

ILLNESS AND HUMAN DIGNITY: A STUDY OF FATURANANDA AND PULIN BIHARI RAY

ABSTRACT: While death can be invested with nobility, illness is a state of suffering minus dignity. Despite technological advances, illness remains a constant reminder of human fragility. Diseases do not only affect the human body; they also act as an assault on human dignity, reducing man to a state of pitiable helplessness. Artists throughout the history have shown diseases like leprosy as a consequence of God's wrath, reducing the afflicted to a state as vulnerable as that of an animal. Leprosy has also been represented as a metaphor of damnation in religious books (The Bible).

Sickness is a threat to the order of the world. Protagonists are seldom ill, and to be ill is to be expelled from the world of action. The forward movement of the narrative is a key factor leading to almost negligible representation of ailing heroes in folktales. Since most narratives deal with action, the diseased character seldom finds an opportunity to define him through action. However disabilities have to be confronted in literature as an inescapable aspect of human condition.

My paper centers on illness and aims to examine the representation of illness as a challenge on human dignity with particular reference to two Odia narratives: the autobiography of an eminent Odia satirist, Fatura Nanda's "Mo Foota Danga Ra Kahani" (The Story of a Leaking Boat) and Dr. Pulin Bihari Ray's "Roadside Animal". Description of Faturananda's disease (leprosy) and the anxiety surrounding the fragmenting leprous body followed by blindness have been used to analyze attitudes towards illness, the threats that it poses to human identity, surviving and transcending it through ways of imaginatively representing it. On the other hand "Roadside Animal" narrativizes the observations of a medical practitioner. I aim to investigate the similarity in the attitude towards illness and to make analysis of the distinction between lived experience and the dimension of illness as seen through the lens of a practitioner.

Keywords: *illness, disability, colonialism, body, metaphors*

INTRODUCTION:

"Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as the citizens of that other place".

While death can be invested with nobility, illness is a state of suffering minus dignity. Despite technological advances, illness remains a constant reminder of human fragility. Diseases do not only affect the human body; they also act as an assault on human dignity, reducing man to a state of pitiable helplessness. Artists throughout the history have shown diseases like leprosy as a consequence of God's wrath, reducing the afflicted to a state as vulnerable as that of an animal.

Illness has always been used as a metaphor to enliven charges that a society was corrupt or unjust. Traditional disease metaphors are principally a way of being vehement; they are, compared with the modern metaphors, relatively contentless

Leprosy has also been represented as a metaphor of damnation in religious books (The Bible). Throughout history leprosy has been projected as a curse. Culturally accepted as a dreaded disease, leprosy does not only lead to the physical exclusion of the patient but also social exclusion just as in the case of Sophocles' Philoctetes. A moldering stone façade in French is still called a "lepreuse". Religions across the world portray leprosy as a cause of sinful conduct which is why the patient is stigmatized to a greater extent. In the nineteenth century, the notion that the disease fits the patient's character, as the punishment fits the sinner, was replaced by the notion that it expresses character. It is a product of will. "The will exhibits itself as organized body", wrote Schopenhauer, "and the presence of disease signifies that the will itself is sick." Recovery from disease depends on the healthy will assuming "dictatorial power in order to subsume the rebellious forces" of the sick will. One generation earlier, a great, Bichat, had used a similar image, calling health "the silence of organs", disease "their revolt". Disease is the will speaking through the body, a language for dramatizing the mental: a form of self expression. Groddeck described illness as "symbol, a representation of something going on within, a drama staged by It.."

Nothing can be more punitive than associating a disease to a moralistic meaning such as corruption and decay. Local folk tales like the story of Samba, the cursed son of Lord Krishna, is a tale of suffering leprosy as a punishment for incestuous conduct. The disease is shown as a consequence of moral degradation and misconduct where the patient becomes the victim of humiliation and social exclusion.

Disease occurs in the Iliad and the Odyssey as supernatural punishment, as demonic possession, and as the result of natural causes. For the Greeks, disease could be gratuitous or it could be deserved (for a personal fault, a collective transgression, or a crime of one's ancestors). With the advent of Christianity, which imposed more moralized notions of disease, as of everything else, a closer fit between disease and "victim" gradually evolved. The idea of disease as punishment yielded the idea that a disease could be a particularly appropriate and just punishment. Cresseid's leprosy in Henryson's The Testament of Cresseid and Madame de Merteuil's smallpox in Les Liaisons dangereuses show the true face of the beautiful liar- a most involuntary revelation.

Since a disintegrating body is a product of death, the physical degradation and deformity of a leprosy patient depicts him as a decaying life, and hence often termed as "death before death". Unlike other diseases, leprosy patients are seen to form communities for survival. For example the leprosy colony near Loknath Temple or the Leprosy colony mentioned by Che Guevara in his The Motorcycle Diaries, both show that lepers are forced to inhabit in clusters due to the stigma associated with the disease.

Sickness is also considered a threat to the order of the world.

. Disease imagery is used to express concern for social order, and health is something everyone is presumed to know about.

Order is the oldest concern of political philosophy, and if it is plausible to compare the polis to an organism, then is plausible to compare civil order to an illness. The classical formulations which analogize a political

disorder to an illness-from Plato to, say Hobbes- presuppose the classical medical (and political) idea of balance. Illness comes from imbalance. Treatment is aimed at restoring the right balance- in political terms, the right hierarchy. Society, by definition, never catches a fatal disease.

The idea of illness has been conceptualized by cultures and societies for centuries. Descartes described an ailing man as an ill-made clock. Illness was also in part considered as what the world has done to a victim , but in a large part it is what the victim has done with his world, and with his world. Such preposterous and dangerous views manage to put the onus of the disease on the patient and not only weaken the patient's ability to understand the range of plausible medical treatment but also , implicitly direct the patient away from such treatment.

Protagonists in plays or novels are seldom shown as afflicted with illness, for to fall ill is to be expelled from the world of action, which is what most narratives centre on. The preoccupation with forward movement of the narrative is a key factor leading to almost negligible representation of ailing heroes in folktales. Since most narratives deal with action, the diseased character seldom finds an opportunity to define him through action. Physical wholeness is demanded, which is why people who are deformed due to illness are looked down upon and are considered as less than fully human. In the case of leprosy, the body faces the threat of disintegration or dissolution. Disability is caused by the disease. The loss of wholeness, the integrity of the body also triggers emotional trauma. However, disabilities have to be confronted in literature as an inescapable aspect of the human condition.

HISTORY OF LEPROSY IN INDIA:

Dating as early as 2000 BC , texts like Atharva Veda has been seen to have the records of skin diseases that can be translated as leprosy. The Laws of Mnau (1500 BC) resitrected contact with those afflicted with leprosy . The laws included punishment and ostracization for those who married the afflicted. The Sushruta Samhita registers leprosy under the Sanskrit name “*kustha*” meaning “to eat away”.

Stories such as a king being banished from the kingdom on being infected with leprosy adds to the fact that the disease forced social exclusion along with physical vulnerability irrespective of caste , power and position. Soon after their arrival, Europeans described the uncommon practice of ritual suicide by those affected by leprosy, who were often assisted by their families. Though Hinduism generally considers suicide a sin, for leprosy it was not Christians too associated leprosy with sin. Struck by the scale of this Biblical disease, Europeans, especially missionaries, singled it out from a myriad of tropical infections. They often described the most dramatic forms of disfiguring leprosy, evoking fear of an “imperial danger”: leprosy reaching the British Isles. The public pressured the colonial government for the segregation of people with leprosy. The 1989 Leprosy Act led to much of the segregation though soon the remedy to the dreaded disease was found. Doctors like Isaac Santra have done much to eradicate the stigma associated with the disease. Though health centers provided medical reliefs, the cultural aspects needed to be addressed.

Hansen's disease is still called *kusht* in most Indian languages, as it was in Sushrutha's time. The word itself still evokes fear and aversion, despite Mohandas “Mahatma” Gandhi's efforts to destigmatize the disease. Parchure Shastri, a Brahmin and Sanskrit scholar who became an outcast when he acquired leprosy, came to stay in Gandhi's *ashram* in 1939. His contemporaries considered sheltering or touching a person with leprosy unthinkable, but Gandhi changed Shastri's wound dressings and massaged his feet daily. This iconic image was

later depicted on a postage stamp emblazoned with the words “leprosy is curable.” The cultural shift Gandhi desired is materializing; in 2005, representatives of the estimated 630 leprosy colonies in India met in New Delhi. Entitled “Empowerment of People Affected by Leprosy,” this conference sought to demarginalize those affected by the disease and reintegrate them into society.

THESIS STATEMENT:

This thesis aims to investigate the attitude towards illness especially leprosy. It analyses the elements of suppression and tension documented in an autobiography (Faturananda’s *Story of a Leaking Boat*) and a fiction (Dr. Pulin Bihari Ray’s *Roadside Animal*). It also investigates the typical use of metaphors to represent illness and to overcome it.

RATIONALE:

This research work focuses on two Odia narratives which are distinctly different from each other. While one is a life writing registering true live events other narrative is based on observation of a doctor. Faturananda’s journey as a leprosy patient has been described in his autobiography where he imaginatively triumphs over the disease. Similarly Dr. Ray writes a fictional account of lepers while weaving a plot of suspense around it. My research aims to make an analysis of the attitude towards illness and how both the writers use literature to represent it in non-fiction and fiction respectively. This research is the first time that an attempt has been made to analyse whether illness is an assault on human dignity and how writers have represented illness in both fiction and non fiction respectively.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

How illness creates metaphors of physical as well as social vulnerability?

How is illness (specially leprosy) an assault over human dignity?

How has illness been represented in fiction and non-fiction?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The research is based on textual analysis of two primary texts- Faturananda’s *Mo Foota Danga ra Kahani* (*Story of a Leaking Boat*) and Dr Pulin Bihari Ray’s *Rasta Kada ra Prani* (*The Roadside Animal*). The secondary text I take reference from is Susan Sontag’s “*Illness as a Metaphor*”. I have made individual textual analysis of how illness has been represented in two kinds of works where one is a personal account of the victim while the other is a fictional account.

Illness as a metaphor in life writing:

The autobiography of an eminent Odia satirist Dr.Ramachandra Mishra (also known as Faturananda), which traces his remarkable journey through life as someone afflicted with leprosy. Born in the year 1915, when the country was still under the British rule and science had yet not discovered a cure to the dreaded disease, Nanda interestingly associates the struggle for freedom with the battle against leprosy. The disease seems to be

colonizing the human body and in the stripping it of dignity and self-respect. The country for its part had been similarly colonized by the British who had robbed the colonized of not only their precious resources but of also of their dignity and self-esteem. Thus the autobiography of Faturananda depicts the protagonist as doubly disadvantaged: a colonized Indian and a leper. His autobiography provides a gripping account of his attempts to survive and triumph over the crisis that threatens to cripple him. The disease forces him to take resort to literature as a means of overcoming social vulnerability. The individual triumph over the trauma is depicted through multiple metaphors in the text. It is observed in various cases that a diseased ceases to be a part of the community. Unlike them, Faturananda relentlessly seeks to be reintegrated to the community that sought to exclude him. He chose humor and satire over lamentation over his miserable lot. Thus, imagination is employed as a powerful weapon in the struggle against leprosy.

After schooling, Faturananda was determined to pursue higher studies in science from Ravenshaw College. However, he had to join the SCB Medical School under peer pressure. He compares himself to a lamb dragged to the slaughter house owing to his unwillingness to pursue medical studies. He goes on to add that this decision of his life assumed great value when he was stricken with leprosy. He has repeatedly mentioned in the chapter "Life at the Medical School" that the decision of getting admitted to the medical school despite his unwillingness made him combat illness with greater strength and resilience. The author was struck by leprosy by the end of his career as a medical student. Instead of practicing his profession he had to stay back at home. This not only severely curtailed his economic freedom, it also led to his seriously considering taking up writing as a career. Unlike autobiographies about illness that tend to dwell on narration of miseries caused by it Faturananda makes ample use of satire, metaphors and humour to recount the long-drawn-out battle against his sickness. Born to a Brahmin family of vaidyas, he was quite accustomed to living in comfort and had come across instances of rare and incurable diseases. He mentions the expertise of his grandfather, who had cured a patient suffering from an incurable disease with a medicine made of herbs. It was he who identified the first signs of leprosy in Faturananda. Even if he remained unaware of the onset of the disease when he was a high school student, it was detected by his grandfather, who took him to a leprosy home and got him checked by another doctor. There he was treated for sometime by a compounder who gave him injections to treat him. The disease never showed any visible proof of its presence until the fourth semester of his medical school. In his autobiography, he says he was kept bedridden as a result of a sudden collapse of his immunity system. The chapter "My best friend leprosy" (moro parama mitra mahabyadhi) uses illness as a metaphor. The author compares the leprosy spreading through his body with the colonization of India by British Empire.

Just like the British arriving from far across the sea and making their first settlement in a small village called Sutanati in Bengal, the first red patch of the dreaded disease showed on the author's elbow and eventually began affecting the entire body. The ignorance and weakness of Indians encouraged the British to take advantage of this situation. Faturananda compares the Britishers and leprosy to a python that slowly attacks and swallows up its victim completely. Quoting a dejected Indian ruler Nanda says "everything will become red" to drive home the striking similarity between colonized India and the his leprosy-stricken body. The dreaded red patches began to conquer his body just like the British ended up colonizing the whole of India.

In the same chapter, the fatal disease and its culpability is highlighted when leprosy is referred to as "mahabyadhi" or "the great disease". Since the disease was incurable and left the patient deformed, people

treated it as the emperor of maladies. However, the author humorously states that despite having no fondness for medical sciences or dedication as a student at the medical school, in the end semester he determines to revive his dignity by passing the final examinations and return home. It can be observed that the author tries to give himself a reason to live by challenging himself and defying adversities, in this instance, the physical complications faced due to leprosy. Having passed his exams successfully, he tried to cure himself of leprosy under the guidance of his teacher Sri Biswanath Kar. The treatment went on for years and he compares this struggle with Gandhi's movement of nonviolence against the British. Being a doctor himself, Nanda injected himself with the medicine despite immense pain which he describes as boiling oil put under the skin.

Nanda was not just fighting the battle for his own dignity but, being an educated man of science, he carried out research to find ways to eradicate the evil of leprosy. The first ray of hope came in the form of an article from the journal *Leprosy Review* published from London. He wrote to the Abbot Research Laboratories seeking further information and succeeded in becoming one of the first Indians to try Dyson for the cure of leprosy. He not only administered the medicine to himself, he went on to help another friend who was also afflicted by the disease. While several relatives had convinced themselves that he would certainly succumb to his disease and could do nothing more than pity his decaying body, he himself never gave up and constantly engaged in collaborating with the socially alert men of his times as a writer and a doctor to find solutions to existing problems. Until then in the 1920s it was only under the treatment of Dr Isaac Santra that a leper could find some relief but no permanent cure. A cure for leprosy was a dream for Odias and Nanda brought it to the state for everyone to use.

It is interesting to note here that having successfully treated himself with Dyson followed by Dapsone injections, the author compares himself to a warrior with scars all over the body. Leprosy is compared to a tiger that lost the battle with him but left behind a few scars (patches) on his body-

“I recovered completely from illness. Just like a survivor back from the battle with a tiger with bites and scratches of the animal on his body, some scars settled down on my body forever.” (Mo Futa Danga Ra Kahani)

However, it was not just some scars but also diminished vision that made his life difficult. Diagnosed with cataract he was advised to undergo an operation at the Netaji Sebasadan. This is where he had a humiliating experience that kept oppressing him for a long time. A fellow doctor, Dr Gyan Das, carried out the operation and advised him bed rest. However, the Head of the Department, Dr Rajkishore Nanda called a press meet and accused Dr Das of having defiled the hospital premises by admitting a leprosy patient without the permission of the authorities. As a result, Faturananda had to return home without taking bed rest due to which he lost vision forever. He describes this pain as almost “lifetaking”-

“I laid on the bed in a room listening silently to the discussions of the conference outside. Dr Gyana Das was condemned of defiling the hospital premises by admitting me. My bed head tickets were taken away. The discussions of the conference was life-taking for me. I was forced to leave the hospital and continue treatment at home under the supervision of Dr. Gyana Das .”

It is also seen that whenever his friends expressed pity for him he proudly celebrated his victory over leprosy and asked them not to pity him. Use of humor as a weapon to fight the battle for dignity is evident in this. He mentions humor to be his ultimate weapon since he has used it abundantly both in writing and treating leprosy. As a student of medicine he had learnt that a good deal of laughter could stimulate memory and lighten the

gravity of a situation. Perhaps this knowledge gave him the strength to fight leprosy cheerfully, with a positive spirit. Nanda states that had not the British colonized our country Indians might not have availed themselves of the advantages of modernity. Similarly, had he not been afflicted by leprosy he would have never been able to be loved and respected by such a large number of Odias. The disease isolated him from society and encouraged him to be a writer. This is where it can be noted that the ailing man constantly searches for self worth, a recognition which he succeeds to find through literature. The entire process of colonization of the body by a disease condemns the diseased as inferior. The loss of social acceptability in the case of Nanda, despite being born to a high caste and affluent family, leaves him longing for self worth which he eventually discovers in his writing life.

In the last segment, the author throws light on the real plight of a leprosy patient. A person sympathizing with him was not something he desired. He says that, after the demise of his mother, he felt that his world was now bereft of affection-

“I kept myself drowned in the ever flowing affection of my mother. She made her way through life and left me without waiting for me. I was impoverished of affection.” (Mo Futa Danga Ra Kahani)

Comparing his life to a leaking boat with a hole the author says that he hoped to row it and reach the shore since it appeared to be quite close. However, unfortunately water started to gush into the boat from all directions in the form of blindness, loneliness and poverty-

“I was on sailing on a boat with a torn and stitched boat, sailing on an ocean of sadness for years alone. I have sailed ahead, with no sunrise as of yet. I am changing direction with an aim at the pole star. How long can a torn sail drive an upturned boat? Added to that is the plight of a hole in the boat and the gushing water. My hands are now tired of removing the gushing water from the boat. I have been moving in the right direction uncertain of the fact whether I will ever reach the shore. Hence towards the end the author longs for death as he no longer possesses the energy to fight the battle against the disease and society which he had as a young man.”

The autobiography dramatizes one man's struggle against a dreaded disease which not only threatens his body with deformity and disintegration but also casts him out of his community. The author finds in imagination and humour unique resources for overcoming the trauma of physical pain and social exclusion. These enable him to view leprosy as a form of colonization of the body by germs and find in British conquest of India a parallel. Just as Indians, after the British left their country, acknowledge the benefits colonialism brought them, such as modernity, the author thinks that leprosy made it possible for him to win the affection of a large readership in Odisha. In constructing such rich and insightful metaphors for illness, Nanda suggests ways of reconciling ourselves to the human condition in spite of the misery it often inflicts on us.

Representation of the diseased in fiction by a medical practitioner:

The title of the second text “The Roadside Animal” is suggestive of the theme of the story: the miserable lives of lepers. The author Dr Pulin Bihari Ray gives a fascinating fictional account on the life of a group of lepers who reside near a beach of a renowned pilgrim site which has not been named anywhere in the text. Frequent

by people from all social groups, this pilgrim site has a grove which is populated by a cluster of leprosy patients and is a storehouse of countless experiences of life. The author being a practitioner, a doctor by profession, makes keen observations of the mutilated bodies of the lepers and their attitude towards suffering while weaving an interesting plot full of suspense. The leader of the cluster of lepers, Birabhadra Samal, is described as a responsible leader until threatened by a group member Bana Parida who could disclose his sin if not silenced in the right time. The story is a grappling synthesis of true to life events and climaxes despite keeping unwavering focus on the explicit description of lives of lepers and their perception of society.

Despite being centered on the pitiable lives of a community of lepers, the story has the freshness and richness of detail as it begins with the vivid description of the setting. The pilgrims walk along the beach of an important site of pilgrimage. As they walk towards the sea by the beach, they hear the wailing beggars. This group of beggars, mostly consisting of leprosy patients makes a show of their degenerated bodies to win sympathy. While poverty and illiteracy had brought them to the roads, the only profession they could take could take up was to beg for a living. They would scream their lungs out to the people who passed them expecting food, clothes or money in response. While some tourists offer fresh food, others quickly walk away in utter disgust making remarks at their deformity. Some change their routes in order to avoid the sight of the lepers while others pity their state and living conditions. The author has made ample observations on the typical response of the tourists. He records the conversation between two tourists who appreciate life when compared to the miserable conditions of these diseased beggars. He says that while the lepers have nothing left to live for, a disintegrated body being all that they have, they still keep continue the struggle for life. People who go ahead to commit suicide in life should understand that the lepers have all the reasons to be rejected by life while students kill themselves for reasons as petty as minor failures in exams. Here it must be noted that unlike all other diseases that do not make physical appearance of the disease or deformity, leprosy forced the diseased to be socially excluded due to the disintegration of body parts like: arms, toes, fingers etc. Since there was cure until late 20th century, the diseased were forced to live in clusters for survival while resorting to begging for a livelihood. Pilgrim sites like Loknath temple had some of the largest community of lepers residing in its vicinity. They would sit it in rows along the temples and make a display of their wounds and suffering in order to earn money. The author perhaps makes a fictional portrayal of this scene around temples which are populated by lepers, deliberately occupying areas around religious sites to gain sympathy and alms from the pilgrims.

Another subtle observation of the author is the conversation between a couple who is awestruck by the companionship and love between two lepers. An old man who is also a leprosy patient is seen by them, lying on a cart being pushed by another old lady who is also a victim of the dreaded disease. Her hands have lost grip since her fingers have been eaten up by the disease. With wounds and puss all over her body, she is described to have lost it all to leprosy. Though she stinks and is too weak to help another person, she continues to carry her husband on the cart with any complain. Looking at the love and dedication of the old lady towards her leprosy stricken semi-paralyzed husband, a lady who is walking by the beach with his lover enquires her of his relation with the old man. On hearing the reply she is reminded of her own husband, whom she had betrayed and eloped to be with the man she was accompanied by.

Few other tourists, like a family of merchant donated clothes, money and rice to the beggars out of charity. Some tourists despite having long passed the trail of leprosy stricken beggars sat by the beach and meditated about the life of these poor people. The meager thought of being struck by such an incurable disease terrified them. However others accepted the unpredictability of life and good health. They associated good health with

good karma. They wondered if these lepers were born diseased or eventually caught the disease. Interestingly many settled for the fact that the beggars were cursed with leprosy due to their sinful conduct.

At the same time the beggars were committed to earn their livelihood and had taken the suffering to wholeness. They appreciated foreign tourists, made a large hue and cry demanding alms, and cursed the tourists who did not donate. Those who shunned the lepers were also faced by their aggression. The God fearing donors were often haggled by them, since they were brutally cursed by the lepers if not donated in good amount. Some beggars are described as pretentious since they made an exaggeration of their suffering often by lying of beds of needles or putting burning coals on their bodies. One such example is, one of the lepers is described wearing a thick layer of cloth around his disintegrated arm which looks as red as blood. However this is a deliberate exaggeration of wound through costume to grab the attention of tourists. They knew that just being a leper was not enough. They had to sell their suffering by exaggerating it.

Having described the location, the perception of the tourists and the attitude of the lepers as beggars, Ray funnels down for a closer view of the leper community who made a cashew nut grove their place of habitat. The place is excluded by common people since it is occupied by the untouchables, the lepers. The fear of coming in contact with the diseased forbids the common people from entering into the grove. In the evening when they return to their settlement, the moving bodies of the lepers appear to be like shadows in the dark, similar to real life where lepers seem to be non-existent to the world.

The first major character introduced to us is Birendra Samal or Bira who is the leader of the leper community. Bira and his wife Paro are described as a religiously committed couple. They pray near God to forgive them since they believed themselves to be cursed and sinners. The common belief is that leprosy was curse for the sins committed by the person in the same birth or previous birth. The speculations of the ancient world made disease most often an instrument of divine wrath. Judgement was meted out either to a community (a plague in BOOK I of Iliad that Apollo inflicts on the Achaeans in punishment for Agamemnon's abduction of Chryses' daughter ;plague in Oedipus that strikes Thebes because of the polluting presence of the royal sinner) or to a single person (the stinking wound in Philoctetes' foot).

So Bira and Paro accepted themselves as sinners near the altar of God and prayed the Lord to save them from the suffering. They longed for death and salvation. Karl Menninger's said "Illness is in part what the world has done to a victim , but in a large part it is what the victim has done with his world, and with himself.. ." Such preposterous and dangerous views manage to put the onus of the disease on the patient and not only weaken the patient's ability to understand the range of plausible medical treatment but also , implicitly direct the patient away from such treatment.

However there was another group of lepers who objected this idea of salvation and mocked them. This group of lepers defied faith in God and belief in religious practices. According to these men , the God who created them cursed them with the most dreaded diseases due to which they suffered death almost being alive. A God who does that to his creations deserved no more attention from them. They found it futile to beg for forgiveness near a God who made life miserable for them. Despite being human beings the lepers were treated worse than animals. Even humans shunned them in disgust. The angst of being rejected by fellow human beings and treated like animals made them lose faith in the very concept God and salvation. The author wisely puts two contrasting ideas and point of views across his readers unlike being partial to major characters. He leaves the conversations open ended ,true to life and worth believing. The complaining lepers went as far as to say that if

there was God then let him be worshipped by those who have been given by him a good life to live. They did not confirm to the blind practices of believing a God just out of blind faith. They objected worshipping or being spiritual since it appeared discriminating to give them a degenerating body without any reason while others humiliated them every day despite them being at no fault. Being ill is involuntary however ostracizing the diseased is a voluntary action. The pain and of being abandoned by the healthy community for being ill is shown through the anger the Creator.

To such condemnation of God, Bira, the religious leper leader says that God has never asked people to worship him. It is to relieve themselves from their sin that one should rely on God. Instead of hating other men who are healthy and who shun them, it must be understood by them that while people shun them, they are the same people who help them in the time of need too. Such hatred and aggression was the reason they were suffering. However at least by surrendering to God they could get rid of such suffering. There is a clash of opinion between the religious and non religious which is also seen in real life. Like most diseased people who take refuge of spirituality or God to survive through the anxiety and helplessness, Ray shows two kinds of people in the story. One group is inclined to God while the other finds it difficult to convince that they are sinners and should suffer the consequences without any questions.

The second major character whose story runs parallel and at one point meets the story of Bira is: Binay. Binay is a lawyer, a pious and religious man who donated in plenty and had sympathy for the lepers. He along with his wife Reba frequented the beach to distribute food and cloth among the beggars. The mystery that Bira slides away at the sight of this pious couple troubles, and is remains a mystery until the third section of the story.

The battle of opinions continues between Bira and another group of lepers. While Anadi, one of the lepers, returns late and describes his experience at a session of religious sermons, he is mocked at by few lepers of his community. Anadi on his way back to the settlement came across a session of religious sermons and was tempted to attend it. He believed himself to be sinner who could be relieved of his sins if he heard Gods's name regularly. After the session he was served with a delicious meal. Anadi found is rejuvenating and believed that to get rid of the curse of leper, the absolute surrender and dedication of the worshipper was essential to which others objected. As per the belief of the second lot of lepers, there are sinners all over the world. Not everyone is however punished by God. Even on earth not everyone caught for the theft or the sin that they do. Unless the thief is caught he is assumed to be pious.

To this Bira replies that in a world full of people no one wishes to die except those afflicted with leprosy. People flocked in to the beach and the pilgrim site to perform pious and religious rituals to attain peace and salvation. Bira goes on to describe the beauty of the world and how much people loved the world around them. He goes on to ask them if anyone liked to listen to their utterances, however Anadi was attracted to the religious sermon because those were tales about good people and their good deeds. He tries to justify the value of good karma by telling them that even if those good men are no more alive, their good deeds have remained to inspire people for generations. Here he highlights the importance of religion or spiritual inclination in the life of the diseased. Religion seems to give them direction. The anxiety of being stuck in a disintegrating body, not able to free themselves from an unwanted life of disgust is somewhat channelized by taking up religion and faith in a supreme unseen energy. Though the argument that those who kept faith in lord appeared to be at more peace and harmony compared to the others, seems to be true, one cannot help but wonder whether the other group of men who questioned God were wrong.

The entire story has been constructed with ample dialogues between often major characters and mostly between nameless lepers. The sections of conversation are interesting since they help to evaluate the process of thought and the dilemma of a leprosy patient. In another section of conversation there is a serious dialogue among few sleepless as well as nameless lepers of the community. One of them asks “Why does the sea roar at night? Someday its waves will come close enough to carry us with it.” To which another leper retorts that it would be fortunate for them if the waves reached for them and carried them away. The tone of melancholy and dejection is evident when he goes further to say that the sea would not come anywhere near them, it wouldn't touch them since they were untouchable lepers. In fact the sea never came near them because it knew their settlement was that of a dreaded diseased community.

Another leper is seen narrating his attempt to commit suicide. Once he walked close enough to the sea to drown himself in the water. He dreaded the beautiful moonlight. Despite attempting several times he could not do it. When a police man noticed him near the sea at night, he was beaten away from the beach. Since that day he cancelled the idea of dying by drowning himself in the sea. It was not the only reason which stopped him from taking away his life. He was constantly at loggerheads with his own idea of defiling the waters of the ocean. He narrates that once he tried to commit suicide by jumping into a well but then he was reminded of the many villagers who would be bereft of using the water. A leper jumping into the well would pollute the water. The fear of polluting the water and harming the community also stopped him from taking the last step. The exclusion of a diseased is not just limited to physical and social, he is constantly seen being traumatized by the notion of being morally polluted. The human is reduced to the level of nothingness, unnecessary yet death is something he might not be allowed choose because that is not what the society wants. Disgust for life is evident when we analyse the typical train of discussions among the lepers. While they might be distributed under the grounds of faith in God, they are united by the fact that all of them have accepted their life as futile. All of them are seen longing for an end to the suffering, if not death.

Ray however as an author, makes observations like a poet when personifies death. He tells his readers that Death could easily make his entry into the grove where the flow of life isn't too strong. Death cannot be drowned by the weak flow of Life at the settlement. However Death wasn't keen to visit a community of lepers. They were filthy and miserable. The author seems to be sympathetic towards the lepers when he describes Death discriminating between the poor lepers and the happy and healthy men. He says that Death can only take pride in taking away the lives of happy men which is why people believe that the life line of a happy man is short while there is no death for a man in despair. Though the lepers constantly yearn for an end to the unending suffering and humiliation, Death won't meet them. Death might only consider take them if they hang themselves to death or poison themselves. Such moving description of Death being equally merciless to the lepers as life, is suggestive of the fact that the author has come in close contact with leprosy patients and has made record of their mental conditions. He has not only sympathized with them but also respected their different notions about life, god, etc.

Though the story has not been broadly divided into sections, it can be sectioned into three parts. The first part centers on myriad discussions and observations on lepers and their general attitude towards life. The second part begins with the journey of Bana Parida, a central character, another leper of the same community, who travels to a different location. Keeping the society of that period in view, the author introduces an interesting twist to his tale. While nobody in the leprosy colony is heard of leaving it before, Bana Parida in the second section is seen travelling to another location, carrying opium with him. Putting light on the illegal trade norms

of the time, Ray introduces a merchant named Sudam Babu who promises Bana that he would pay him well if he helped him trade the bag of opium to another city. Initially terrified, Bana succumbs to his persistent demand and leaves the same day without informing the community head Bira. Here it is noteworthy that illegal trade through lepers was a norm during the period. The lepers weren't questioned or touched and highly ignored as animals which made it easier for merchants to use them for illegal business.

As Bana travelled, the events in the train project the perception and attitude of people towards the diseased. Some passengers are seen commenting that travelling in the third class compartment of train had become too dangerous since it leprosy patients shared it with them. They also termed them to shameless and stubborn. They insisted that being polluted by an incurable disease, they should themselves leave the compartment and let others be at peace. Other travelers were empathetic towards their condition. They said that they were as much human as others and had the urge to travel like all of them; however it was wrong to humiliate them for just being diseased. Other passengers went on to add that, if the lepers were sinners, they were already suffering enough. Lepers were almost akin to corpse; hence to some it was unnecessary to be abusive towards those who had already lost the most of life. Even while many of the passengers decided to thrash the lepers away from the train, it is funny to see how they fail to decide whether they should touch the untouchables or not. The hatred for the diseased is threatened by the fear of getting contaminated through touch. They also looked for sticks to hit them the lepers since even if they bet them with an umbrella, it would be unimaginable to reuse it as it would get defiled by the touch of a leper.

After much arguments and offence, the group of lepers including Bana Parida had to escape from the train. Bana Parida along with few others accepted that they should have raised their voice or argued with the inmates of the train. They thought it would have been wiser to have accepted that they were miserable lepers and stayed silent even though they offended them. Having been throw off from the train they looked for food, water and shelter. The next location where Bana Parida finds shelter is also a pilgrim site where free food is provided to all the leprosy patients. This proves that the idea of residing near religious sites was a norm among leprosy patients. However Ray makes distinct observation through the character Bana. Bana notices that unlike his city, this place was quite and less populated than the beach. Bana who had never starved in his life had finally found food too. There were young girls who were also residing in the leper colony. Bana found a partner for himself and with the permission of the leader of the community took him as his wife. Nakhi, Bana's wife is terrorized by another leper, Kashi who also belonged to the same community and wished to marry her. Being offended by Nakhi's rejection, he goes on to wrestle with Bana. However he fails and narrowly escapes from death. He blames his bodily disability for the loss of the fight. Compared to Bana, his fingers were much more eaten by the disease and lacked the power and grip of Bana, due to which he lost balance and lost the fight as well as Nakhi. Also, Ray cleverly weaves the suspense of Bira Samal into the plot. During the stay, Bana discovers the history of Bira, who was in fact servant to a rich family. Bira while a servant to the family, had impregnated the daughter of the house, a beautiful young lady. Having broken the trust of the family, he escaped from the place and was later afflicted by leprosy. Shocked by the history of Bira, Bana also comes to know the child born to the lady was still alive. This revelation is used as a weapon by Bana to tease Bira in the later part of the story. The other leper makes a statement. He refers to lepers as "roadside animal". He believes that they wouldn't be a thing of worry for anyone after death. Healthy men, as per Hindu rituals of death ceremony, demand logs to be burnt in. However there would be no logs required for them as nobody would touch a leper's body even after death. Therefore their bodies would be carelessly kicked out of the road to be consumed by vultures and

rodents. For these animals, their death would mean a day of feast. According to him, since they had already been pushed down to the lowest rung of the society, there was nothing beyond it that could be lost. He goes on to say that since there is life, death is inevitable but for a leper there is neither affection for life nor sorrow for death.

Taking the discussion forward someone says that confession of the sins could reduce the count of sins. To this one after another a series of confessions were made by each leper. While one confessed to have stolen gold jewellery from temple, the other confessed of burglary, another accepted having cheated and by the time Bira had his turn coming, he was scared to confess the truth. He cleverly says that he was once told by a doctor that the disease was caused only when one comes in contact with

While such revelation of Bira's past was made somewhere else, at the grove we see the usual discussion of life and death among the beggars. Someone said that there was no disease bigger than leprosy. There was no place for minor diseases. He further adds that they did not bath in the clean water; they used the polluted water of the pond to take bath. So they would use the impurities to fight against any other disease or germ that would dare to attack them. The fearless tone of the speaker highlights the disgust for life in him. He says that the parts of the body which are unable to bear the stringent rules of the disease are eventually tearing themselves apart from the body itself.

In the mean while we also learn that Binay Babu has won an election with support of the lepers. He and his wife Reba have adopted a child who is none but the illegitimate son born out of the union of Bira and Reba. The story takes an interesting turn when Bana returns to his city and confronts Bira, putting Bira's image as a leader at risk. At the end Bira lobs to murder Bana while Kashi follows them to seek revenge. However we also see four nameless men in ambush who probably murder all three of the lepers. The bodies are found floating. Instead of pity for the dead, the lepers of the community aim to acquire the wives of the two dead men. The brutal reality of the lives of lepers belonging to the lowest rung of society is portrayed through the prose. The eye for detail and judicious sequence of events makes Ray's narrative realistic.

CONCLUSION:

“Suffering is the unique distress of persons whose intactness or integrity is disrupted or destroyed. The first lesson of suffering is that bodies do not suffer, persons suffer. It follows that a loss of dignity may incite suffering, as do other injuries to the person”.

Illness has represented through the use of various metaphors like “leaking boat” and “roadside animal”. The narratives show that while suffering might be redemptive in epics and tragedies, such suffering cannot be romanticized or ennobled. The protagonist Faturananda in his autobiography is a doctor who is struck by leprosy in his early twenties. His journey from youth to middle age and consequent submission to death shows that he accepts the erosion of his limbs and the betrayal of society through literature. He seeks refuge in literature when the disease incapacitates him and alienates him from the society. The author gets integrated into

the society much later only when his works as a litterateur gets recognition. Doubly disadvantaged by blindness and physical deformity due to leprosy, the author continues his battle against the disease instead of being passive to his weakness. He sets an example of individual triumph of the emotional trauma caused by a disintegrating body along with social ostracization. While illness causes physical vulnerability, diseases like leprosy cause social vulnerability. In as much as unmitigated pain and suffering are often thought to rob human beings of their dignity, physicians and other care providers incur a special duty to relieve pain and suffering when they encounter it. When pain and suffering cannot be controlled it is sometimes thought that human dignity is compromised. Death, it is sometimes argued, would be preferred to a life without dignity. Reasoning such as this trades on certain preconceptions of the nature of pain and suffering, and of their relationships to dignity. In the second text we see lepers being secluded to a community unlike Faturananda who was still a part of the community. The lepers perhaps belong to lower caste and economically incapable of sustaining the treatment. They are also mentioned to have been much lesser educated compared to Faturananda. The repeated arguments between the lepers of the community depict the clash of ideals whereas in former we observe a uniform sentiment of faith in spirituality even in the most decrepit condition of the author when he has lost his mother. However spirituality is a common platform where some lepers and Faturananda's idea of overcoming illness meet. Both the writers are indicative of the body becoming a burden and liability for the sufferers. The repeated insult and disgust for life is hown through profound use of metaphors. The writers have tried to establish a middle course between pity and horror for the diseased. Both the texts are deeply rooted to the cultural context of Odia society. However Faturananda seems to have imaginatively triumphed over his illness when he asserts that like a warrior with scars from the victory earned over a tiger, he too had won the battle against sickness with just patches of the diseases left on his skin. Also as a personal narrative, the lived experience narrates the actual journey with much more detail unlike Dr. Ray's protagonists whose narrations are restricted to detailed conversation of pity, self loathe and often aggression. However we cannot ignore the fact that the attitude towards illness has a remarkable difference when social status is taken into account. Faturananda can be seen to have been in a better position when compared to the characters like Bira or Bana.

The intractable suffering of the assault on human dignity has been well documented by both the narratives and can be subject to further in detail historical and biographical scrutiny if provided with more time and resources. However both the accounts are invaluable resources to understand the individual as well as social callousness towards suffering induced by illness.

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