressing in his studies and moving up the social ladder. Arjun has to take special permission to attend school outside the garden, which is a kind of historic event for the coolie. His life in the school is quite tough, troublesome and insulting as he is teased, taunted and even physically abused most of the time only because he is a coolie. Isolated, he becomes an object of ridicule because of his speech and physical appearance for both teachers and students. He becomes the victim of the colonial attitude of the local people who force him to be the other and puts him in a traumatic situation. His intonation, which is different, like "*ji Saa'b*, what is *kaka*?" (302) puts him in an embarrassing situation. Arjun introduces himself: "We are *mazdoors, mazdoors* of the garden" (302). Arjun perceives his identity in terms of *coolie*, *mazdoor*, *bagania coolie* (302) only because he is brought up to think like that. But the coolie identity is constructed along the markers of work, labour etc only and not along racial line. Arjun is

unable to answer a question posed as for whether he belongs to Uriya, Bihari, Chautal or any other race or ethnicity. For him, his identity marker is a coolie - a *bagaania* only. He is not given any chance of learning proper Assamese by the particular Assamese teacher. With no scope to talk to anyone, he becomes a pariah, an exile at school - a terribly distressing situation for a boy. A lot more cruel and strange is that he becomes an exile within his own society of the *bagan*. Quite unexpectedly for the labourers Arjun emerges as a challenge to their labourer ethos and negation to their cultural heredity: "being himself a *mazdoor*, he endeavoured to become a *babu*" (302). With their limited knowledge the labour community takes it as an insult upon them as a whole. Thus, we can see how the colonial discourse has infected the coolie community in a negative way where progress is viewed as a threat to cultural identity. Arjun has been thrown into the confines of a ghetto. These are the negative impact of the trauma that the community is exposed to as shown by the writer. But their apprehension of loss of cultural identity is nullified by the progressive voice of Rumni that appreciates change but not at the cost of cutting them off from their roots:

> "This is the rule of the universe … In the distant past, we used to wear animal skin and barks of trees. Untill the other day we painted our body with *gadani*[1] … Thus we abandon few things and welcome something new. *Jhumur* is good; it will sustain." (326)

According to Rumni none can be indifferent to one's heritage and should not abandon *Jhumur* and *Tushu* songs.

Arjun's sense of "otherness" intensifies with the attack upon him by his fellow students during a football match only because his identity is fixed as a coolie, who is there to be attacked. Arjun becomes aware of his physical appearance and dress habit that is viewed as different; the love-hate politics of the students and teachers are explained by Rishi, who teaches Mathematics and has a soft corner for Arjun:

> "The number of boys who hate you will increase day by day. At present they overlook you only because you are a boy from labour community (*mazdoor*[2]). They

[1] Specific design painted on the body, particularly by tea tribes of India
[2] Labour, daily wage worker

do not detest you completely. It is only the beginning of jealousy; gradually it will intensify." (318)

However, Arjun emerges a victorious boy and finds a worthy supporter in the form of the Assistant teacher of the school and prevents further damage from the trauma of segregation or isolation inside the school. Arjun has shown promise and can become what other coolie/labourers could not achieve. Besides, he encounters different life experiences in school with classmates and teachers. Here, the relation between coolie children and the school also indicates the conflict between the individual and the institutional system. For Arjun, school life is a nightmare because he becomes an object of attack by his fellow students. But there are teachers who love him and it lessens his trauma to an extent. Arjun's realization of his physical appearance, his perception of his ethnicity and physical features shows minority children's identity crisis. They understand their inferior social status in a hostile society, and now they wish to be upgraded and assimilate into the mainstream culture. Thus, Sarma facilitates a kind of dialogue between the self and community in Arjun and his community, self and other in Arjun and local Assamese people. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogic attributes of language and experiences can be applied to our study of Sarma's novel as well. Bakhtin's theory of language, especially heteroglossia, concentrating on the linguistic elements and the literary aspects of language, is relevant here because it enables us to approach, beyond a mere linguistic line of thinking, the ideological points of view, cultural values, and opinions that are attached to and are reflected by language. Bakhtin holds that the individual self comes into being only through the confrontation with the other and the alteration takes place precisely through language, which is open-ended, social and dialogic. Bakhtin formulated the inseparability of self from the other in this way:

> The hero's attitude toward himself is inseparably bound up with his attitude toward another, and with the attitude of another toward him. His consciousness of self is constantly perceived against the background of the other's consciousness of him "I for myself" against the background of "I for another." (203-07)

Tulsi's words and his idea about himself are structures under the continuous influence of someone else's words about him. Tulsi, Arjun, Rumni, Bishni, Bhola all are concerned about their cultural heritage and identity as we have already seen in our discussion.

Moreover, individual's concern and voicing of the culture, past can extend to the community as reflected in the Sarma's text. Tulsi as a child and later on Arjun constantly build their identity on how the other, especially the dominant section, view them in the society. Cathy Caruth has opined that in extreme trauma one's sense of self is radically altered. Simultaneously there is a traumatized self that is created. Of course, it is not a totally new self; it is what one "brought into the trauma as affected significantly and painfully", that can be taken as "a very primal way, by that trauma" in the text. As such, the "recovery from post-traumatic effects, or from survivor conflicts, cannot really occur until that traumatized self is reintegrated" (188) in the present. Importantly for the elders in the society, their identity as coolie is constructed alongside "social reality" and "othering" as argued by Homi Bhabha - "despite the play in the colonial system which is crucial to its exercise of power, colonial discourse produces the colonized" (5). Bhabha's idea of "othering" (5) is based on factors that go beyond the colonizer-colonized paradigm, to operate with religious difference, economic differentiation and imaginary geographical spaces in Sarma's text. This idea is relevant to our discussion of the coolie community's negotiation of different issues regarding their identity and culture as a strange, different community. The atmosphere of shock and curiosity that is seen when the labourers confront the Assamese people for the first time can be discussed along with the line of argument taken by Bakhtin and Bhabha. The local Assamese people's attitude is not much different from the colonial authority who views labourers as "slave" (Sharma, *Ejak Manuh* 53) working in the *bagan*. The two groups look at each other with much curiosity and with a purpose to find out how much they are different from each other. Their culture, body colour, dress habits are different from each other. There is an atmosphere of mystery and strangeness that is expressed in the form of question posed by both groups:

> "You are coolies, aren't you? Coolies of the Bagan?" (54)

The coolies nod in affirmation and retort with question about the *nagara*[1] and *hari-naam*[2]:

[1] A drum in the shape of bowl covered with animal skin which makes loud sound when stroked rhythmically
[2] A kind of collaborative activity of chanting prayers to the accompaniment of clapping and rhythmical beating of drums, *taal* etc. It is a part of *Asomiya* Baishnabite culture

"How does it make such a loud noise? What is that thing (referring to the *nagara*)? What does it contain? So roaring a sound!" (55)

The class divide along the racial and ethnic line is obvious as Assamese people consider the coolies as untouchable. Here we find close affinities between the Assamese people and the British; Assamese people consider the coolies as other and the British consider coolies as slaves:

"Hei, wait, you are coolies, coolies indeed. Cannot you talk? ... That is our *nam-ghar*.[1] Understood? *Nam-ghar*. But wait; do not touch me, for I have to distribute *maah-chaul*.[2]" (55)

The man continues in his dominant style and tries to make the coolies realise that their life styles are different from each other:

"Ya, this is our nam-ghar. We sit on the floor and chant *naam*.[3] God, almighty you must be aware of … How far is your home? Do you have such big *nam-ghar* … and, do you have *baari*[4] like we have here? Does your place have things like *tamul*[5] tree, mango - jackfruit tree, open fields, paddy?" (55)

Banha clarifies to the village people that they eat *roti*, *chatu* as food and they do not have a nam-ghar but they have temple owned by *Zamindar*[6]. And in the village they have rows and rows of mud-houses. But the tension eases out gradually and the writer has shown the two communities coming close to each other despite having cultural differences. Even towards the end marriage relation between the two communities develops. Inside the Tea - Estate the coolies are the people who work hard. Still they have not seen any significant change in their life. And it is a negative policy of the shrewd British authority to keep the labour community away from the rest of the world. British do not want to make the labourer aware of their rights and position. It is the reason that Finley is nervous to see the labourers being united

[1] Sacred place where prayers are chanted
[2] Snacks, primarily vegitables distributed after chanting of collective prayers
[3] Prayers
[4] The courtyard in the backside of house with different trees and fruits and vegetable crops for household use of an Assamese family. Someone having a big courtyard is considered a status symbol in the Assamese society
[5] Beetle nut offered as mark of respect
[6] Capitalist landowner

under Tulsi's leadership. The policy to segregate the coolies is challenged gradually by the coolies after they come in contact with people from local Assamese community outside the periphery of the Tea Garden. Tea Garden authority tries to traumatize the coolies by beating and putting them in jail. Resistance starts and gradually they organize different community activities and rituals which can give them an identity and self-definition. This consciousness about their ethnicity and race is another significant aspect of their coping strategy. For this ethnic group consisting mainly of coolie, memory and trauma are fully incorporated into the collective psyche that "trauma unsettles and forces us to rethink our notions of experience and of communication" (Caruth 183). Their past experience of trauma as a group or community has improvised their ways of communicating and interacting with people both from inside and outside their group. In course of time, it becomes an imperative for the group to contact other people outside their group and this includes local people outside the periphery of the tea estate. At this point maintaining their ethnicity and cultural identity is one core issue. Different activities like shopping, education and cultural exchanges help them come closer to each other, once Tulsi saves a local boy from drowning in the river and wins the trust of local Assamese people. One character Dehjur focuses the significance of the incident in these words:

> "Tulsi, the village people adored you very much today. In a single day you have endeared all the coolies in their minds." (Sharma, *Ejak Manuh* 92)

This incident acts as one of the first steps in removing the mistrust, doubts and disbelief between the local people and coolies. The freedom struggle gradually affects the people too. Those small incidents help them come closer to local Assamese society and assimilate with it. The cultural exchange is shown as a natural process in the novel to focus on the issue of confronting the trauma as a group and this method works when one has to live a life in the periphery. Although this is not a diversified group with hybrid identities, there are hints within the novel that they are ready to accept change. Change is a necessary precondition to deal with the sense of alienation and dispel the ghost of otherness rooted deeply in the minds of both local Assamese and the Britishers. But in this colonial garden all identities tend to be hybrid because it is a result of interaction between multiple cultures over a period of time as already pointed out. This identity encounters other culture over the borderland and acquires

hybridity. Gloria Anzaldúa brings forth issues relating to the construction of hybrid identity by pointing at the "nostalgic demand for unitary, isolated cultures" (221). Isolated, pure identity is a myth in the present world and such a demand will only lead to more confusion when "we constantly come into contact with, and must live among, others who are mixed in different ways" (210).

On the other hand, remembering and reenacting the trauma of displacement assumes a kind of cultural practice and becomes an identity marker for members of the community. Regarding identity construction, Kirby Farrell contends that trauma is both "a clinical concept and … a cultural trope" (14). It is, therefore, customary that artists and writers have traditionally used identity construction as a trope in their work. Deborah Horvitz writes that "individuals internalize the material conditions of their lives" (5), by which their "social and economic realities, through symbols, fantasies, and metaphors in order to build a unique and personalized interpretation of the world" (5). Such internalizations lend themselves to art and more specifically, to writing. Farrell argues that trauma is a type of history that interprets the past:

> Like other histories, it attempts to square the present with its origins. The past can be personal or collective, recent or remote: an artifact of psychoanalysis or an act of witness; a primordial myth or a use of ancestral spirits to account for misfortune or violation. (14)

Already we have seen the connection of histories and elements of literature such as myth, witnessing, remembering in *Ejak Manuh*. Remembering and witnessing help the community come under collective consciousness. Revolving around a collective memory and a kind of collective strife they shape their cultural identity by organizing *Jitia Karam Puja* (Sharma, *Ejak Manuh* 102) and dance to celebrate the coming of the new season and a good tea production. The collective strife causes shared memories of both good and bad to resurface and forces the witnessed to extract good memories of their homeland and sustain life in the face of adversity. It helps the community in overcoming the devastation caused by the earthquake of 1927 collectively and starting life anew. They do not stop sharing the love and being loved by others. The bonding and their shared sense of ethnicity come to the forefront when Bishni is molested and raped by Mackenzie. They immediately group together and are

ready to avenge the attack upon the member of the group. Sarma has depicted the violence done upon the females and the resultant trauma of the female psyche in the incident when the old woman narrates how Fredric's torture forces a newlywed girl from the garden to go mad. Fredric keeps his lustful eye on the girl and he is desperate to have her. Here Fredric appears as a representative figure of the colonial torture upon the coolie and nobody can stop him from fulfilling his lust. After Fredrik's exercising of his sexual authority, the girl goes mad and all the symptoms of trauma inflicted upon the girl can be seen in her behaviour. The attitude of the British colonial authority towards the female is always contested under different discourses like gender, race, culture and subjugation. The coolie woman remains a desired sexual object for the British Manager. There are two instances of this objectification in the novel – first the rape of a newlywed girl by Fredric and then Bishni's molestation by Mackenzie. Females are denied individuality and silenced by means of different violent methods. Moreover, the colonial male power is thought to be beyond any contention. The incident is narrated in these lines:

> "She served wine to *Saheb*. *Saheb* adored her while drinking at the same time, and eventually led her into the adjoining room and removed her clothes. She screamed in frenzy. Not because she had seen a man in that state, but suddenly *Saheb* appeared to her as a dreaded beast. She felt that a brutal beast is approaching to engulf her with cruel claws and gaping mouth. She screamed in frenzy and collapsed. She was found in the hut next morning and she did not recover again. Suddenly she would scream and run like insane; and then frequents the hut." (101)

Sarma has used the mythic element as he narrates that the girl perceives the manly figure of Mackenzie transforming into a beast. This narration has surely conveyed the trauma psychosis to the readers. After three months of hysterical behaviour, the woman dies. The traumatic fear is so deep in her that the girl continues to narrate her experience as if she is still having the perception:

> "There is a beast measuring as high as the hut, its mouth and eyes are crimson red, and the lower portion of its body rese mbles a black serpent, a gigantic serpent curled right there." (101)

Surely she has failed to comprehend her trauma. So, in an utter traumatic frenzy, she keeps frequenting the place and repeats her behaviour for several days. In this instance Fredrik epitomizes colonial attitudes and does not attach any value to the female except as a body; a section of the coolie women echo the same sentiment as evident in their response to Mackenzie's death. This attitude feels that the coolie women should be available when sought by the white master for a sexual purpose. The protest is useless, and the question of any other negative effect upon the female is totally overlooked. In a book on Europeans in India, a section on the planter mentions that "you occasionally come across a bachelor Planter whose views on a certain form of morality are somewhat lax. This is he who fits himself with a partner of his loneliness, generally a daughter of the soil" (Guha 53). But this lurking threat of the abuse of the woman is articulated in the anxieties over female chastity by the labour community in general. The female bodies become textual evidence that recounts the torture and agony that the victim survive. Kalondi's molestation by Seniram and Bishni's rape by Mackenzie are some incidents that assume almost similar traumatic proportions. Finley knows this well and sees the impending danger resulting from the heinous crime committed by Mackenzie. So he says:

> "Mackenzie, you have only ten minutes in hand. We must not take more than two minutes in talk, so that you are left with eight minutes during which you will pack-up, carry the suitcase to the waiting jeep outside and drive out of the garden." (Sharma, *Ejak Manuh* 259)

When Finley sees that suggestion has been rejected he shouts again:

> "You know very little about the sentiments of the labourers, and I do … how many of them can you kill with a gun, forgetting the question of self defense. What is after that? After that they will cruelly pull out your tongue and cut it in slices, cut off each finger in your hands and feet, poke out your eyes. And then wait and find out other ways to torture if they find you still alive." (259)

It is not for nothing that Finley perceives the labourer in such cruel words. The ages of torture and trauma that the coolies are exposed to have made them cruel where there is hardly any humanity. Now they will answer the violence with only violence. At this moment

the community's traumatized consciousness can be viewed in terms of responses to "the darkest of fears and anxieties" (Neal 5). Under such conditions, the boundaries between "order and chaos, between the sacred and the profane, between good and evil, between life and death become fragile" (6) as people see themselves as moving into uncharted territory both individually and collectively. The central hopes and aspirations of personal lives are temporarily put on hold, replaced by the darkest of fears and anxieties. Symbolically, "ordinary time has stopped: the sun does not shine, the birds do not sing, and the flowers do not bloom" (4-5). The outrage of labourers regrouping to assert their right expresses the changing dimensions of the laboures collective consciousness:

> "In a few minutes the crowd of men and women, assembled there, came to know about it. And each of them felt with suppressed agony and danger, that the torture was, in fact, a torture on their community as a whole, - a heinous crime perpetrated on a helpless group of men and women." (Sharma, *Ejak Manuh* 256)

Moreover, gendered images of rape and violence upon the female body are used as tropes in this narrative which engage the reader's attention in realizing the trauma. It is a crucial issue here and the community protests the molestation and seeks justice for Bishni and the womenfolk. But they are not always violent and love to live in peace. The same feeling is shared by the labourers when Kalondi is molested by Cheniram. Bhola voices this to Finlay when he expressed the community's desire of revenge:

> "Sahib, hundreds would have joined him regardless of consequences. And Sahib, we have spent long years here to know for sure, the result, when a coolie fights a Babu, no matter how right was the coolie's cause." (192)

The discourse of trauma and torture upon the females can be related to the colonial way of recruiting and managing the labour population. Colonial capitalism deepens ethnic clustering among the mass of the plantation labourers and brings about ethnic and class solidarity among the managerial and intermediary class. The laborers remain strictly divided by ethnicity, language, and religion. This practice reflects the larger colonial trend of divide and rule of the East India Company, commonly practiced during the nineteenth century. Entities such as the Assam Company further prevent mass protest by isolating their divided

workforce from the outside world. The Assam Company enacts measures of discipline in various ways and the labourers are compelled to "reside within the vicinity of the gardens; their mobility within and outside the plantations was severely restricted; they were isolated from the outside world; and they were made completely dependent on their employers" (Behal, 19-20). The struggles that develop on the plantations remain isolated, and no links could emerge in such a detached climate. Laborers, both native and foreign to the Assam Valley, are not allowed to leave the estates, and *chowkidars* prevent them from contacting villagers nearby. The following lines express the state of confinement of the *bagania* coolies inside the garden:

> "But the problem is that, how they would venture out of the coolie line? Bagaania coolie is imprisoned within the Bagaan. It is customary for them to do different works like hoeing, felling the trees during the day, and sleeping silently inside their hut at night. It is a crime to go out of the estate at night." (Sharma, *Ejak Manuh* 52)

Enforced isolation inhibits "the development of class consciousness … by maintaining … a strict physical control" (Behal, 23). This gross exploitation reduces workers to the position of neo-slaves. Moreover, real profit from these tea estates ends up in the hands of the owners and managers in the form of profits or salary as they receive a salary many times that of their common labourers. In this way, the company ultimately produces a system of neo-slavery that traps workers from great distances throughout the entire sub-continent. Further, the police stations are not located in close proximity of the Tea Estates, so that any kind of complaints against the authority will not be entertained in a short period of time. This position is succinctly articulated by a planter:

> Labour is the great machinery by which tea-land is made valuable; and it is costly machinery, too, especially for Assam tea-planters. Now, no man would be fool enough to buy a machine, and then willfully damage it. (Baildon 155)

On the other hand traumatic experiences of coolies are racialized; and in most cases, racial trauma is socio-culturally constructed. There is no intrinsic trauma for any given racial minority, but labourers are often associated with certain traumatic experiences. For example, people generally assume that female labourers in Asia have no individuality and live in a

subjugated situation. This image of subjugated Asian women has been widely accepted by mainstream audience and reinforced by Caucasian writers, such as Pearl S Buck, who depicts Chinese women's situation through her western eyes. In her two major novels *The Good Earth* and *Pavilion of Women*, Buck depicts her version of Chinese women as so weak, vulnerable, and lacking individual autonomy that they need Christianity to liberate them. Her depiction of Chinese women has become a racialized image for the American white readership. Because of the ignorance of ethnic difference, the readers may also generalize all Asian women as having the same subjugated situation. In *Ejak Manuh* females live under constant threats from the British as well as the males from the host community like the Sarders. Later on in the novel we find that Gulabi, another coolie girl, is attacked by males from the host community.

However, assimilation is a universal process and dance, music partially help them forget their tragedy and thus give them a temporary sense of happiness and a "relocation or translocation of culture" goes as a simultaneous process (Werbner 236). They can now sing traditional Assamese songs like *Borgeet*[1] as well as their own songs which are full of hope for the future:

> "Behold the dawn, busting out of darkness.
> With myriads of rays
> Turning the earth aglow." (Sharma, *Ejak Manuh* 360)

Rumni sings a popular and famous *Borgeet* – a devotional song akin to *Bhajan*[2] – accompanied by flute, violin, and a *khol - mridanga*[3]:

> "Awake, Oh Kamalapati
> Awake and arise
> For a glimpse of your moonlike face
> Oh Gobinda, I yearn.
> Behold the dawn busting out of darkness …" (374)

[1] Lyrical or holy songs that are sung to specific ragas mostly composed by Srimanta Sankardeva and Madhavdeva in the 15th – 16th centuries
[2] Also a song with a religious theme
[3] Traditional Assamese musical instruments used for performing Borgeet, Bhajan etc

She surprises everybody with her songs which are sung unexpectedly with all the subtle and intricate nuances of *Raga* without any strain. The coolie children have made Assamese their own language. The community organises a function to celebrate Arjun's entry into the MBBS course and the girls dance to the tune of *madal*, *dhak* and *dhumcha* etc with the accompaniment of songs:

> "Find yourself butter and cream
> Get your flute and harp
> Collect the whipping rod too
> And heed to me,-
> Free the calves as soon as you can,
> ……
> What penance gifted you?
> The lords of thee worlds
> As your cow-herd?" (379)

The songs sung in the community gathering capture this optimism regarding Assam—as a land of hope, opportunity and work. They reflect hope, positivity and also hint that the community has come a long way from the traumatic days and is looking forward to a bright future. *Jhumur*[1] songs map the transition of the Assam tea garden from being imagined as sites of despair to the sites of hope. Tulsi and his community have successfully fought the difficult phase of their life in the Cha-bagan so far. Regarding the reflection of life in the songs and oral culture in the tea plantation workers Nitin Varma comments:

> The perceptions and anxieties about Assam tea gardens were also becoming a part of wider constructions of *cha-bagan* as a site of "oppression" (places of *dukh* and *taklif*[2]) articulated in other narratives sketching the life on the tea gardens. *Jhumur* songs, an important element in the oral/cultural traditions of tea labourers in Assam, indicate to one such imaginings of the tea-garden. (125)

[1] A traditional dance form performed by young girls basically fromtea tribes of West Bengal, Assam, Jharkhand and Odisha
[2] Pain and misery

In *Ejak Manuh* the articulation and the lyrics of songs do not necessarily echo sadness and pain of coolie life as commented by Varma. In contrast, songs show the glimpse of hope and a good future for them. But the Assam as a place reminds them of the change of cultural context that carries the anxieties over *dukh* and *taklif*. Magho's *madal* becomes synonymous with his identity and helps him wipe away the memory of his tragedy to some extent.

As in other tribal societies, alcohol for the coolies (Mundas, Santhals, and Oraons etc) has a particular social, cultural and religious significance. Drinking forms a crucial part of festivals and religious occasions. In fact, the coolie/labourers consider it to be spiritual to drink during a festival and drinking is almost a ritual for them. The Bengal Excise Commission of 1884, which makes detailed observations of the festivals and rituals of the tribals of Chotanagpur, observes that it is a religious duty for all persons, male and female, to drink the home-brewed *handia* on major festivals like *Bandua, Sarul, Horul Charok, Bhansing Puja, Chhata and Kuramgar*. Libations of *handia* are offered to the gods, followed by dancing and celebration in which both sexes indulge freely in *handia*. Again drink is said to be important during social occasions of birth, marriage and death. In an anthropological survey of the alcoholic beverages among tribals in India, J.K. Roy argues that not only is the alcoholic beverages (especially home-brewed rice beer) important in social, cultural, occasions but also that these form a part of the diet, having significant nutritive value (312-322). Garden *haat*,[1] Bhola's shop from where the coolies purchase their weekly necessities, and often where the liquor shops are located, become the site for these weekly drinking occasions. The weekend drinks, in particular, become a crucial axis of sociability of plantation workers, cutting across lines region, language and ethnicity. It assumes significance all the more because the patterns of work and life within the plantation were attempted to be drawn on the lines of race and ethnicity. The most important role played by the beverage is that it brings the people together as a group and it provides a platform for them where they could share their problems with other. Local people from outside the Garden share this beverage and exchange information on cultural, social, and political issues. This helps the labourer community in mitigating their tragedy to some extent. Bhola's shop provides such a common platform where people would come together

[1] Local markets

and share their pain. A recent anthropological/sociological study of the plantation workers in Assam argues that, "…though they (plantation workers) are ethnically different in their homeland yet by virtue of their sharing common world-view, folklore, songs, dance, food and drink, like *handia*,[1] these scattered people formed drinking clusters which ultimately lead to form social clusters, again in Assam tea gardens" (Mahato 133).

To sum up it can be said that Sarma has shown that the coolie community successfully chalks out the strategies to cope with trauma by cultural assimilation as well as through other social institution like education, development and overcoming of the language barrier. This is another trope in his narration of the development of an intentionally hybridized (Bakhtin 1981) community where the translocation of culture acts a "process of dislocation, transplantation and relocation, both painful and joyous" (Werbner 236). It is through such practices that the displaced "invent and re-create a local culture and viable community" (236) which also sustain their organic identity to some extent so as to counter the trauma of displacement. Such trauma of dislocation and displacement becomes a permanent condition for this ethnic group. In fact, this sense of a shared traumatic past helps them evolve as a distinct ethnic group and at the same time carve a niche for themselves within the greater Assamese society. The collective consciousness is instrumental in transforming them from one state to another. The ability a group shows in adjusting to a new situation and forgetting the past plays a crucial role in the healing of trauma.

[1] A locally made liquor

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Chapter V

A Sense of Return: Trauma and Memory in *Makam*

> The absence of an empathetic listener, or more radically, the absence of an addressable other, an other who can hear the anguish of one's memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story.
>
> Dori Laub

> There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.
>
> Maya Angelou

This chapter reads *Makam* as a novel representing strategies of collective trauma, memory and coping. The study juxtaposes both individual and collective experiences of victims that the writer has taken into account. The belated responses characteristic of trauma underlie the narrative structure of Choudhury's book, and the author frankly admits that she is late in starting the research for writing a book about the plight of Chinese origin people deported from India in the wake of Sino - Indian war of 1962. An intuitive impulse for writing a book on the subject is one of the main factors behind the creation of *Makam*, which is about the traumatic period previously hidden from the world. Choudhury here intends to bear witness to the soreness and pains of living wounds of the Chinese origin people and their estranged family members. The novel also highlights the plight of people other than Chinese, belonging to other parts of India, brought to Makum in Assam as part of British tea-plantation ventures. Thus, the author aims at lifting the veil from the truth and it becomes evident that "to bear witness is to take responsibility for the truth" (Felman 1992b: 204). This is made clear by the author in the writer's section appended in the end of the novel. Forced displacement of the Chinese people brings in the issue of identity which is pitted against the notion of deconstruction of the purist form of identity in the novel. The characters in *Makam* specifically identify themselves with a place; and thereby constantly express an urge to return to the place of their origin - homeland. The writer has shown this tendency on the part of the characters by creating some figures or images of return to the

traumatic and silenced histories. This narrative strategy works simultaneously with the recounting of the traumatic ordeal of displaced people. In our reading of *Makam* and the different literary devices used to represent the trauma, we need to first examine the issues relating to literature and testimony that convey some meaning so far latent. In this context we can quote Felman and Laub who ponder over the same issue:

> What is the relation between literature and testimony, between writer and the witness? What is the relation between the act of witnessing and testifying, and the acts of writing and reading, particularly in our era? (xiii)

The application of trauma theory to study the nature of testimony incorporates other questions on direct/indirect witnessing of traumatic events that do not go by the ordinary mechanism of understanding and cognition of the human mind. In other words, this question leads us to more complex questions on the nature of truth in literature and how to access its truth value. Is it possible for a writer to write the trauma when the experience does not form a part of his/her life? How authentic would be the depiction when the fictionalization is done from secondary sources? Would the writer be able to retain the same amount of intensity as the narrator has gone through? Finding an answer to these questions will lead us to the exploration of the development of different facets of trauma theory in recent times. Whether one is a direct or indirect witness to the event, distortion can arise at each stage of understanding or narrating the trauma. In the twentieth-century, trauma theory has opened up the scope for looking for a link between writing and history. Toni Morrison and W. G. Sebald are instrumental in the resurgence of trauma studies in psychiatry, law and historiography as providing a belated testimony for the century as a whole. The interest in identifying twentieth-century narrative as testimony started perhaps after Walter Benjamin's reading of Baudelaire as the poet of the shocks of the city (Jennings 4). Still, application of trauma theory to the twentieth-century war narratives has been largely unexplored.

Rita Choudhury, in the present era, has established herself as a well known and much sought after novelist in contemporary Assamese literature. Her novels cover a wide range of subjects and themes; the range of her novels covers politics to the history of Assam from ancient to modern days. She is also known for her poems. She has received the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award for her novel *Deo Langkhui* (2005) in the year 2008. She drew the

attention of critics and readers alike with her first novel *Abirata Jatra* (Incessant Journey) published back in 1981, which won the first prize in a competition held by Asom Sahitya Sabha on the novels on contemporary Assamese situation. She wrote this novel when she had to go underground during the Assam Movement. She was also the editor of *Adharxila* for 2001-2002. Some of her famous novels are *Tirthabhumi* (The Shrine, 1988), *Maha Jibanar Adharshila* (Foundation Stone of Great Life, 1993), *Nayana Tarali Sujata* (1996), *Popiya Torar Xadhu* (Tale of a Meteor, 1998), *Rag Mal Kosh* (1999), *Jala Padma* (Water-Lotus, 1999), *Hridoy Nirupai* (The Helpless Heart, 2003), and *Ei Samay Xei Samay* (These Times, Those Time, 2007). While the novels published in the early stage of her career deal mainly with love, sacrifice and rampant corruption in the society, we can discern a marked shift towards historical events in her later novels, especially in *Deo Langkhui* (2005). *Ei Samay Xei Samay* (2007) and *Makam* (The Golden Horse, 2010) are continuation of that trend, experimenting with form and content. Choudhury presently holds the post of Director of the National Book Trust of India. *Mayabritta* (Illusory Circle, 2012) and *Bivranta Bastab* (Puzzled Reality, 2015) are her latest creations that deal with the contemporary issues of ailing society.

Makam tells the story of the place, Makum, breaking a silence in the pages of history revealing the collective trauma, tragedy and the feeling of loss of a particular group of people of Chinese origin who have been conveniently forgotten by histories. The title of the text is related to Makum, a sub-division in upper Assam dotted with tea gardens, and with a demography that is closely linked to the introduction of this plantation crop here from South China by the British in the early part of the nineteenth century. The narrator takes us further into history and discloses multiple stages of development. The first labour forces are the forcefully displaced from China - compelled by the oppressive situation of poverty and the cruel British overlords. These all-male Chinese migrants establish china *patties* in the area, come in contact with Hindustani migrants from the Chhotanagpur plateau, and enter into maritial relations with them. This small, hardy community does everything to get assimilated to the local culture and endears themselves to the people as expert craftsmen, especially carpenters, and is inseparable from the beginning of tea plantation industry in Assam because of their processing skills. Jayeeta Sharma in her book *Empire's Garden* (2011) has detailed how the skilled Chinese workers became important in the experimental

venture of tea by the Britishers. The cunning Britishers smuggled seeds and plants out of China, which was thought of as a profitable and marketable variety. This cultivation was done simultaneously with the authentication of local tea plants in Upper Assam. Thus "the normally miserly East India Company had to open its purse to recruit Chinese tea experts....their superior energy, industry, the spirit of speculation, and the ability to calculate profit equalled that of any European (Sharma 35-36).

Choudhury, whose research on the subject starts five years prior to the writing, travelled across China, Singapore, Hong Kong, Canada, Australia and the US to interview more than one hundred displaced individuals that included both internally and internationally dislocated people. In China, Choudhury met Mailin Ho, who was twenty years old and pregnant when she was deported to China. Mailin's Assamese husband is stranded in Makum and she could never meet him later. The 1962 Sino-Indian war shatters their lives and dreams, puts them into the periphery with baffling identity. Subjected to insinuations, suspicions and derisions, they are segregated and thrown into distant jails. What happens to them afterwards? Where are they now? This search for their lost roots and tracking their present existence is the subject matter of Rita Choudhury's novel *Makam*, which means 'golden horse' in South-Chinese language (Ma-horse, Kam-gold). The way in which the author frames her text peels the dense layers of history of the place and reflects the understanding of the situation faced by the Chinese exiles and their realization of that traumatic past. Today, there is little to indicate that Makum once had a thriving community of Chinese people, who had settled down in the area in the 1830s. The ghostly Chinatown with its desecrated tombs, skeletal remains of a 150-year-old club and dismantled homes stands witness to the history of the tiny community.

In other words, *Makam* is a story of captivity, torture (both physical and emotional) and exile. A report in *The Telegraph*, Sunday, April 18, 2010, quotes Wang Shing Tung, former Makum schoolmaster Wang Shu Shin's son, who was only seven years old at the time of the tragedy:

> "They picked up all the Indian Chinese early one morning in November 1962 and packed us in a cowshed. Police said they would jail us for 'safety.' No one was allowed to carry any money, food, clothes or ornaments." (3)

During the seven days nonstop journey to Deoli in a heavily guarded train, those detainees are served half-cooked *khichddi*[1] as the only food. There is no way out for the enemies to escape. For the older people, the ordeal is too much to bear. Traumatised and devastated, this blow proves fatal for them. The hard-earned fortunes over four generations are snatched in a single day from these who had arrived here as tea garden workers but eventually became successful businessmen with their hard labour. The same report goes on to quote another detainee Ho Ko Men, 72, who ran a motor garage in Makum when he is sent to Deoli:

> "Most of the male members of our extended family were sent to China in three batches. Luckily, the anti-Chinese paranoia had disappeared when our turn came and we returned." (3)

But when they returned to Makum, they found that the situation had changed utterly. Their houses had either been auctioned as enemy property by the Government or taken over by neighbours. Moreover, the locals now started treating them as enemies.

Fiction writers have always looked into history for useful perspectives on events and people. Taking recourse to histories, novelists have created immortal characters, with the application of their fertile imagination. While doing so, it is expected the novelist should not be over-dependent on history that would cramp their vision, and there should be a temporal distance from the event that they seek to represent or bear testimony to. However, the author of *Makam* is not a participant in the events that are being represented and has got the necessary temporal distancing, although she does not have any authentic or documented history available for reconstruction except a few personal narratives. The writer has to travel back in time and find survivors who can relate their painful stories to her, thus providing her with multiple personal histories instead of one official version of history. This exploration is like looking for several pasts or layers of pasts in the same sense as we talk of memories, recollections, histories, fictions, and similar notions in plural terms**.** A good novelist has the ability to borrow the historical material, the ideas, patterns and broad concepts and to blend these into his/her narrative only to the extent required for the creation. Thus, history loses its

[1] An Indian dish made from rice and lentils, other vegitables are also added according to tastes

circumstantialities and becomes a timeless presence in fiction as writers writing about such tragedies use imageries of rape, violence and destruction as has been pointed out by Anuradha Marwah Roy regarding Partition Literature of India. This kind of narrative can be "roughly defined as the creative attempt to make sense of one of the worst pogroms in human memory" that seek to "grapple with the enormity of misery" (113). Some of the most illuminating examples of such fictions are Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1869), Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), Khuswant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1961), and Amitav Ghosh *The Shadow Lines* (1988) etc. Dickens uses the French Revolution as the setting in his *A Tale of Two Cities* to fictionalize history and make it serve an archetypal function. Salman Rushdie selects some broad events from Indian history and fictionalizes them in his novel *Midnight's Children* (1981) using magic realism as the basic technique.

Likewise, as a writer of fictional narratives primarily based on historical events, Choudhury has enjoyed certain liberties, and the characters and events have undergone certain changes. There have been criticisms of Choudhury for not being true to some of the names from history and relationships between them. For example, the novelist has described the relationship between Robert Bruce and David Scott and represented the former as the "ex-major of Bengal Artillery of the East-India Company" (Choudhury, *Makam* 23-24). We come across a similar misrepresentation when she writes: "Jogighopa is located on the boundary lines between Assam and Bengal" (25). However, the novelist has presented the general panorama of life, one that is throbbing and pulsating and is not asking for or demanding historical accurateness:

> It was very late when I started writing. Most of the people having knowledge of the Chinese migration to Assam have already left the world. That is why the initial days of the Chinese society have remained in darkness. (603)

Further, she says:

> Though I have applied some amount of imagination while trying to present history covering a long period and many people, the main story and the events have been retained as far as practicable and no events have been exaggerated. (604)

Accessing the history of that period has never been easy for the author. She has traveled back in time only for a re-creation of the past; and she is not playing the role of a historian here. So, such criticism appears largely off the mark. A novelist cannot be criticized for exercising her imaginative liberty that is the basis of her mode of engagement with history. Choudhury has depended highly on the individual memory of the trauma survivors for the recreation of a dark history. Therefore, a text like *Makam* can also be taken as a testimony of collective memory and identity. Memory provides individuals and groups with a cognitive map, helping them orient who they are, why they are here and where they are going. Memory, in other words, is central to individual and collective identity. The collective memory may be defined as recollections of a shared past which are passed on through ongoing processes of commemoration, officially sanctioned rituals which recall a group through calling upon a common heritage with a shared past as a central component. This process of memory and its working is evident in the storyline of *Makam*. Eventually, the legacy of trauma becomes dominant in the novel. However, *Makam* is an outcome of numerous personal interviews that she has conducted through travel and secondary research with a few imaginary inputs wherever indispensable. In this way, *Makam* is a book about witnessing, witnesses and the limits of witnessing. It is also a text on the process of re-writing and witnessing – writing as bearing witness to something that happened long ago. It talks about witnessing from inside and outside the catastrophe. The point of beginning of this process of witnessing occurs with Arunav Bora's confrontation with Lailin Tham in a writer's meet in Toronto. The narrator as witness confesses inadequacy in a melancholic tone in the opening pages of the novel:

> "I am but an incompetent artist of a tragic epic that remains hidden in the hearts of thousands of people." (11)

However, he moves forward with his venture and the result is there for us to see.

The first part of the novel shows how, after facing the wrath of the fellow novelist Mailin, Arunav launches an emphathetic exploration and ends up searching for their turbulent past, which is indeed a journey that cuts across time. This part depicts in detail how tea plantation comes to Assam from China and ends with the marriage of Ho Han and Phoolmati. This description includes the process of labour recruitment and forced

displacement of poor, needy people from famine-ravaged China of the 17th century. The middle section, which is the heart of the novel, presents the fourth generation of Ho Han, and occupies center stage. The community's socio-economic condition at Makum against the backdrop of the 1961-62 Indo-China conflict is the focus of attention here. The concluding section deals with the attempts of survivors at different levels to discover their roots and their reconciliation half a century after the war. It is about remembering the trauma of dislocation, struggles, sufferings and the multiple tragedies of Chinese origin people in the past two centuries. It can be considered as the black chapter of the Indo-China war. Such unique fictional worlds and intricate methods of expression may be analysed in the light of theories relating to collective trauma and memory. The writer has adopted a particular narrative strategy to explicate trauma by creating a narrator within the novel, named Arunav Bora, and presents him as a novelist in the embedded novel. Therefore, going through the novel gives us the experience of exploring a mysterious Chinese box; and readers are left confused as to which novel they are reading: is it the novel by Rita Choudhury or by Arunav Bora? At times we are also not sure about who the speaker is: is it Lailin, or her mother Mailin, or the writer Arunav Bora?

How is this novel brought under the purview of contemporary trauma theory? Why is it necessary to do so? Trauma, in its most general definition, as Cathy Caruth puts in "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History" (1991) is:

> An overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. (181)

In the similar note Vertzberger defines collective political trauma in his essay "The Antinomies of Collective Political Trauma: A Pre-Theory" (1997) as a "shattering, often violent event that affects a community of people (rather than a single person or a few members of it), and that results from human behaviour that is politically motivated and has political consequences." He goes on to add that such an event injures in one "sharp stab, penetrating all psychological defensive barriers of participants and observers" (864), allowing no space for denial mechanisms and thus leaving those affected with an acute sense of vulnerability and fragility. Through the notion of trauma, we can understand that a re-

thinking of reference is never aimed at eliminating history, but at resituating it in our understanding. Choudhury's novel is an effort to perform this task by bringing into light, and compelling us to think about an incident long forgotten and hidden from public memory. That is why the publication of *Makam* is considered crucial by many critics and it became a public event that initiated open discussions on issues relating to war, ethics, identity, violence and exposed how war can alter the relation between friends and enemies. The mutual faith that holds a society together in the period of adversity is dealt a severe blow by the loss of mutual trust between communities. The torture experienced by the Chinese is traumatic, horrible and has changed their lives forever. Traumatic events and the insults witnessed by the small Chinese community stir up collective sentiments, resulting in a shift in that society's culture and mass actions. This is the beginning of historical trauma, which is cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over their lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences. The historical trauma response demands an "accumulation of agonizing experience over a period of time" (Caruth 1991: 140). *Makam* can be interpreted likewise and it may be argued that different characters exemplify the feeling of collective trauma and loss. The issue of their identity is one of the crucial factors that put them in difficulty during displacement and deportation; and this idea is dealt with in detail by the writer in relation to their trauma and pain. In this regard, *Makam* demythifies the notion of Assamese identity as an all-inclusive phenomenon. Manjeet Baruah opines that *Makam* "not only demolishes Assamese as a political identity but in the process liberates the modern Assamese language from the need to perform any role of representing Assamese identity" (167). Contrary to Baruah, Amit Rahul Baishya holds that a certain notion of Assamese identity is still performed by the diasporic Chinese subjects in *Makam* (175). While comparing *Makam* and *Felanee*, Baishya opines that these two novels "conduct a scathing critique and deconstruction of a purist and fixed notions of identity" (176). We can add that *Makam* exposes and to some extent breaks some myths regarding India's ethics and hospitability to people in distress, and reveals the Government's lack of application and commitment to the need for humanitarian policies.

The unresolved mysteries of trauma demand narrative strategies that illuminate the multiple facets of temporal gap. An effort to represent the predicament and subdued traumatic experiences from public memory challenges the boundaries of narrative

framework and the adequacy of the fictional form. This re-creation of history by Choudhury is achieved through the "reconfiguration of narrative time" (Baishya 178). In this process, subjects are allowed to travel back in memory to their forgotten past hidden from the plain sight of the readers. In other words, we could name this as the process of return to the site of trauma in memory that facilitates recreation of the past in present times by which fictional characters confront their tragic and silenced past. Theorists have argued that any art form that deals with traumatic events serves its purpose better if the historical event retains confrontational value in representations. In this regard theorist, Leo Bersani argues that the "catastrophes of history matter much less if they are somehow compensated for in art, and art itself gets reduced to a kind of superior patching function" (1). However, *Makam* is not escaping from reality, rather it moves towards reality. This type of fictional recreation calls for a coherent interplay between history, fiction, and memory that seeks to recover or re-create the past. An author's manipulation of these three elements, including the creation of subtle interdependencies among them, is the hallmark technique of the genre. It involves both content and form and, if appropriately executed, succeeds in fusing the two, defining not only the objective nature of the work but also, to a great extent, the subjective measure of its artistic merit. The concepts of nationality and national identity inexorably enter the equation, giving new dimensions to the characters' identities, which are now colored by their association with the individual as well as collective pasts.

In trauma fiction, this return to the past is achieved in narrative by creating figures of return, or characters and situations that lurk back to the troubled past. In a symbolic gesture, Choudhury says that she has stored her memories from youth when she had seen a few Chinese people in Makum. In the novel, two of her characters are shown to be actively involved in traveling back in time past to revive their youthful memories. One of them is the secondary novelist and narrator of the story, Arunav Bora and the other is Lailin Tham - the receiver of his discourses. Retrieval of the erased and forgotten traces of memories of the people, perceived as enemies, whose tragic histories are buried behind the veil of a narrative of national humiliation, calls for a meta-narrative and non-linear mode of narration. The mode of narration adopted in *Makam* appears complex for such reasons and the writer provides us the clue to understanding the complexity in the author's note appended to the novel. Choudhury reveals that the idea of writing a novel takes its roots in the lingering

memories of seeing Chinese denizens in Makum during the youthful days. However, she says "a lot of time has elapsed while I kept thinking I would write a book. *If I had known* the critical importance of the topic, I would have begun this task a long time ago…When I eventually started writing, *it was already too late*" (Choudhury, *Makam* 603). Because of her delay in starting the project, lots of facts are also gone with the Chinese expatriates that died abroad after expulsion. The temporal gap and unavailability of materials compel her to meet the exiled Chinese wherever she can and collect the bits and pieces from the recesses of their personal and collective memory to write a novel from the "limited material" (603). Travelling to different parts of the world with the purpose of collecting memory traces can be termed as writer executing another symbolic return to the trauma site. This metaphorical wordplay is termed as narrative progression by Baishya where the melancholy tenor "If I had known…" to "it was already too late conveys the writer's mood to the readers" (2).

One of the hallmarks of *Makam* is that Choudhury's novel counters the official truth presented in public history, and re-visits the personal histories of the characters or war victims to explicate their trauma. The characters depicted are not directly involved in the Indo-china war, but they are victims of political outrage in Assam over China's mindless attack on India in 1962. They are victimized because of their Chinese origin; now they are in no man's land and neither country is ready to own them. As war victims, they collect and recollect traumatic memories repeatedly inside their bodies and minds as corporeal evidence of political exile. War is a national trauma that permeates personal lives and causes losses, deaths, and permanent pain for the people affected by the chaos. In *Makam* the author provides subtle descriptions of loss of humanity during traumatic moments along with family reunions in the site of trauma and its aftermath. So, to achieve verisimilitude Choudhury has picked characters from real life and endowed them with the tendency by which they show constant attachment to their homeland and their roots. This is reinforced by the incorporation of figures of return within her narration, both at the level of characterization and theme of the novel. It is already mentioned that first of all the figure of return is concretized in two of the central characters of the text: the first-person narrator Arunav Bora, whose voice occupies most of the text, and other is the primary audience of his embedded novel, Lailin Tham. After setting the tone of the narration in motion readers are introduced to the repeated occurrence of the idea of a return to the site of the trauma – in

the emotional space of the characters and also the actual place of the trauma. In this context, we can refer to Claude Lanzamann's groundbreaking film *Shoah* (1985) which tries to decanonize the silences relating to the Holocaust through an exploration of the depths and secrets of history referred to precisely as "historical unspeakability" (Felman 1992b. XIX). Though in a different medium, Rita Choudhury's *Makam* draws a significant parallel with Lanzamann's *Shoah*. In *Shoah*, the narrator/filmmaker performs a historian; *Shoah* includes among its list of characters (its list of witnesses) the figure of the filmmaker in the process of the making – or of the creation – of the film. Travelling between the living and the dead and moving to and fro between different places and different voices in the film, the filmmaker is continuously – though discretely – present in the margin of the screen, perhaps as the most silently articulate and as the most articulately silent witness. In *Makam*, Choudhury has created the character of the novelist, Arunav – the narrator and listener of testimonies of the witnesses. Arunav can be taken as a replica of Choudhury herself, the witness who is silent but always present. Like Choudhury, he travels to distant parts, interviews survivors, facilitates their trauma responses, and breaks the ice. The writer is trying to show to the readers what she has undergone herself in the process of writing *Makam* like "the creator of the film speaks and testifies, however, in its own voice, in his triple role as the *narrator* of the film (and the signatory – the first person – of the script), as the *interviewer* of the witnesses (the solicitor and receiver of the testimonies), and as the *inquirer* …" (Felman 1992b: 216) or investigator. Likewise, Arunav is a narrator, "the figure of witness as questioner" (216), records their trauma and a secondary witness. It is Arunav, the *inquire*r who questions Lailin about her silence when she behaves unexpectedly with Arunav. Arunav challenges this behaviour which wrenchs out the story from Lailin. Now Arunav has a crucial role to play as a listener, as the testifier, as the narrator, as the interpreter of her story. This opening leads him to numerous untold stories of the trauma of displaced. One story leads to another, one door opens another. However, Lailin is only a second generation witness of the trauma of the displacement, which, although real, took place outside the parameters of normal reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time. The trauma is thus an event that has "no ending and attained no closure" (Laub 69) and therefore, as far as Mailin and other the survivors are concerned it continues "into the present and is current in every respect" (69). Mailin and her daughter are living not with the memories of the past,

but with an event that could not and did not "proceed through to its completion" (69). Recounting the event works as ventilator although the survivor of the trauma is not truly confronted with the cruelty of its reenactments, and thereby remains entrapped in both. They are living claustrophobic lives which are close to imaginary and unreal. Arunav, an Assamese author, is initially shocked by the *ghrina*[1] that Chinese origin Lailin displays towards Indian in general. This is a crucial point in the narrative that increases Arunav's curiosity to investigate deep into her psyche. Lailin could not hold her rigidity for long and soon we see an astonished Arunav conversing with Lailin and her mother Mailin in Assamese language and his desire increases to know more about the truth and to tell it to others.

Choudhury has shown the gradual onslaught of trauma on the Chinese community in *Makam* and loss of mutual faith between local people and the community through some skillful narrative technique. To capture the trauma inflicted upon the community as a whole metaphor from one arena is mapped into the other so that the bleak and horrible atmosphere can be portrayed effectively. As Indo-Chinese clash starts casting its ominous shadow on the community in Makum, readers are presented with scenes that clarify how the insults and taunts from local people make life difficult for the Chinese origin people in Makum. Choudhury inserts short segments of ominous dialogue between anonymous members of the public, and at the same time, the narrative is mainly focused on the public events and community gatherings like a football match or protest rally or school assembly. For example, one of the minor characters, Robin brings up the matter of tension in China border while discussing miscellaneous things. Immediately, the focus shifts and they start talking about the Chinese aggression. By including short dialogues between different anonymous characters within the narrative Choudhury has tried to convey and recreate the trauma scene. In Chapter II of Second Part, one anonymous member of the group suddenly says:

> "The man who came here from Calcutta is not a good one. I know him. His name is Ting Li Yang. He came here once or twice before. He asked us to obtain Red China's passport. He told that it would help us."

[1] The Assamese word 'ghrina' combines effective connotations of both hatred and disgust.

> "You don't have India's citizenship?" An astonished Pulak enquired. (Choudhury, *Makam* 161)

The conversation continues giving us more hints about the upcoming complexity regarding the identity of this community:

> "Why? Didn't you come several years ago?"
> "Hmm. Then it was British's rule. Long ago before the war."
> "Still then you are not an Indian citizen. Why?"
> "Do not know…surprising!"
> "We do not know in what capacity we are staying here. Baba[1] has some old document given by Manager of Garden…we have never been in any difficulty."
> "Apply for citizenship. You may be in trouble later on." (161)

Pulak finds it difficult to believe the fact that these people have not taken Indian citizenship yet. Although he is not worried much, readers can assume that this issue will be stretched long by other local people. The writer has not represented every member of the Chinese community as ignorant or politically unconscious; but, some of them realise very well that they are not in a comfortable situation. The fear and uncertainty about their future are reflected in this conversation:

> "What will happen to us now? This is not a just thing done by the Chinese government. To quarrel for the land is not a good thing. What would be done by grabbing more land? Have already taken the Tibbet na?"
> "Why have you said that Chinese government has not done the right thing? How do you know that whatever China has said is not the just thing? Chi Hui asked."
> "Hei, keep quiet, keep quiet. Do not utter this kind of things. You will be put in jail if the CID people hear this. An experienced Chi Fu told with fear." (194)

Again in Chapter 8, we get a glimpse of increasing hatred for the Chinese community within the local people. Here people are discussing the tension in China border and some CPI workers are also participating in the discussion:

[1] Father

"Now-a-days you seem to be very adamant when we talk ill of China"

….

"Now it is time to get rid of this adoration for China, do you understand?"

….

"Baruah (Pulak's father) has rightly told one thing. Now-a-days, I too feel agitated when I see these Chinese people. China is creating troubles on our border and these people (Chinese community in Makum) do not utter anything."

"What will they do? What kind of things you say? Who will listen to them? They are Indian people only."

"Indian people? How do you know that they are Indian people?

"If not Indian then where do they belong to? ... People staying here from before the Independence what they will be if not Indian?"

….

"Do not advocate for them too much. Things are not going very well now-a-days. Nobody can predict the direction of events." (232)

Artistic portraiture is achieved in the depiction of the fearful atmosphere of how the small school children of Makum are held hostages in the hostel.

"There is an order to assemble all the Chinese people in a place. Do not know anything else. Call all the people. Quick! Within ten minutes."

"But *sahib*, why?"

"My wife is not home yet." (332)

The undercurrent of melancholy and trauma is strong in the depiction of Yui's sadness for the small children of the Chinese school in Makum:

(Yui speaking)

"I am feeling sad today."

"Feeling sad? Why?"

….

"Nobody has told me anything? I am feeling sad for Anjali and all."

"Who is Anjali?"

> "Anjali is my classmate. Today Anjali cried a lot. Mei Houk cried. Asun, Byong all cried. You know, they have been crying from before the puja. I tried to console them. But they won't. Their parents have not come to receive them - that is why. Yui said sadly" (220).

Particularly in Chapter VI, the writer includes a scene of a football match where the converging spectators express disgust at the Chinese origin players and resent their attitudes. This football match between the Seven Star Club and another Club becomes a metaphor between Indo-Cino war and anti-China paranoia overwhelms the feeling of love and compassion between humans. Chinese origin players sense this and the sudden fear grips them as well. In the conversation between anonymous spectators utter distrust and hatred can be heard:

> "It's very hard to win against Seven Star."
> "It's time to shut down that Chinese club."
> "They shouldn't have brought Hong and Ming. They are Chinese. Obviously, they are beholden to their own people."
> "Hasn't Ming scored a goal? Don't talk nonsense."
> "I am not speaking nonsense. Tell me why Hong could not intercept the ball passed by Lee-sang?"
> "Keep quiet! They will hear us."
> "Let them. What will they do? I get angry whenever I see the Chinese nowadays."
> "What did they do?"
> "What have they done? Don't you know what they have done at the border? Just look at their faces. You know that they are happy when you look at them. Obviously! If they defeat us here today they will feel as if they have occupied India." (211-12)

Friends are now turned into enemies and the conversation propels a sudden patriotic urge among the locals. The writer has specifically used the metaphor from the arena of sports to reveal the feeling of hostility between the locals and the Chinese. A. R. Baishya examines this technical use of metaphor by Choudhury and points out how metaphors of friend and enemy (that of sports) are slowly mapped on to a larger geopolitical arena of war. For him these are "ominous signs - initially represented as a sharp rubble of dialogue which soon

metamorphose into outright calls for the expulsion of the enemy" - and "prepares us for the sharp cleavages that rent asunder the community of friends. For one to live, the other must be exposed to expulsion or death" (79).

Because of its multidisciplinary nature trauma theory has gained widespread critical attention in recent years although scholars have contradictory opinions on the effectiveness of representation. One group of theorists led by Caruth believes that trauma is characterized by unrepresentability, inexpressibility, and its inability to be assimilated into the narrative. It can only be symbolised in the form of figures and images. But for the group of theorists led by Herman, trauma recounting stimulates necessary healing process working through purgation of undigested memories. Witnessing in the form of listening and recounting of those "abnormal pursuing" (Vickroy 23) helps the victim towards the path of recovery and normalcy. Clinicians Judith Herman and Laub admit that recovery is possible only "within the context of relationship" (Herman133, Laub 87) of witnessing and listening. Trauma writing, thus, serves as the major medium to re-view traumatic events and personal stories about people involved in them. Geoffrey Hartman holds that "literary verbalization, however, still remains a basis for making the wound perceivable and silence audible" (2003, 259). Remembering, rather than merely continuing to repeat neurotically (Freud 1989), may lead the victim effectively to act upon it, rather than allow it to dictate the behaviour. Experience of trauma can be divided into two different categories: personal trauma and collective trauma. The collective trauma is a traumatic psychological effect experienced by a group of people or an entire society, causing collective sentiment, often resulting in a shift in that society's culture and mass actions "creating communities" (Vertzberger 865). The trauma of displacement also produces a mass effect as it is experienced collectively; hence it is classed as collective trauma.

The scrutiny of the narrative strategy adopted by Choudhury is pivotal to our study of *Makam* as a trauma fiction. A cursory reading of *Makam* gives us the sense that we are reading the novel written by secondary novelist Arunav Bora rather than Rita Choudhury. The plot unfolds through the self-discovery of Arunav Bora, the narrator. Eventually, that narrator or the novelist within the novel is placed within the narrative melodramatically making him a member of the extended Chinese exiles, which seems the only way writer

could accommodate him in the narrative. He finds rather his lost roots by digging across memory lane. After deciding to tell his story through the mode of bearing witness he engages in what can be termed as an effort of "writing cure" (Robert Folkenflik 11). Starting as an outsider he becomes an insider to the story. He says:

> "I am not the creator of this novel.
> I am but an incompetent artist of a tragic epic that remains hidden in the hearts of thousands of people.
> I am Arunav Bora." (Choudhury, *Makam* 1)

This jolt out of the blue comes from the bizarre behaviour of his fellow novelist Lailin (Mailin's daughter) towards him and leads to the sudden and unexpected discovery for Arunav Bora. The author extracts strands in the past to create an immediate space in the future:

> "Two years back from today.
> Unknowingly Lailin unleashed a storm two years ago. My beautifully decorated life, my home, my identity were shattered. This removed the ground from beneath my foot." (1)

Arunav's act of bearing witness begins with many discoveries he makes after confronting Lailin Tham in Toronto for the first time in his life. He finds the path through which he can travel deep into the heart of darkness, to the silenced layers of history of a place and its inhabitants. His fellow writer Lailin is the interlocutor holding the keys of a locked door to the mysterious and undocumented truths. At this point, Lailin is a stranger to him, who helps him discover his identity hidden so far beneath a false veil of happiness. Arunav finds, especially, the depths and complexity, the non-linear and the committed interminability involved in the process of discovery of a traumatic past and overcomes the difficulty of documenting the past. He has to search a past that is almost non-existent until and unless he records the victim's narrative for the first time by slicing through different layers of personal and collective memory. His position in the narrative as listener also puts him in a unique situation. The overwhelming trauma that rejects registration in human language has to be recorded carefully by the listener. By doing so he becomes a party to the

creation of knowledge. His act of "bearing witness to massive trauma" does indeed begins with his meeting Lailin and her mother who "testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of its occurrence" (Laub 57).

In the process of documenting the elusive past, he makes several discoveries. First and foremost is his sudden discovery of and confrontation with Lailin Tham, who compels him to rethink his Indianness. Lailin is a second generation trauma survivor and witness who show hatred and disregard for Arunav during the writers' conference in Toronto. From Lailin Arunav comes to know about the existence of a place called Makum, the site of trauma, its uniqueness and significance. Makum now holds the remnants of the throbbing and pulsating Chinatown that was once there. Lailin arrives from nowhere and shatters his beautifully decorated home by making him aware that he is only living a false life. He enters the periphery of Makum through the mysterious door opened by Lailin. Now he comes to know about different individuals that crowded this place and were forced to leave painfully. He decides to write their agonizing story and starts looking for testimonies that will help him reconstruct the history of the place. Taking the role of witness and interviewer he eyes a retrieval of facts and multiple facets of that reality; a story of "irreplaceable historical performance, a narrative performance which no statements (with no report and no description) can replace and whose unique enactment is itself part of a process of realization of historical truth" (Felman 255). Entering from outside Makum, he discovers himself as an insider, a place that holds his roots, and footsteps of his forefathers. Finally, the writing of the novel signifies his finding a way to document the trauma, untold, hidden and suppressed so far; the meaning and implication of advent of its own finding. Arunav's act of writing the novel itself creates a new possibility of not just a vision but a revision of the past and a ruthless scrutiny of the history of Makum. The writing of the novel provides the possibility of seeing again what in fact was never seen in the first time, and deliberately so (by the government and other authorities), and moreover on a personal level of surviving - it remained unseen originally due to the inherent blinding nature of the occurrence - the latency of trauma. Caruth argues that the phenomenon of trauma can only be experienced in and through latency:

> The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself. (1995: 7-8)

Moreover, we can consider this discovery on the part of the writer as a kind of a departure for another kind of journey; a return trip, which goes back to the originally unperceived historical scene, and thus takes place as a journey to another frame of reference, entering into another space and time. Arunav's performance as a listener is to elicit testimony which exceeds the testifier's own awareness, to bring forth the complexity of truth as questioned by Lailin: "Can you hear?" (Choudhury, *Makam* 17)

Arunav unknowingly acts as a strong catalyst that propels otherwise suppressed emotions from inside Lailin's heart. It helps him see through the concealment and self-deception - that Lailin uses as a defense strategy against emotional outbursts -

> "Can an Indian know this Arunav?" (Lailin speaking to Arunav)
> Lailin speaks again:
> "What shall you do by knowing it, Arunav? Can you erase all the tales that I have been carrying inside my heart?"
> (Arunav speaks) "If it is possible to erase then I will surely do it Lailin. Why aren't you willing to tell? Are you wary of any risk?" (17)

At this point Lailin feels a heavy heart, fails to relate her experience and speaks in a suppressed tone to Arunav:

> "I am requesting you, go back Arunav. Let me stay with myself. I do not want to discuss all these with anyone. Not even with myself - with my own self." (17)

Lailin feels a reluctance to share the pain, characteristic of the traumatic psyche. She reveals:

> "I do not know why I am speaking to you. I never thought that I shall ever talk to any Indian…But from yesterday I have been thinking - is it necessary to tell all this? Lots of time has elapsed, Arunav, several years." (19)

Now the role of Arunav, the listener, assumes a crucial importance. He is not ready to let Lailin slip away so easily and enquires in a very soft tone:

> "I can go away. I have no right to put pressure on you. But I have a question. Is it possible to go away without knowing why someone hates my country? Will you be able to go?" (18)

Gradually Lailin begins to come out of her protective shell that she has created over the years. It is necessary to do so for the healing to start, she has to pour her heart out and get rid of the heavy load that she has accumulated in the form of testimonies most of which are collected from her mother Mailin. She has to come out of the entrapment of traumatic fate, because it is setting in motion a process of constructing a narrative, of reconstructing a history and essentially of "*re-externalizing the event"* that will take effect only when one can "articulate and *transmit* the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself and then take it back again, inside" (Laub 85).

The telling of the past trauma that has contaminated the psyche of the victim releases the venoms from inside the victim by reasserting "the hegemony of reality" (Laub 72). Lailin, a writer herself has tried to re-externalize and write the traumatic phase several times in past. But the absence of a listener or an audience has failed her attempts. She says:

> "Not only for you - possibly for all the people of Assam that past does not have any existence now. But for me, Arunav it is not a past even though it is past. For me, that is a dirty truth which can never be separated from my own self. When I remember the old stories, a fire breaks out inside my mind. I writhe in the agony of not being able to do anything." (Choudhury, *Makam* 20)

This speech by Lailin testifies to the torture she has been experiencing for years. Now the arrival of Arunav has compelled her to open up, and she is showing signs of the ability to tell:

> "I thought several times that I shall write about it. I wanted to pour my heart out in writing. I would like to tell the people of the world - look, look - at the real face of India, who speak so much of democracy, of Panchaseel. Look, look at Jawaharlal

> Nehru's India quenching their mind's appetite with the tears of innocent people. But I stopped again and again after starting to write." (20)

However, her repeated failure at writing the stories has left her brooding over how and what should be written. Her failure testifies to the failure of a trauma victim. Thus for Lailin, these are "wordless and static" memory, which is "a past experience of frozen time" and initially without emotion, but it has to be reconstructed through narration and "integrated into the survivor's life story" (Herman 175, 195, 175). And what is the use of writing at all? Would it benefit anyone? Preoccupied with such thoughts she says:

> "Does a creation borne out of hatred carry any meaning? If it has any meaning then would it be able to change the time that has already passed? I hate India. I hate all Indian people." (Choudhury, *Makam* 20)

Lailin has never been to India and her perception of India and its citizens are expressed only in negative attributes. Moreover, she has formed these gloomy images of India from the description of her mother only. And in this respect, she is poles apart from her mother who has gone through the entire trauma in real life. Lailin has acquired this legacy of silence and trauma from her mother. Mailin would say in a simple way:

> "Don't hate anyone. A country and its entire people can never be bad. Whatever has happened can be considered as our misfortune." (20)

This response from Mailin is the response of an individual who has stopped fighting the trauma and accepted life as it has come. This is Mailin in her old days and her fighting spirit of the younger days has gone. However, it was never easy for Lailin and Arunav is desperate to generate a response from Lailin. Arunav narrates her condition in this way:

> "Lailin took time to open up herself. We came out of Pitmen Hall. Sitting on the bank of Lake Dav, beneath the shade of a tree she turned pages from the past one after another." (20)

It is the point when the "emergence of the narrative which is being listened to - and heard" - initiates the "process and the place wherein the cognizance, the knowing of the event is given birth to" (Felman and Laub 57). The telling process starts and with this starts the

testimonial departure for the victim. It has been forty-five years since they were deported from Makum in Assam and her mother Mailin knows it very well:

> "Her mind is full of anguish. Don't mind her, Arunav.
> Where do I belong to - perhaps I would not be able to tell you today properly? I can tell one thing - once upon a time I belonged to Assam. Several years ago - perhaps in a previous birth." (Choudhury, *Makam* 22)

This speech of Mailin expresses the intensity and amount of torture of trauma she has gone through in the last forty-five years. Her choice of words like previous birth is an apt analogy to map the distance that is there in her life before and after the traumatic displacement. Arunav relates his experience of that day in his own words in this way, which is traumatic for him too.

> "On that day at Lailin's home, the door of a forgotten country was opened. We returned to an unimaginable past. Turning over pages from memory Lailin's mother took me to an agonizing chapter which was not recorded by history." (22)

Gradually he becomes a participant in and a co-owner of the traumatic events through the acts of listening to the mother and daughter. He starts to experience the trauma himself as he says:

> "I was looking at her face.
> What is hidden inside the heart of this ancient woman? What ailes her memory? What kind of sad tale Lailin has brought me to listen to?" (22)

Arunav is now a listener, who becomes the "blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time" (Laub 57). Without this blank screen, there is no space for the inscription of trauma and Arunav is now interviewer and listener who has to be modest, attentive actively helping the witness in the reconstruction process. The beginning of the testimony in the narrative is a crucial point in the novel as well as the healing process because "only when the survivor knows he is being heard, will he stop to hear – and listen to himself" (71). Unill this moment Mailin and her daughter have been dwelling on a deserted island which is reflected in Mailin's words:

> "After forty-five years I have seen an Assamese person from Assam. I am not able to make you realize how much I feel good … no one has come searching for us in last forty-five years. Everybody has forgotten us, Arunav." (Choudhury, *Makam* 22)

Arunav, in the process of listening and documenting the past, is transforming traumatic memory into narrative memory, into a chronologically coherent story because "the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language" (Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart 1995: 176). It is in the process of telling and listening, that the trauma story communicates a testimony and "time starts to move again" (1994: 181, 195). Thus, Arunav's journey to the heart of darkness begins. The writer takes the reader through the journey and provides multiple figures of return as the characters experience the anxiety of the return of trauma at times during the process of telling. Arunav's questions open the floodgate of Lailin's heart uncovering thick layers of buried history. The testimonial orientation corresponds to what Herman views as "remembrance or mourning": the subject explores the traumatic memories in order to turn them into an integrated coherent narrative, that is, the process whereby "the survivor tells the story of trauma" (175). This is evident in the testimonial act performed by the author-narrator of *Makam* when Mailin decides to narrate all these experiences in order to "confront ghosts from the past" (Figes 139). It is evident that the vital function of testimony is to liberate the self from pain (Felman 47).

Both Arunav and Lailin are second generation witnesses of the trauma and are distanced both temporally and spatially from the crippling effects of trauma. Lailin has inherited the legacy of trauma from her mother and it is a sudden discovery for Arunav. Mailin is a trauma survivor and her experience amounts to a loss of a basic sense of trust and a feeling to be "utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of the human and divine system of care and protection" (Harman 52). The narrator Arunav sets out on a venture of unearthing personal histories from the grave of individual memory and studies the minds of people like Lailin, whose mother Mailin was deported to China after few months of her marriage to local boy Pulak. Mailin could not have met her husband Pulak without the effort made by Arunav. Articulating the silent past of horror, Arunav's narration works like the efficacious "expressive writing" (Pennebaker 23) aimed at effective trauma cure for Mailin, Pulak and

other members of the group as well. Though never accepted by her father-in-law, Mailin ever remains an Assamese. Mailin decorates her home in traditional Assamese manner while she waits for Arunav in Lailin's Canada residence, and prepares traditional Assamese food. Living in an imaginary homeland, she keeps her Assamese tradition alive in those far off places like Hong Kong, Canada and nourishes it for the future. It may not be possible for her to return to her place of birth physically, but she is trying to keep her tradition alive by creating the atmosphere of a homeland around her. These efforts on the part of Mailin can be taken as what Waldinger has referred as "residual, especially symbolic, attachment to a place of origin" (97) In this part of the narration the writer successfully utilizes the images/figures of return where Mailin makes an endeavour to re-create the atmosphere of her lost Assamese home in exile. And at such moments, fiction and reality merges for Arunav. He is amazed to see how Mailin has kept her Assamese identity alive. An unfazed Mailin keeps repeating and reminding her daughter that they are Assamese people, and never converses with Lailin in any language except Assamese. Her identity as an Assamese means a lot to her. She could forgive everyone who has placed her in this situation but would never forgo her Assamese identity. The interesting thing to note is that the exposure to trauma has made her stronger as an individual, and she confronts the reality squarely. Her tragic past has returned repeatedly and she reconstructs her home time and again, first in the agriculture farm in China (Huwakiao Nongchang) immediately after her deportation to China and then in Hong Kong. According to Baishya, "the return to the past here operates at two levels. The more evident level of return in the text is represented by Arunav whose memorial narrative act, mirroring Choudhury's own endeavor of returning to the past, exposes the hidden and unacknowledged wounds to public view" (14). Although this memorial act for Arunav is sudden and unexpected, there are other characters in the novel for whom the denial to relate to the past is intense. An example is Lailin who is never ready to accept her Indian roots, and for her, India remains a country to be hated. However, the biggest metamorphosis in the novel is shown to be occurring in the case of Lailin, not only in her relationship with Arunav but, most importantly, in the way she relates to the repressed dimensions of her mother's past. This is evident as Lailin attends to the sick Mailin after having completed reading Arunav's 'novel':

(Lailin speaking)

"You have fever, mother."

"Just a little. It isn't much."

"Just a little! It isn't much! I can't decide whether I should cry or be angry at you. Why, are you like this, mother? Uuf, what type of person are you?"

"*Asomiya Manuh.*[1] Her mother said, smiling slowly…"

"I don't have a high fever. It will be fine if I rest a while."

"Are you a doctor?" Lailin questioned with anger, shaking the thermometer.

Suddenly, Lailin halted, troubled by an extreme agitation, as she gazed at her mother's wrinkled, aged hands that were held out to receive the thermometer. She knelt down on the ground and placed her head on her mother's lap.

"I can't stand it anymore, mother. I can't stand it anymore. I now understand why you are still attached to India, mother."

Lailin was drenched in the incessant flow of tears. (Choudhury, *Makam* 595)

Here we can clearly see the shift in Lailin's perception of her mother's love for the homeland. From *ghrina* for Arunav and a lack of understanding of her mother's love for her lost homeland, Lailin arrives at a position where she acknowledges her mother's pain and longing.

Even after the long temporal gap of forty-five years, Mailin fails to dissociate herself from the memories of her home at Makum. But she has accepted that returning to her birthplace in Makum may not happen in this life. That is why she says to Arunav that she was an Assamese in her *agor janmo*[2] (22). However, Mailin's homesickness and the realization of the impossibility of return reshape her memories of her place and activate her nostalgic memory, one which, at times selects the positive experience of the past, preserves and even creates a sentimentally embellished image of Makum. Her first conversation with Arunav, which revolves around the issue of their identity, reveals how deeply she wishes to return home. He also comes to realize that she carries in her mind a vivid image of the homeland, and she strongly believes that there is only one home to her, that is Makum. Her Assamese culinary styles, chanting of prayers prove her close attachment to the place,

[1] People from Assam
[2] Previous birth

holding it close to her heart and her emotional failure to come to terms with a home adopted subsequently. This memory is unlike the nostalgic memory as described by Spitzer and Mailin's memory does "not help ease the cultural uprootedness and sense of alienation" (17) that she faces everywhere. Homeland is a geographical location in Mailin's imagery, an actual concrete place that she relates to in a sensory and even sensual manner. It is a land that she can touch with her face when she kneels down, tastes its sand, and even embrace its trees. Second, the homeland is the sum of the people who live on that land and becomes a marker for her memory - the China Patti, the neighbors, the school, the market, Makum club, those who meet daily and occasionally, including those whose names are not known, the festivals etc. Third, the homeland is also constituted by the present, the past, the re-enactment of a routine lived on that land and possible only on that land. Fourth, the homeland is the sum of small objects that she leaves behind on that land, such as her cloth, all the sweet memories of her short conjugal life, her personal belongings and books bearing Pulak's signature etc. Thus, Mailin gives her homeland the characteristics of a fixed and rooted geography, intersecting the communal and the individual, the geographical, physical, and the emotional. The homeland stands for one's land and hence conforms to the characteristics of the nation as understood by the British cultural historian Raymond Williams, who argues that nation as a term is radically connected with native. He Says:

> We are born into relationships which are typically settled in a place. This form of primary and 'placeable' bonding is of quite fundamental human and natural importance. (45)

Moreover, Mailin's idea of home concurrently incorporates one's community, house and home. Not only is it associated with one's community and family, but also with a storehouse of childhood memories that shapes one's identity. Clearly, her idea of home combines with an ache of temporal distance for the place, cultural milieu, and past existence. She casts backward glances to what she leaves behind despite her awareness that the sum of the small, physical, and concrete things that connected her to the homeland might have disappeared with time, even the old people might have died. As such, the homeland becomes in her diasporic imagination a place of desire but of no return until the appearance of Arunav Bora. Her loss becomes a double loss: first, of a homeland left behind, and second, of a sense of

being at home that cannot be regained; the homeland for her possesses solely the connotations of the private and is separate from the public.

But Mailin and Lailin are not alone to have gone through such a traumatic experience, the deported or exiled community face the trauma of displacement as a whole. All the members of that community help each other face it with courage and conviction. Those who could not face it show mental fatigue and illness and in them the writer has shown the intensity of feelings to return to their home. Thus, the writer has to create numerous instances where the figure of return works effectively to explicate the trauma faced by the displaced subjects. During their stay in detention in Deoli Camp, people tend to lose patience. They show different symptoms of post-traumatic experience and start showing historical trauma response (HTR). The narrator says:

> "Some of them keep crying. Some keep sitting for hours. They do not talk. They do not want to eat. Some will repeatedly go to the gate. They keep requesting the guard to open the gate and let them go to the office." (Choudhury, *Makam* 447)

Si Hui, another character, lost his mental balance as a result of losing his hard-earned property during evacuation. During his detention he would repeatedly ask the guards:

> "Let me go out. I want to go to the office." (447)

Their repetitive behavior testifies to the intensity of the traumatic experience. Patricia Moran's reading of the representation of traumatic memory in the works of Virginia Woolf puts this experience in the image of rupture of present time frame:

> As in the models of traumatic memory, highly visual, intrusive fragments of "past time" frequently rupture the narrative "present" and thereby compel characters to re-experience vivid, unwelcome disasters. (6)

Throughout the course of their journey to China, especially during the painful experience of the train journey to Deoli, this community shows solidarity and unity. Traumatized families are reunited and reformed, old people die, new ones arrive. This repeatedly reconfigures their notion of place and home. In the process of transformation and reconfiguration of experience the displaced community participated as a whole. It is because the individuals in

the community could "recognize that others were in the same way so that together they form a club of suffering" (Vertzberger 865). Their shared past bind them in "a camaraderie forged by purification through pain and grief that non participants cannot penetrate" (865). Some of them are willing to move to China and that urge becomes acute after they face the insinuation from local Assamese people like Thakra, and the tag Chinese Spy makes the situation worse for them. Those people have secret affinity with the Chinese Communists and the Calcutta Master provides them with secret passport and all. They are happy when the Chinese Red Cross Society came forward to help them with food during detention. They express their anger with deep nuances:

> "Indian Government put us in jail as enemies. Indian people stoned us as enemies. They rebuked us. Will you stay in India after all this? Are you all shameless? I will leave if Chinese government sends ship for us. I will not stay in this country." (467)

This hostility distances them from India, a country which can demolish all age-old relationships overnight. It seems every nook and corner of this land is screaming aloud with a slogan: move away from this country. This moment of shared helplessness, grief, and guilt result in greater societal cohesion among these people of the Chinese community. Only because of their Chinese origins, hundreds, for whom Assam has been the motherland, Assamese the mother-tongue and who have nothing to do with China, are suspected as Chinese spies and forcefully deported to China. They cannot live in a country that transforms their citizens into foreigners on account of their Chinese roots. A war has uprooted them from their place of birth. But to their utter helplessness, the situation does not change much in China either. In fact, for some people, it turns out to be worse and they are unable to bear it. Devastated emotionally, they resign to death. Ting Li Iang having immense faith on China's Communism, is an example of this. His suicide is an example of the failure to face the trauma. Li Chang, Meihang, Liang all are victims of this although they have not resigned themselves to death. So their story is a story of continuous struggle of facing the historical trauma and memory that remains "wordless and static" (Herman 175) till Arunav's writing out of the traumatic phase for the exiled folk and retelling of the experience performs some form of "scriptotherapy" (Suzette A. Henke XII). Some of them move to different parts of the world from China, hoping for a better tomorrow. Now they are

scattered in Canada, Australia, and Hong Kong etc. however, their "preverbal body memories" (Herman 175) of traumatic events recur as incomprehensible and intrusive memory fragments and keep resisting narration. Author Rita Choudhury is surprised to see that some of these people are not willing to relate to the experience of this traumatic past for the danger may befall again. Laub has defined this inability to tell the trauma as an incomprehensibility of the trauma itself and "the fear that fate will strike again is crucial to the memory of trauma and to the inability to talk about it" (67). Trauma survivour might have suffered from "a deep sense of guilt and self-blame … caused by the belief that the event could have been prevented" (Vertzberger, 869).

The hesitation and denial to talk about their past prove that the survivors are still haunted by their painful past. The author Choudhury has herself acknowledged this in a report in *The Telegraph*, "The survivors are scared to discuss the trauma, let alone fight for legal redress" (April 18, 2010. 1). The consequence can be as fatal as the re-silencing of the witness and thus the loss of narration/testimony itself in some cases as "the repetition of the traumatic experience in the flashback can itself be re-traumatizing" (Caruth 1995: 63). Since these characters find themselves going through a phrase of acting-out the trauma, they are constantly struggling with remembering and forgetting the past (Whitehead 2004: 121). Mailin's individual trauma mirrors the collective trauma undergone by many people who are not able to find a place to rebuild their lives after the displacement. Our "collective responsibility" (Figes 82) of testifying "would help to expose the truth" (109) of the mindless deportation of Chinese people during the war. Arunav believes that recalling traumatic memories "is not just a personal story, a memoir of private events; it involves what is now history, and our view of important events inevitably changes with the passing of time" (139). By telling the story of the displaced Chinese, readers are provided with a perspective on Indian history that casts light on aspects of the past that have previously been neglected on the grounds of national sovereignty. *Makam* is crucial because of the political and collective dimension Arunav gives to his testimonial work which highlights the intertwining of the individual, cultural and political traumatic experiences which demonstrates that "trauma is never exclusively personal" (Gilmore 31). Rather, all the individual traumatic experiences represented in *Makam* have a collective dimension that the writer does not want to ignore. In fact, these interactions between individual and collective

processes can contribute to resilience and reconstruction after a group has gone through a traumatic experience (Alexander 2004; Robben and Suárez-Orozco 2000). Arunav's political and testimonial work confirms that the need to voice trauma has surely opened-up new narrative possibilities that render these experiences speakable or tellable. Therefore, the explosion of narratives dealing with traumatised lives has increased in recent years and highlighted the importance of studying trauma itself and its different manifestations in literature.

But there is another aspect to these traumatic experiences. The responces of Pulak and Mailin to the trauma is contrasting although they face similar situations. Shocked at the suddenness and the timing of the incident, Pulak could not recover from the trauma and fails to come to terms with his parents. His parents, especially his father, were instrumental in separating Mailin from him. After the traumatic split of his self, Pulak's response can be symptomatic of the trauma survivors who try to defend themselves from the "onslaught of traumatic recall by becoming emotionless and robotic" (Moran 6). An observation by Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart on trauma response can be illuminating in this regard:

> Traumatic memory is inflexible and invariant. It has no social component; it is not addressed to anybody, the patient does not respond to anybody; it is a solitary activity. (163)

Pulak resigns himself to an isolated life, away from his parents and friends. Nobody could locate him for a long time. Unable to bear the sense of guilt, another character, Ananta, remains a bachelor forever. Ananta had an interesting encounter with a Chinese girl Ahalin during the school days. In such cases, Choudhury is successful in incorporating the trauma in the plot of the novel. In the last scene of the novel, Arunav carries a letter from Ananta and delivers it to Ahalin and asks for her forgiveness. This is a melodramatic scene that does not add to the beauty of the novel. Thus, the novel *Makam* is not only a study of any particular individual but it the Chinese community as a whole and also the tenacious involvement of the local community in the political happenings which explicate the phenomenon of trauma "extending beyond the individual to the community" (Moran 96).

In *Makam*, the writer has shown that the first generation of displaced people cherishes a dream of returning to their birthplace before their death, at least once. The memories of their homeland haunt them. However, the historical trauma, which refers to "specific natural or human-made historical catastrophes" (Caruth 1996: 294) assumes trans-generational mode in case of their next generation. They do not share the same feeling and are comparatively happy to live in the present location. For example, Lailin does not have any attaraction for her homeland nor for the people of that country called India. She belongs to the next generation of displaced who "possess preferences, tastes, and loyalties that make them different" (Waldinger 97) from their earlier generation. But she cannot escape the "emotional landscape of their parents' lives" (Burstein 25) of their parents that is rooted in their homeland. Lailin is not sure which country is her homeland; and she clarifies it to Arunav:

> "I do not know Arunav. Because even today I do not know which country is my own." (Choudhury, *Makam* 18)

She was born in China and later on, her mother took her to Hong Kong. So, it is complex to trace what factors induce her to label a country as her homeland. She makes it clear through her gestures towards Arunav, which is a turning point in his life. The memories of the homeland have developed into a live scar for her. Lailin is never easy with her connection to Assam and there is a constant effort on her part to deny and even conceal her roots; she knows but never uses the Assamese language. But the connections are still alive in her unconscious mind. If she does not have any feelings for her Indian roots she would have behaved as normally as she does to anyone else. She fails to check her emotions and thus outbursts in the form of anger and disrespect towards Arunav. The crucial question for the readers is: which country should be the home/homeland for Lailin? Is it India where her biological father hails from or is it China where she is born or is it Canada where she is brought up and has a father from paper document? Or has she chosen to be an individual without a country? India has failed itself as home to her and her roots have given her pains; her strategy is to dissociate herself from her past. The question remains unanswered. However, the irony is that in the end, the author has placed the character of the narrator in a state of displacement. From being an outsider to the traumatic space he discovers that he is

an insider to the experience; and in a melodramatic turn of events he finds his father Tungsing who was deported forty-five years ago from Makum:

"*Deuta*[1] I am Ashin. I am Ashin, *Deuta*. I am Sonpahi's son." (603)

These discoveries and reunion of the families after a considerable time lag can be considered as figures of return.

Makam offers a happy outcome of sorts in that the displaced families find a sort of emotional relocation, and the reader gets to witness and re-imagine the meaning of it all. Healing process starts for the survivors and the return trip to their homeland is also achieved on the emotional place. For Ahalin, Arunav hands over the letter from Ananta and this is another reunion. This type of close ending gestures towards optimism in that it holds out the promise of transformation: for Choudhury the need is, to tell the truth of the past, to move on and to offer the possibility to effect change. The ending of *Makam* is again ambiguous simply because it reflects the contradiction inherent in trauma; it is connected to the tension between remembering and forgetting, and the risk to lose what Cathy Caruth calls "the force of its affront to understanding" (1995:154). Trauma fiction, like *Makam*, powerfully conveys the shocking force intrinsic to trauma. As traumatic events refuse full understanding, so does the final clossure of *Makam*. In this sense, there is no end of the trauma. The impact has not been lost. It continues post-narration.

Thus, in this chapter, an attempt is made to read *Makam* as trauma testimony which makes an effort of accessing the truth having certain limitation of representation and recounting of the silenced past. While referring to Virginia Wolf, Jean Rhys and the aesthetics of trauma, Moran points out that "modernist narrative form, with its emphasis on interiority, memory, psychological verisimilitude," and "personal isolation, and its development of fragmented, nonlinear plots, provides an ideal medium for the transcription of traumatic experience" (3). Besides, we have to consider that "literature bears testimony not just to duplicate or to record events, but to make history available to the imaginative act, whose historical unavailability has prompted, and made possible, a holocaust" (Felman and Laub XII). Moreover, they say "one does not have to possess or own truth, in order to

[1] The Assamese word for Father

effectively bear witness to it" (15). So, whether primary or secondary, witnessing helps us revisit the trauma site in the form of a novel or any other testimony. This is true for the narrative of *Makam* too. Traumatic events can damage people, families and communities. Trauma creates distance, distrust and disconnection between people. Healing is about reconnection, reconstruction and finding meaning. Healing must repair connections with others, self-images, values and beliefs. Healing comes in many forms, and individual counseling or therapy, spiritual help, and group or whole community gatherings are all important aspects of the healing process. *Makam* can be taken as an endeavor in this regard. The author does not claim to provide the traumatic due to the victims, but her narration is "symptomatic of the deeper issues of socio-political relations" (Baruah 106) and social transitions. These issues demand critical exploration. As for the readers, according to Christine Van Boheemen-Saaf "reading the art of trauma may engage the reader in a dialogue with that trauma which might open him or her up to begin to acknowledge its hitherto repressed presence" (10). However, we may end on a poignant note of Lailin:

> "Can you talk about us while you are standing on Indian soil? Do you have that much of courage?" (12)

Arunav Bora overcomes the shock and is able to pen the tragedy, the trauma of the displaced and exiled, but not before fully empathizing with the survivors and witnesses. But it is only after being propelled by Mailin's antagonism towards the Indian people that he is emotionally charged to search for the hidden past. So, as Judith Herman puts it "trauma is contagious" (140) and he too is gripped by that infectious trauma. Choudhury has shown him as investing time and emotions in writing the tragedy that he bears witness to, and by doing so finds him confronting the trauma. By virtue of being the writer, he is destined to become an intellectual witness, who, as Geoffrey Hartman says, "too is at risk: our academic hygiene, which often sanitizes art, will not shield us from secondary traumatization" (24). Choudhury feels the empathy for the victims and tries to convey the traumatic experiences in *Makam*, which is a kind of working through amidst a troubled past to emphatic unsettlement – "a kind of virtual experience through which one puts oneself in the other's position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other's place" (LaCapra 78).

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Chapter VI

Conclusion: The Dark Holds Terror

> When it is ignored or invalidated the silent screams continue internally heard only by the one held captive. When someone enters the pain and hears the screams healing can begin.
>
> Danielle Bernock

A victim of extreme trauma is doomed to the darkness of eternal silence until a competent and patient listener facilitates some sort of light that swipes away the darkness. Trauma healing starts only after the process of telling and re-telling is initiated by someone, preferably a competent listener. The victim does not have a choice but to surrender to the deep recesses of darkness that holds the trauma. The victim does not tell. The victim does not live. Bearing witness to any form of telling or recording in language triggers the breakthrough of communication of an almost impossible experience.

The present interdisciplinary study has tried to examine the representation of trauma of displacement in selected Assamese novels from the post-Independence era, which is also named as the modern era in Assamese literary history. First of all, this dissertation explores the process of characterization in the selected texts that highlight issues of trauma victims in contemporary social and political context in each chapter. Then the discussion moves over to the analysis of different literary devices like metaphor, simile etc used in the texts and sees how the authors have read the situation in terms of working through the trauma of displacement. It also scrutinizes the texts in their representations of geographical, bodily, and textual space by analyzing the setting of the novels and their role and strategy of coping with the trauma. To achieve this objective Assamese trauma narratives have been placed in dialogue with the predominantly western model of trauma theory which is primarily based on PTSD theory. This approach is fairly new to the criticism of Assamese novels that take up the trauma of displacement and historical erasure. But we need to explore the culture-

specific experiences of this region as the PTSD model of trauma theory may not be an effective one in analyzing texts that emerge out of places other than the Europen space. It has already been said that the application of trauma theory to Assamese texts may help us develop a reading of trauma which is localised and contextualised in experiences.

The trauma of displacement, in this case, may refer to burden of losses of home, family, relationships and also the predicament one faces due to loss of memory and sanity. It may also refer to commodification of nature as an anthropocentric urge as seen in *Chenabar Sont*. Moreover, this study focuses more on the issues of identity, culture, borders, migration (national/international) and orders within the postcolonial and multicultural diversified societies. Questions of identity and rights enter strongly in the present trauma texts, especially in the texts written in the post-Independence era, especially the post-1970's period of Assamese literary history. In the 'Introduction' to her important collection *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Caruth writes that "trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures" in a "catastrophic age" (1996: 54) in which we are living at present. Incorporating Caruth's idea into the present study it would not be wrong to say that the application of trauma theory in cross-cultural perspective enables us to explore Assamese texts in a new light. Although the selected texts in this study are only exposed to a limited number of the audience because of its production in the regional language in Assamese, these texts have focused on the trauma involving a group of people in multiple ways. Importantly, the novelists are not trapped by the chronological barriers of time and space in selecting their subjects which are mostly related to the plight of working class people and also unravel the history of convenient forgetting by the dominant class and cultures. While documenting the lack of collective will of dominant groups of society to listen to the trauma survivors, these novelists portray the darker side of familiar people and groups.

The introductory chapter of the study entitled "Introduction: Assamese Novels and Trauma Studies" addresses some general concepts on trauma and displacement. The ever-expanding field of trauma theory has come a long way since its introduction into the academic sphere by theorists like Cathy Caruth, Judith Herman, Hartman, Dori Laub, Kali Taal from the early 1990s and at present it does not limit itself to the study of western models solely anymore. Later, theorists like Steff Craps have given a new orientation to

trauma theory by relating it to cultures other than European. The phenomenon of displacement is intricately related to trauma. We have also seen how the theme of trauma as a subject is not new to Indian literature. Indian Classics have especially portrayed the intense emotional conflicts in some characters like Márícha, demon King Kansha and others. The following section of dialogue of Márícha in Indian classic *Ramayana* can be cited as an example from:

> Throughout the grove there is no spot
> So lonely where I see him not.
> He haunts me in my dreams by night,
> And wakes me with the wild affright. (Ralph T. H. Griffith 973)

It is seen that trauma study is an all-encompassing area in contemporary world literature and theorists Stef Craps and Gert Buelens regard it as "reinvention in an ethical guise of this much-maligned textualism" (1). In fact, trauma theory is an umbrella term that includes psychoanalysis, post-structuralism, philosophy, theories of memory, ethical and aesthetic questions of the nature and representation of traumatic events. Not only public and historical trauma but also the private and memorial narratives of trauma have dominated the field. The initial impetus provided by the Freudian psychoanalysis in early stages is now taken over by different multidimensional theories like Feminism, New Historicism, Cultural Materialism, Deconstruction, LGBT Studies, Cultural Studies, and Post-colonialism, and Marxism in the post-1990s.

After the introductory chapter on trauma and its relevance on the praxis of Assamese post-Independence novels, the second chapter scrutinizes the representation of the working of displacement and trauma in Mamoni Raisom Goswami's *Chenabar Sont*. This chapter addresses the crucial issue of politicizing the female body in terms of asserting dominance over it – body not as a dignified given but a politicized inferior space where males can converse in terms of their desire by asserting their supremacy, and is made a site for trauma and violence. This violated body space can be compared to the spoilt and corrupted natural space around Chadrabhaga or the Chenab River where the disfigured human body is used as a leitmotif in the text. A parallel is drawn between the violated body space of female and the physicality of Chadrabhaga's landscape in *Chenabar Sont* where the virginity of the land is

lost to the anthropocentric urge of overconfident humans. As a result of it, valuable human lives are lost. The death of Sadashiv in *Chenabar Sont* and Mackenzie in *Ejak Manuh* could be viewed as part of the same tragedy and again we can draw a parallel between the two. Sadashiv loses his life in the anthropocentric desire of dominating or conquering the Chadrabhaga and making of a bridge over it, the water body and the land - the nature, whereas Mackenzie's life is lost to his passion for the female body. Both are males and seek to exercise the patriarchal norms of conquering a given territory. Goswami has projected and politicised the male gaze as self-destructive, a gaze that does not help in *living* but drives the man crazy to *leave* for conquering a territory which is either female body space or natural landscapes of the river. Goswami has used the female body as a central metaphor to deliberate upon the issues of loss, pain, horror, death and violence. In this regard, critic Tillottoma Misra opines that Mamoni Raisom Goswami's women are portrayed as a tragic generation suffering from a deep sense of guilt and remorse "for their inability to rein in their libido. They are pursued relentlessly to their doom by the furies of their own mental creation" (30). None of her characters can transcend their suffering and attain a dignified poise. But the ending of the novel *Chenabar Sont* shows Soni attaining a semblence of calmness, but that does not mean that Soni has resolved her traumatic pain. This open ending of the novel can be taken as a suggestion towards trauma healing and adjustment.

The third chapter looks into the dark history of World War II and the resulting complicacies in the no man's land of the British colony of Burma. It tries to analyse the historically forgotten long march through the lenses of trauma theory and how the doubly displaced Indian farmers complete an almost impossible flight to the long-lost homeland called India after crossing a space of terrible loss and decay. In doing so the novel addresses different issues relating to identity, borders, nationalism and hybridity that counter exclusivist or purified notions of identity formation in the modern world. Thus, *Jangam* takes us en route a roller coaster ride of tropical Asian forests. Through his panoptic view and skillful narrative, the writer portrays a high voltage human drama with death, decay and loss of humanity with a passionate urge for national purity. Here the politics of location deals nasty blows to humanitarian ideologies in general. The novel takes the reader through the *Chakrabehu* of nature in a politically unstable place and simultaneously shows the cruelty of Burmese nationalists. The omnipresent narratorial gaze hardly stops anywhere

throughout the narrative and readers are introduced to the maze-like atmosphere of the Hukawng valley with death lurking everywhere in the ugliest manner. Through the representations of trauma and memories associated with the war and subsequent displacement through the use of different tropes of madness, victimization, memory loss and their impact on the life of the protagonists, Acharyya has raised some serious questions related to writing about an experience which does not comply with any conventional or linear type of narrative structure. Indeed, the traumatic experience by its nature defies linear time cognition through interruptions and the interference of flashbacks and other traumatic disorders. The novel can be perceived as trauma fiction in the sense that it focuses on a specific traumatic event which involves a violent act. Thus it is apt to say that the traumatic event in the novel is both culturally and politically constructed.

Chapter IV addresses the question whether trauma is transitional as portrayed in Umakanta Sarma's novel *Ejak Manuh Ekhon Aranya*. This chapter discusses geographical displacement and community formation as depicted in the novel in an effort to read it as a text where subaltern voices are trying to acquire a hybrid identity that would help them move near the cultural center after relocation. Exchange of cultural elements and at the same time maintaining a cultural purity is a challenge experienced by the denizens of hybrid cultural spaces like tea gardens - the colonial garden where we see the trilogy of Assamese, British, and Bagania culture coming together in a rich and diversified panorama. With his agile view at work, the narrator looks at the building up of the self-other binary construct and its multidimensional implications.

Chapter V examines the theme of return to the site of trauma and memory in Rita Choudhury's *Makam*. *Makam* takes us back into the politically volatile space of wartime nationalism and a search for purified singular identity in Makum during 1961-62. In *Makam*, the author is successful in portraying a patient listener named Arunav Bora who acts as a strong catalyst propelling Lailin to fling open and emotionally discharge her traumatic past. In this novel where the narrator enjoys a peculiar outsider-insider position, people are shown to be at the receiving end in the wartime discourse of overtly politicised ethnic identity. The narrator Arunav Bora self-scrutinizes his identity through the panoptic gaze of nationalism that compels the reader to question the credibility of national narratives of history. In

Jangam, the narration is not lost to the story, whereas in *Makam*, the narrator has let the narration cruise towards a melodramatic closure. The author seems to have been emotionally overpowered by her characters within the novel which is not the case in the rest of the novels of this study, for example, Soni in *Chenabar Sont*. Tulsi in *Ejak Manuh* and Lailin in *Makam* have inherited the trauma of displacement from their forefathers. As mentioned earlier, the ending of *Makam* can be taken as a deliberate strategy on the part of the author who tries to suggest a sort of permanent or lasting solution and healing of traumatic pain by a compensatory act by someone.

The Concluding chapter is titled "The Dark Holds Terror." This chapter sums up the study and suggests the possible outcome of the thesis.

According to Jane Smiley, the medium of fiction offers scope for healing and regeneration of trauma victims' lives by performing a "therapeutic act" in writing and helps to "come to terms with" (176) history by communicating the pain and suffering to readers. Moreover, literature in its interaction with society conveys the hitherto unsaid and effectively involves readers in a meaningful dialogue with the metanarrative of history so that some of the wrongs can be reversed. In doing so literature can be a potential medium for breaking the silence on historical erasure which leads to healing and understanding in the absence of which society "will be brutalized and coarsened" (177) by a lack of empathy. This is also true of the texts included in this study. Circulation of such books amongst the people in power becomes a necessary precondition for this to happen and the books must be read. Trauma theorist Hartman uses the term "antidote" and "resilience" to refer to the emphatic role that literature plays in trauma healing. The intensity of human suffering can be realized from a "larger, trans-historical awareness of the incidence of trauma – personal or collective." The antidote is mainly drawn from a "deeply incorporated memory - source" (269). He poses a significant question in this regard:

> Is it not the risk involved in widening the sympathetic imagination that defines art – and should define what it means to be fully human? (274)

Trauma fiction plays the role of informing the readers about the unaccountable misery of the victims and thus stops probable future misgivings about the incidents. In literary trauma

theory, the positioning of the reader as the witness is one which signals ethical concerns. In this regard trauma fiction can be termed as ethical literature because it depicts tragic events that have often undergone cultural repression, urging readers, who have to situate themselves in relation to it, to acknowledge and take part in the fictional characters experiences as an ethical commitment to try and effect change. It has the ability to bridge the gap between past and present generations of victims and perpetrators. It is believed that most of the intensity of the trauma is lost in the process of transformation from the victim to the semantic representation. As such, readers are only secondary witnesses to the trauma. In this regard, Kaplan's five-part model for the experience of traumatization helps us move through the complexities that span from direct experience to traumatic counter transference mediated by visual and/or semantic information. Kaplan categories witness into following five divisions: i) the first-hand experience as victim, ii) eyewitness experience which is "one step removed," iii) "visually mediated trauma" such as seeing trauma in the media including films, that is "two steps removed," iv) reading trauma and "constructing visual images of semantic data," which is "three steps removed," and finally, listening to a patient's traumatic experiences involving "both visual and semantic channels" coupled with a "face-to-face encounter with the survivor or the bystander" (91-92). *Chenabar Sont* shall come under the category of the testimony of an eyewitness experience of the writer and thus one step removed from the actual event. But as the writer herself was present at the trauma site during the time of happening, she was deeply pained and felt the trauma in herself. It was not difficult for her to imagine herself in the same situation as she constantly suffered that sense of loneliness during her childhood. Now, in the horrible worksite on the bank of the Chenab, the contagious trauma infects her again. Thus, although Goswami's account seems to be "one step removed" (Kaplan 91) from the trauma site, it comes close to be classified as a sort of first-hand experience as a victim. Moreover, it is through Goswami's text that her eye-witness accounts and partial first-hand experience remains open with all its horror, nightmares, silences and cognitive or linguistic breakdown (see Felman and Laub). Debendranath Acharyya's *Jangam* is neither a first-hand experience as a victim, nor an eyewitness account that is one step removed from the event. Rather it can be classed as "visually mediated" (Kaplan 91) form of testimony reconstructed with the help of the testimony of others. Thus, it is a reconstruction - two steps removed from the actual

encounter with trauma. But it is not to mean that Acharyya's reading of the traumatic situation is not authentic. On the contrary, Acharyya's depiction is vivid because of the graphic and cinematographic detailing of events and actions. This form of narration intensifies the reader's sense of trauma. Umakanta Sarma in his *Ejak Manuh* follows a technique similar to that of Acharyya and can be classifed as a form of trauma testimony that is two steps removed. But, he too is effective to a certain extent in creating the required impact upon the readers as he stresses both the personal and social aspects of trauma in his text. The personal aspect is seen in the depiction of the state of hallucination and dream element in the characters of Banha and Tulsi; the social aspect is dominant in the sections that portray the predicament that the tea tribe faces as a community. Trauma is seen as arriving in a belated and repeated form as if something is missing in memory but reappears in the form of "dream, hallucination and other intrusive elements at a later time" (Caruth 1996: 55) with all its exactness and literality. Choudhury's *Makam* is a reading of trauma that may belong to the fifth category of Kaplan's categorization. It incorporates listening to a patient's traumatic experiences involving both "visual and semantic elements" with a "face-to-face encounter with the survivor or the bystander" (Kaplan 94). However, Choudhury's *Makam* also comes close to being a partially firsthand testimonial narrative as the writer has mentioned in the postface of the novel that she long nourished a desire to write trauma of the Chinese denizens of Makum after having come to know their tragedy (603). She could feel the pain unlike anyone else who did not think it necessary to write anything about that black chapter of Indian history. Thus the author intends to rectify some of the mistakes committed by the then Indian Government and laments the negligence and hostility shown by parts of contemporary Assamese society. The creation of characters like Pulak's father Minaram Barua and Thakra justify these claims. The author is successful in compelling the readers to rethink our sense of ethics and moral responsibility. But these linear classifications cannot justify the greater claims that these texts make when considered from other social and political perspectives that have the ability to give new directions to trauma healing in these Assamese fictions from the post-Independence era.

All the four texts except *Chenabar Sont* can also be classified as transnational texts that talk about how issues of identities-border-orders question our notions of nationalism and civilization when displacement is legitimated and reproduced through a system of narratives,

public rituals and institutions, formal state bureaucracies and informal social relationships, written and unwritten regulations, sets of assumptions and expectations of civility and public behaviour (see Schiffauer et al). Scholars have sought to develop a transnational analytical framework and have defined transnationalism as the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-standard social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement (Basch et al) building a kinship networks extended across two different places. But displacement and migration itself confront various complex issues of identities-border-orders. "One reason migration enters political agendas with greater frequency and silence now," suggests Martin Heisler, "is that at least in some host societies, it disturbs the sense of bondedness" (236). The displaced are forced to live in such a difficult state because of the hostility shown by local people that the place of origin becomes a source of identity and the place of residence becomes a source of rights. The result is "confusion between rights and identity, culture and politics, states and nations" (Kastoryano 160). It is seen that sometimes the displaced are engaged in a confrontation with the host societies to assert their identity and rights. These are also part of the process of assimilation that relocation allows.

All the texts suggest different coping strategies in the face of trauma and adversity. Different strategies that the characters engage themselves in such a situation are:

- Assimilation to a local culture and habitat
- Assimilation post-displacement leading to minimalisation of the self-other binary prevalent during wartime nationalism
- Focusing on trade and commercial activities to nurture and share human skills
- Need of a window period to restore oneself to a normal state of mind after displacement. This only can unite scattered or disjointed family members. This is suggested by the use of madness and loss of memory in the selected texts
- Practicing symbolic gestures of return to one's birthplace or homeland can be another very effective technique of attaining some sort of healing of trauma
- Sharing of pain and grief after exile may lead to decreasing the burden of trauma and mitigation of the sense of loss and withdrawal to a certain extent.

This is clearly visible in the group activities performed by different members of the community within the texts

- Curative properties of the novels or the literature in general. Reading and spreading of such trauma texts is necessary for the truth to circulate amongst the public

Whether one agrees with this model or not, and believes the reader to be further removed from the trauma than the spectator in a movie, it is crucial to distinguish between primary and secondary trauma and primary and secondary witness. When viewed from a psychoanalytic perspective, trauma is known or understood by its symptoms that characterize the victim's behaviour and simultaneously demands an outlet. For LaCapra, working through "means coming to terms with the trauma, including its details, and critically engaging the tendency to act out the past and even to recognize why it may be necessary and even in certain respects desirable or at least compelling"; it does not entail a strictly linear process that moves straight from acting out to closure (144). In fact "acting out" and "working through" are related to each other and one leads to the other in a series of repetitive behaviors. LaCapra's concepts of "working through" and "acting out" echoes Freud's ideas of mourning and melancholia respectively (Freud 2003/1920: 52-70), and also correspond to van der Kolk and van der Hart's "narrative memory" and "traumatic memory" (154-156). Mamoni Raisom Goswami, Debendranath Acharyya, Umakanta Sarma and Rita Choudhury - each pictures protagonist suffering from crippling effects of trauma, and shows them working through the trauma in the later part of their lives and tries to pass on the same to the readers. It gives the impression that the survivor is able to overcome the pain and a certain amount of mastery over the event is also attained. But complete transcendence is largely an illusion for the victims. Sometimes the protagonist may create a confusing narrative that hides the trauma, but in reality, he/she might have only adjusted to the hardship without forgetting his/her past testified in the creation of the illusive narrative that acts as a cover-up for her soreness. The protagonists, whether male or female, fails to transcend their pain, and carry the traces of its memory till the end of life. Soni in *Chenabar Sont* is never able to get rid of her loneliness and the existential trauma remains sharp as ever. The positive note at the end of the novel only helps in creating more illusions for the readers because both Soni and Sibanna are looking at similar futures as their present one. They are preparing to shift to

another location – a new work site. It is rather unlikely that their life will change drastically for the better or that the intimidating presence of trauma will be negated. The image of the "torn shoe" continues to haunt the narrative here as well and suddenly the terrible Chenab is converted into a deity that seems to bless the two fallen figures of Soni and Sibanna with a "go ahead, go ahead" (Goswami, *Chenabar Sont* 88). Acharya's *Jangam* ends with an image of a happy child smiling in its dreamlike nap indicating a positive turn in the lives of trauma survivors. But the narrator keeps the mystery unresolved about the madness of protagonist Ramgobinda and his wife. Thus, there is a hint of the possibility that they would keep on facing the nightmare of trauma. *Makam*, on the other hand, ends in a dramatic fashion with the unexpected reunion of father and son, who is the narrator himself. Other characters including Pulak and Mailin Ho continue to be burdened by the trauma of separation even after their belated reunion – "away from everyone's sight a scar remains, which will never be healed. The source of tears stays with them that will never stop flowing … It has left a group of people who lost their roots" (Choudhury, *Makam* 604). Umakanta Sarma ends his novel on a positive note with Arjun and Rumni looking forward towards the horizon - "a newborn Sun" (Sarma, *Ejak Manuh* 378) appears at a distance suggesting a new lease of life. But what about their parents, for whom the scars of trauma are still alive? All these closures show that there are still ways and means to carry life forward even after facing the horrible ordeal of trauma. In this way, the novelists have shown that the possibility of healing, of continuation of life and shared human values of love, care, compassion and cultivation of cultural spaces after assimilation may help the trauma victims to rebuild their lives. All the three novels except *Makam* have an open-ended closure. An open-ended closure of the novel is full of possibility and suggestion. It can be compared to a fluidic reality where we can see different possibilities in the future and suggests that life still carries hope and conviction for the next generation of trauma survivors. The experience of trauma builds up the memory of the victim and controls his/her actions at present and the reality is an illusion for them. And that is why they cannot merge with the reality. They are endlessly creating different layers of reality inside their minds and merge with that reality which stops them from coming in terms with the rea reality. This pushes the victims towards creating and working through the subject/object distancing. Physical dislocation leads to psychological unsettlement and continues in the form of searching for a link or reconnecting with their lost roots or

individuals post re-location in another territory or space. This aspect is clearly evident in *Makam*, where the next generation of trauma survivors is ready to reconnect to their roots but not willing to accept the homeland as a form of ideal reconciliation of all sorts. For example, Lailin finds her father in the end; other characters who are reconnected with their lost or estranged family members. Even the narrator is reunited with his father. But still she is not ready to accept it as it will not be wiping every pain clear. In *Chenabar Sont*, Soni is reconnected with Sibanna. In *Ejak Manuh*, Arjun and Rumni together march ahead to pursue higher studies. In *Jangam* the smile of the small child symbolizes a future where the cruelty of war will not corrupt the novelty of life. Thus positioning of the readers as witness, whether primary or secondary is one which signals ethical concerns for the readers at present. Trauma fiction is ethical literature because it depicts tragic events that have often undergone cultural repression, urging readers, who have to situate themselves in relation to it, to acknowledge and take part in the fictional characters' experiences as an ethical commitment to try and effect change.

The selected texts have played a vital role in exposing some of the horrific incidents that have happened in the Indian subcontinent and were deliberately kept secret for a period of time. In this regard, these fictional texts may be classified as texts making political statements as well. All these texts work through the trauma to arrive at a state wherefrom the victims can find a space to renew their bonding and negate their sense of placelessness. These texts highlight the need of social compassion and mutual respect among fellow citizens which shall negate narrow nationalism or temporary ghettoization on the basis of foreign roots and cultural differences. But it is not to say that they claim migration or displacement as a positive or sought after phenomenon. Therefore the crucial thematic and social contexts make them politically relevant and competent texts in the present day scenario. Choudhury's *Makam* and Acharyya's *Jangam* are clear and strong political statements made in this regard. They put their respective responses against the diplomatic silence and humanitarian negligence on these traumatic events in the texts with force. Timely intervention of governments and other non-governmental organizations would have made the victims suffer less. On the other hand, Mamoni Raisom Goswami and Umakanta Sarma's texts *Chenabar Sont* and *Ejak Manuh* expose the darker sides of colonial exploitation in work sites and the complexities of cultural integration and resistances to it. The sense of dejection and

loneliness that lead to the never-ending crippling effect of trauma in Tusli is a classic example of colonial exploitation and an ever-expanding gap of self-other. The difficult life and hostility of the host community intensify the sense of trauma in the displaced tea community in *Ejak Manuh*. In all the texts displacement is seen not as a voluntary activity but a result of political and business activities. This involuntary activity automatically leads to numerous lacks or deprivations for the victims. Separation from familiar spaces or places where they have spent a considerable part of their lives put them in a traumatic situation. And in all the situations of the novels, females and children are shown as the worst victims of displacement.

The novels work as performing therapeutic acts helping the reader know more about the past. At the same time they also act as mediums of empathy for the victims or the surviving lot. In the process of throwing light on the forgotten events, these texts have made us aware of our collective behaviour in the past. It may be hoped that there will not be any such situation in future and this is one of the objectives of this kind of trauma fiction. These fictions have a played a larger role in sensitizing the readers to all these crucial issues. In the above discussion, four Assamese novels of the post-Independence period have been placed under scrutiny by applying contemporary trauma theory. The task of bearing witness and representation of the trauma of the voiceless can be taken to international level by such ventures. In this study four important novels are selected for close study instead of a historical survey in the hope that the programme would encourage scholars from the Northeastern region to take up other works in regional language for their representative research projects. Further, it is hoped that the study would encourage researchers to look for historical documents in the Archives that provide new informations on these traumatic events. Researchers or social scientists may also conduct field study project of traumatised experiences or the areas that are effected by such traumatised encounters, terrorism and state sponsored violences etc.

We need to increasingly incorporate into our research programmes a significant number of texts written in regional languages so that we may be able to illustrate both the culture specific and universality of traumatic experiences. Thereby we give credence to both the heterogeneity and the ubiquity of trauma. Though the opening up of non-western creative

texts to analysis within the domain of trauma theory may tempts us to formulate either new theories of trauma, the present researcher feel that such a quest may not be entilely possible. What is important to realize that the earlier theories claiming the impossibility of traumatic expression have to be replacerd by trauma critical excercises that illustrate the characters' and their novelists' ability to convey the sense of their experiences. The texts selected in this study are themselves proof of the fact that such utterance and expression are indeed possible and worthy of close analysis. Of course, part of the older theories may still be valid, in that deferral, amnesia, belatedness, avoidance etc, may characterize trauma victim's responces to trauma. However, the texts at hand are nevertheless creative enumerations and and expressions of traumatic realities. We have to work between these two axes of unspeakbility and incompleteness on the one hand and the rich discourses of the creative writer on the other. It is in this interstitial linguistic space that we have to work with empathy if we are to apprehend whatever is possible to grasp in the disturbing domain of trauma studies. In this lies our collective growth, salvation and solidarity.

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