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## Trauma of Wounded Childhood: A Study of Namdeo Nimgade's *In the Tiger's Shadow*

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The term trauma, especially childhood trauma has a significant presence in Freudian psychoanalysis. From the sphere of psychoanalysis, the study and application of Trauma Theory has entered the realm of literature too. James Berger in his seminal essay, "Trauma and Literature" (569) highlights this trend of making use of psychoanalytic tools in literary traumatic theory. Theorizing Trauma is always problematic. Julian Wolfrey, in her "Trauma, Testimony, Criticism: Witnessing, Memory and Responsibility", observes that: ". . . it must be admitted from the outset that any gesture in the direction of regulating a response to trauma or establishing a methodology or mode of analysis should be resisted, if one is to do justice to trauma and the work of testimony"(26)

As such, one has to be very careful in applying Trauma theory in literary writings, especially in autobiographies. If one is not careful, the analysis would be an injustice to the autobiography, which is a testimony, as the analysis would try to define the limitations of work instead of highlighting the work's specialty. While doing the analysis of a text, a researcher is supposed to keep in mind that, "The subject of trauma is rendered immobile, unable to move beyond the haunting effects left by trauma and can only experiencing in a damaging, repetitive fashion, the disjunctive specters, remains of what is nonsymbolizable" (134). Another important aspect of Trauma according to Ronell is that ". . . trauma can be experienced in at least two ways . . . as a memory that one cannot integrate into one's own experience, and as a catastrophic knowledge that one cannot communicate the others" (136)

Childhood Trauma is a terrible experience and a eternally hurting wound. Its victims are everywhere. "One of the luckiest thing that can happen to you in life is, I think, to have a happy childhood" ,says Agatha Christie, a noted novelist. However, childhood is neither lucky nor happy for the children belonging to several subaltern groups. Throughout the world, one can find that the fate of children from the marginalized communities is different from that of children belonging to privileged background. May it be African-Americans, or children of migrants, they face traumatic experiences .Further, marginalization is forced on them right from the childhood on economic or racial or regional grounds. In India, experiences of Dalit children often unmask the demonic face of caste.

Usually Trauma Theory focuses on incidents related to child abuse or random violence encountered in the childhood. In the present case, the focus of trauma theory can be extended to untouchability experienced during the childhood. Namdeo Nimgade, a committed Dalit activist recounts such memories in his autobiography, *In the Tiger's Shadow*. Nimgade's episodes recounting his childhood, in his autobiography can be considered a literary documentation of a Dalit child. To certain extent ,Nimgade's autobiography is also the history of the Dalit movement.

Four types of traumatic experiences are documented in his autobiography *In the Tiger's Shadow*. They are social, educational, physical and psychological. Nimgade's childhood was filled with miseries. Although he was born after a long period of penance, his parents could not shower their love on him due to economic pressures, They had to work hard in order to keep their body and soul together. Usually ,the birth of a child leads to celebration and distribution of sweets. However it was not so in the case of Nimgade. There were no celebrations. The musicians who came, as per the custom, on the days of his birth returned empty handed due to the abject poverty in the family. Nimgade recounts: When I was just twelve days old, my mother had to return to labouring in the fields" (5)

Heavy toiling in the fields, lack of rest, lack of nourishment and such factors led to physical weakness. Due to these issues, Nimgade's mother did not have enough breast milk to nurse Nimgade. Nimgade used to keep crying during his infancy as he was hungry. Usually, well to do families feed their infants with cow's milk. The Nimgades did not have any such resources. Hence young Namdeo Nimgade had to sustain on a female donkey's Milk. Further, a few other neighbourhood women used to take pity on him and suckle him. This incident shows that how struggle for survival begins in the life of Dalits right from their infancy. It is a pity that Dalit women have no time to spend with their children as they had to toil in the fields from morning to evening. In the night, they had to do the household chores. In the midst of such a busy schedule ,they hardly had any time to bring up their children. Most of the children used to wail continuously because of hunger or illness. Having no access to food or medicine, Dalit women had to take resource in a very dangerous method to calm down their children. They used to feed their children with a speck of opium! They had to do this because they cannot work in the fields if the children keep crying. This method was used to pacify Namdeo Nimgade too. He says that forced by her mothers-in-law, his mother ". . . would give me (him) a little speck of opium (the size of "the eye of a fly") and I would sleep all the day. I am thankful that my mother was careful; an overdose could easily have put my earthly existence in jeopardy". (5)

Namdeo Nimgade's childhood memories were full of miseries. Pondering over Dalit education, Nimgade says: "As a child, I did not even know what the word "school" meant. That was our golden childhood, a time of simplicity no school, no toys, no clothing, and sometimes no food"

(7). In spite of such adversities, the Nimgades wanted to give the best to their children Namdeo narrates a chapter from the life of his grant parents.

Once, while the family was doing migrant labor working near the village of Varhad, they were approached by some foreign missionaries who asked to adopt Maratrao and Bhaga. The missionaries promised that the children would lead an easier life and would be well educated. Budha and Saguna declined the offer. After the missionaries left, Saguna, true to her character, let loose a stream of invectives. 'We are poor! But we will work hard to raise our children the best way we can-we will never give them away to those white ghosts!'(11)

Namdeo had the first taste of physical labour when he was just seven years old. That was then considered to be a proper age to begin working in the fields. He began to help his mother in the fields. Working in the fields brought him in touch with the world of elders and he began to see and experience untouchability in day to day life. Namdeo Nimgade says.

Only with time did I realize that life outside our maharvasti (neighborhood) was rather different, and that we were considered unworthy of even being touched by higher caste people. These high caste people seemed to have farms, houses, houses, fields, food, and good clothing. It would have been inconceivable to me that these well to do people, in turn, were being ruled over by yet another group-the British colonialist. (11, 12)

When Namdeo was young, neither he nor his parents had thought about enrolling him in a school as they were struggling to survive. Whatever little money Namdeo had earned, helped the family. One day one of the bullocks under the care of Namdeo entered another farmer's field. That man was so furious with Namdeo and thrashed him black and blue. Namdeo's mother who was working in a nearby field came running to his rescue. She was overwhelmed by grief and told him ". . . son, your low birth has led to such troubles ... you have been treated worse than an animal!" (27). The reader has to notice two points here; Namdeo was not responsible for the act of the bull. As he is a young boy, one cannot expect him to control the bull. If the farmer had to beat someone, he is supposed to beat the bullock. But he chose Namdeo over the bullock. This is due to the fact that if the bull was injured he may have to face hostility from the animal's owner. On the other hand no one is going if question of Namdeo is beaten. For him, the bull is more precious than a Dalit youngster. This is one of the recurring themes in Dalit autobiography Dalits are treated worse than animals. Though painful, this incident is a turning point in his life. It was really a blessing in disguise. He says "The humiliating heating proved a blessing in disguise. It made my parents seriously consider sending me to school" (27). This, in the age of fourteen, he was enrolled in a primary school.

Untouchability prevailed in the school too. Namdeo was ordered to stand outside the class room and listen to the lessons. Namdeo recounts :

The headmaster admitted me under the strict condition that I being untouchable, must never enter the school house. Instead I would have to stand outside with a handful of other untouchables on the hot verandah and listen to lessons through a window. There were several windows, each about two by three feet. Fortunately, the school room was small and my vision sharp enough for me to catch most of the lessons. (21)

Untouchability was practiced even in distribution of drinking water. The upper caste students were allowed to use the school well. But the untouchables: “had to go to the untouchable vasti, which was quite far away” (28). Even while walking to school, Namdeo had to keep himself away from his class mates and see to it that he did not touch them even accidentally. If he accidentally “touched their tiffin box, they would consider the lunch container polluted and throw it away”(28). If it is thrown out, Namdeo would pick it up and eat it as he could not bear the food getting wasted.

Nimgade says that his mother motivated him to go to school. She did not want her son get beatings similar to that he received in the field, for no fault of his. Further, she knew the value of education too as her uncle was respected in the community because of his literacy and astrological skills (29).

Despite the hurdles and miseries in his educational career, Nimgade studied well and earned the highest marks. Instead of being pleased by it, Nimgade’s teacher was infuriated. This was due to his casteist mentality. He was unable to digest the fact that a boy from untouchable community is scoring the highest marks. Further, he was irritated by Nimgade’s performance that was better than his “upper caste” classmates. Nimgade recounts these facts:

Whatever our teacher taught, I learned well, earning the highest marks. But this only seemed to anger my teacher, and he would occasionally throw his stick at me. Then he would pick up the stick, sprinkle it with water to purify it after it had touched me, and should to the other higher-caste students, ‘You fools! You can’t even learn as well as this boy standing outside!’ (29-30).

Once, unable to contain his enthusiasm, Nimgade entered the classroom during lunch hour and tried to write in the black-board. The board fell on a boy from another community. Hearing the cry of the boy, Nimgade’s teacher and fellow students came to the spot. In their view, Nimgade had committed two heinous crimes. He had polluted the classroom by entering it and polluted an upper class boy by touching him. What followed is given below in Nimgade’s own words:

Then the teacher picked up his stick and struck me. Usually, he would just beat me from a distance, but today he ignored that distance. It was as if nothing else existed for him except his stick and my body. He cursed me and my caste. ‘You

idiots, why are you learning? And as if it isn't enough, how dare you enter the schoolhouse!' With full strength he showered me with blows. Then he beat my feet- 'The legs you entered our school with!' (30-31)

Once the teacher completed his turn, Nimgade's classmates took over. They slapped and kicked him to their heart's content. They were harbouring malice against him as he out performed them in studies Nimgade thought, "Before ever starting school, I was beaten severely; now I am learning, but I am still getting beaten" (31). The boys and the teacher did not forget to take a bath for purification, after beating Nimgade.

Elsewhere in this paper, the physical and psychological violence experienced by Nimgade, during his childhood, because of untouchability has been discussed in detail. His traumatic experiences followed him from his house to his classrooms. There is no reason not to define the caste based violence experienced by him as trauma. As Berger says "Trauma theory is another such discourse of the unrepresentable, of the event or object that destabilizes language and demands a vocabulary and syntax in some sense incommensurable with what went before"(573). In the case of Nimgade's *In the Shadow of Tiger*, one can see that Nimgade has represented the unrepresentable. That representation shows his psychological scars.

The shadows of the trauma of untouchability continues to haunt Nimgade throughout his life. It can be concluded that Nimgade's act of writing an autobiography is itself an attempt to exorcise himself from the trauma caused by cruelties accompanying untouchability. He speaks not only for himself but for all the Dalits who had a similar past. Through his discourse, he tries to emancipate them.

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