



Body Image and Identity: A look into select short stories of Bhabendra Nath Saikia

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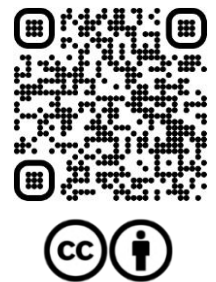
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Abstract— *The human body has been theorized in many ways, including the entire notion of the woman as a human creation. It is generally agreed that this concept refers to our perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about our bodies, which influence our behaviour about our bodies. The article examines numerous authors whose individual genealogies meet on the common ground of identity theory and women's lives and is supported by a theoretical framework based on conceptions of identity, body-image and self-image in women and feminist discourse. This paper probes into the concepts of identity in women through the literary canvas of Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia and demonstrates the effects of body image and self-image on the development of identity. Of course, an extensive discussion of the short stories of Dr. Saikia is beyond the scope of this paper. The aim of this paper is to analyse the concepts through the two short stories short titled "Dhura Xaap" (ঢুৱা খাপ 1958) and "Sringkhol" (স্ৰিংখল, 1970) by Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia. The paper seeks to explore the concepts of self-image, identity and body image through three female characters 'Chandrika', 'Janeki' and 'Ambika'.*



Keywords— *Body image, Identity, Self-image, self-concept, gender, Assamese literature, cultural identity, gender studies, psychological study.*

“Everywhere in the world, self starts with body”.

- R. Baumeister

I. INTRODUCTION

The sense of body ownership, which refers to the unique perceptual status of one's own body and the notion that "my body" is mine, is one of the core components of the corporeal self. Simone de Beauvoir stated in *The Second Sex* that "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (Beauvoir 1993:281). The human body has been theorized in various ways, which also incorporates the entire idea of woman as a human creation. The concept of body image has also been discussed by academics; it is generally agreed upon that this concept refers to our perceptions, ideas, and feelings about the body, which in turn influence our actions linked to the body. The paper makes an effort to analyse the concepts of self-image, identity and body-

image through three female characters penned by Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia in order to provide factual support for the study. The paper will look at how body image and self-concept are perceived in relation to characteristics of references like physical attractiveness, social interaction (or relationship) between the perceiver and the perceived, and social comparisons as sources of self-esteem, as well as sociocultural approaches that highlight the cultural dependencies of this construct. The discussion will demonstrate that our view of social interactions, particularly in the context of self-other boundaries, is impacted by the multisensorial knowledge of the self.

Bhabendra Nath Saikia was an acclaimed writer, filmmaker, and novelist from Assam, India, known for his contributions to Assamese literature and cinema. While Saikia's works cover a wide range of themes and topics, including social issues, cultural identity, and human

relationships, he did not extensively explore the concept of self-image in his writings or films.

Self-image refers to an individual's perception, beliefs, and feelings about themselves. It encompasses how we see ourselves, our capabilities, worth, and place in the world. It is influenced by various factors, including personal experiences, societal norms, cultural values, and interactions with others.

Although Saikia's works often delved into the complexities of human nature and society, his focus primarily revolved around broader social and cultural issues rather than individual self-image. His stories and films often explored themes related to rural life, social inequalities, political unrest, and the clash between tradition and modernity. However, it is essential to note that Saikia's works reflect the human condition and the intricacies of individual characters. Through his narratives, he might indirectly touch upon aspects of self-image by portraying characters who grapple with their own identities, aspirations, and the societal expectations placed upon them. Yet, it is not a predominant or explicit theme in his body of work. Bhabendra Nath Saikia's contributions to Assamese literature and cinema have left a lasting impact on the cultural landscape of the region. His works are celebrated for their nuanced portrayal of human emotions, social dynamics, and the overall human experience. Of course, a detailed discussion of Dr. Saikia's short stories is beyond the constraints of this paper. For which purposes, the writer has taken two short stories for consideration 'Dhura Xaap' (1958) and 'Sringkhol' (1970).

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The work is based on the theoretical framework of identity theory (Stryker 1980) and social identity theory (Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1979, 1986). The theories link the "individual to the social world through a conception of the self, composed of various social identities; often the former is understood to focus on roles and the latter on social groups" (Hitlin, 2006). Identity refers to the various meanings attached to oneself by self and others, and locates one in social space through the relationships implied by the identity (Gecas and Burke 1995). Taken together, the two theories advance our understanding of the self and its relationship to the various identities that individuals claim as their own. Identities serve as anchors for behaviour and understanding in the ongoing flow of interaction. These identities do not develop at random but are a behavioural outgrowth of one's personal identity (Hitlin, 2003). According to SIT, the self-concept is made up of a social identity that includes salient group classification and a personal identity that includes

distinctive aspects (such as physical attributes, abilities, psychological traits, and hobbies).

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Andrei Homan (2011) debates that "beauty is skin deep, but ugly is to the bone, where skin deep implies the superficiality and modifiability of cultural beauty, as well as the individual's possibility to conform to its norms in contrast to the structural, deep ugliness brought by the physical deviance from the geometrical standards". Buss (1987), Cash (1990), Feingold (1990), Jackson (1992), Rose & Frieze (1989); Smith, Waldorf, & Trembath (1990), Sprecher (1989) argues that whether viewed from a sociobiological or sociocultural perspective, women's physical aesthetics are influential in dating, mating, and other facets of heterosocial relations. Attractive people are often viewed as possessing such admirable traits as sociability, popularity, happiness, and confidence (Cash 1990; Falion 1990). Women also are more vulnerable to body norms as they are more likely than men to be judged by their appearance and sexual appeal (Falion 1990). Mostly women are encouraged to judge their inner selves through their external physical appearance and to equate the two. Gardiner, Judith Kegan. "On Female Identity and Writing by Women" resonates that women are taught to create socially approved images of themselves by manipulating their dress, speech, and behaviour. Erikson and Lichtenstein occasionally describe identity as an "evolving configuration," but they see the process of identity formation as a developmental progress toward the achievement of a desired product, the autonomous individual, the paradigm for which is male. Physical attractiveness is an important factor in the definition of a woman's sense of self and her role in Western society (Grimes, 1997, Tiffany 2012). Rudd, Jestratijevic, and Husk (2017) noted that common words like "hate", "disgust" and "shame" are used to describe relationships with their bodies were.

Body image is a multidimensional self-attitude toward one's body, particularly its size, shape, and aesthetics (Cash & Pruzinsky, 1990; Thompson, 1996). Ashmore and his colleagues have articulated an intergroup relations model in which gender attitudes or ideologies operate at several different albeit interconnected levels (Ashmore, 1990; Ashmore & Del Boca, 1986; Ashmore, Del Boca, & Bilder, 1995). Bargad & Hyde, 1991; Downing & Roush, 1984) posits a five-stage experiential progression toward feminist identity and the first being a passive acceptance referring to denial or unawareness of sexism and an endorsement and valuing of gender-role stereotypes. We also find an overall pattern of gender similarity, however:

for both men and women, reflected appraisals are the most important source of self-esteem, followed by self-perceived competence and then by social comparisons (Schwalbe, 1991). Gutierrez et al. (1999) investigated in their experimental research the effects of exposure to physically attractive and dominant same-sex individuals on self-evaluations, measured on the dimension of mate-value (desirability as marriage partner). These two “threats” to self-esteem mirror and are determined by their high importance in the perceived attractiveness of the opposite gender; preferred characteristics in one’s ideal mate - for men, beauty and youth are the essential qualities, while for women it is men’s social status which mostly determine their attractiveness.

Jung and Lennon (2003) investigated the fluctuations of women’s body image after exposure to attractive images, taking into account participants’ appearance self-schemas (cognitive representations of organized information about the self in relation to appearance). Their results show that only in women who were schematic on appearance such exposure led to lower body image and mood. Poran (2002) compared Latina, Black and White women participants in what regards their conceptions of beauty, perceptions of cultural standards of beauty, as well as their tendency to engage in a specific social comparison process – the denial of personal disadvantage (a self-protective psychological mechanisms revealed in the studies on minorities). Results indicate similarities in the personal definitions of beauty, but significant variations in the cultural standard of beauty. Cunningham (1986) on the attractiveness of different types of facial features in various contexts – between representatives of various ethnic groups in the same country. Further Block (1983), Chodorow (1978), Douvan and Gold (1966), Gilligan (1982), Lyons (1983), and McGwire (1984) posits the observation that “the male self is rooted in instrumental action whereas the female self is rooted in relationships.

IV. DISCUSSION

4.1 Body Image

This paper attempts to draw attention to the hegemonic view and ideological matrix of the notions of beauty associated with a female body. According to Zhang (2013) a female body should look lean, healthy, pleasant, and proportionate. Cash (1994) alluded to body image “as a person’s evaluation and effective experience regarding their physical experience as well as their investment in appearance as a domain for self-evaluation”.

The short story “Dhura Xaap” is about two women Chandrika and Janeki who are opposite to each other when it comes to their physical attractiveness, and body image.

Chandrika, the young and beautiful wife of Lilakanta convinces her husband to take a photo with her in the studio. For this she wears a *phulam sador* (*Sador* - a kind of draping of the upper body worn with a skirt ‘mekhela’ and blouse; *phulam* ‘in floral print’) brought to her by Lilakanta. As prevalent of the times, getting photographed or having a full-sized mirror was a privilege of the higher classes; Chandrika could never catch a glimpse of her entire body except for her face in the small hand-mirror which was there in her house. Chandrika was hardly aware of her own beauty until she clicked the photograph with her husband.

“ইমান ধুনীয়া ... এতিয়া ভৰিৰ বুঢ়া আঙুলিৰ পৰা
ভুলৰ চুলিলৈকে গোটেই মাহনুজনীক তাই
দেখিছে“ (Golpo aru Xilpo, p.38)

(Translation : So beautiful!...from the thumb of her feet to the fine hair of the eye brows she can see her whole self).

Chandrika’s self-image was heightened by her body-image. Her attention was drawn to her own beautiful image in the photo than to her husband’s. She was dazzled to see her beauty in the picture and could not keep her eyes away from the image of herself in it; but it did not serve the initial purpose.

“কিন্তু আচৰিত কথা - চাদৰখনতো তাই ইমান
ভালকৈ লোৱা নাছিল; কেনেকৈ ইমান ধুনীয়া
হ’ল? চাবদিয়া চাদৰখনৰ ৰঙা বহল ফুলাম
পাৰিটোৱে ভৰিৰ পৰা আৰম্ভ কৰি তাইৰ গাটো
মেৰিয়াই ধৰিছেফুলে পাতে ভৰপুৰ লতা এদাল
যেন আলফুলকৈ তাইৰ গাৰ ভাঁজে ভাঁজে বগাই
গৈছে বুকুখনত লতাদালে দুবাৰকৈ টো খেলাইছে
মানুহজনেলৈ তাই পাহৰিয়েই গৈছিল। যাক চাই
থাকিবৰ কাৰণে ফটোখন তোলাই আনিলে,
নিজক চাই থাকোতে তেৱেই তল পৰে এতিয়া।
(Golpo aru Xilpo, p.35)

(Translation : But it is strange. She did not take the *sador* properly, still she looked so beautiful in it. The wide flower lined border of the *sador* wrapped her body from her feet. A leafy climber seemed to climb gentle across her body and waved twice against her chest. Looking at her beautiful self in the picture, she forgot to look at the man seated beside her).

A woman’s perception of her culture’s beauty standards, how closely her own body resembles those standards, and her belief about how crucial a woman’s body is in meeting those standards in comparison to other members of her cultural group all have a significant impact on how she feels about herself (Paschal 2012; Spurgas, 2005). Many

people's quests for physical perfection are motivated by our culture's relentless emphasis on physical appearance. Her body is more of a "body-for-others" than a "body of individuality" (Ibid). Body image is the picture of our body, which we form in our mind describing the perceptions of the self that are centered on the individual's sense of their own physical existence. Chandrika's feeling when she sees her image in the photograph embody the powerful and expressive image she forms of herself as a married woman whose beauty is intensified in the presence of her husband beside her.

“মুখৰ একেবাৰে ওচৰলৈ ফটোখন আনি তাই তাইৰ মুখলৈ চাই ব'লা মুখত ওৰণি, কপালত ফোট, তাৰ উপৰি গাতে গা লগাই তাইৰ গৰাকী জনা“ (Golpo aru Xilpo, p. 35)

4.2 Self- image

Merriam-Webster's Medical Dictionary Online 2010 defines self-image as one's conception of oneself or one's role. The understanding of embodied cognition have come together to support the idea that the body's interactions with the environment deeply influence cognitive processes. In the eyes of the world Chandrika was Lilakanta's wife and is supposed to be the only woman in his life. When she discovers Lilakanta's past her self-image was destroyed by her perceptions of the social interaction she was engaged in. Chandrika's sense of fulfilment as a woman and pride of being a wife collapsed when Janeki returned the stained *sador* to her, borrowed by Lilankanta for his wife. Later when Chandrika discovered that the *sador* she had so lovingly worn, actually belonged to Janeki, she was distraught and her self-image shattered. The same *sador* with the floral border which embodied her sense of pride and beauty earlier, weighed her down like a snake crawling over her body. She wanted to scream at the sight of the same *sador* and herself which earlier had given her much pleasure.

“ফটোখনত নিজক দেখি তাই শিয়ৰি উঠিল। চাদৰখনৰ ফুলাম পাৰিটোলৈ তাই চাব নোৱাৰিলে। ভৰিৰ পৰা আৰম্ভ কৰি, কঁকাল আৰু বুকুৰ ওপৰেদি এডাল ফুটুকা -ফুটুকী গাৰ প্ৰকাণ্ড সাপে যেন তাইক মেৰিয়াই ধৰিছে ফটোৰ মানুহজনীয়ে পাৰক নোৱাৰক চন্দ্ৰিকা আচল মানুহজনীৰ চিঞৰি দিবৰ মন গ'ল।“ (গল্প আৰু শিল্প, p. 48)

(Translation: She shivered when she saw herself in the photo. She couldn't look at the flowery border of the *sador*. She felt as if a huge snake

crawled over her feet, waist and chest; wrapping her all over).

‘Sringkhol’ (শৃংখল meaning ‘Chain’) based in a nondescript village in Assam, peeks into the conflicts a young widowed mother who have to face conflict of self and identity in the advent of hunger of the flesh. Ambika, a widow with five children, young and beautiful, was left with emptiness in herself and in her household after the death of her husband Nilokanto. Kalidas was a friend of Ambika's deceased husband and earned quite well for a living, moreover after the death of Ambika's husband, he had always shown a keen interest in Ambika. In her eyes, she was a widow and after the loss of her husband, the sole purpose of her life was to live for her children and arrange two square meals a day by working in whatever capacity and work she could get for the day. Her poverty led her to catch the pigeons which were released from the meeting, with the thought that she will be able to sell them in the market and fetch some money.

The old man Dayaram kept piling Kalidas on Ambika because he wanted to see her happy and move ahead from a life of poverty. Kalidas also on a few occasions indirectly articulated his interest in Ambika, and on one instance by narrating to her how he wanted to marry her, before she got married to his best friend Nilokanto.

“কালিদাসে অকণমান সময় ছাঁটোলৈ চাই আছিল, তাৰ পাছত সি পাতল সুৰত, হাঁহি হাঁহি কৈছিল, “এটা কথা তই জান নে নেজান অম্বিকা? আমাৰ মা এদিন মোৰ কাৰণে তোক চাবলৈ আহিছিল নহয়। তই গম পাইছিল নে নাই? (Shrinkhol, p. 6)

(Translation : Kalidas kept looking at the shadow for a while. Then he said in a light note, with a smile, ‘Do you know something, Ambika? My mother had once come to see you for marriage with me. Did you or did you not know?’)

Shock and dread suddenly made Ambika as motionless as a bird on a tree would be, when it heard a weird, sharp sound close by. The way it remained still yet anxious to guess the nature of the sound, Ambika too remained thus, absolutely still, and looked at Kalidas. Kalidas kept smiling like an idiot. Ambika's eyes were unable to tolerate even that idiotic smile for more than a fleeting moment. Pretending to pick up a slice of betelnut peel, she hurriedly brought her face away so that no light fell on it. Time to time, Kalidas also tries to find out every possible way to spend time at Ambika's house and on one occasion he even suggests that she should invite him for a meal together and allow him to spend the night in her house. Although Saikia does not mention the age of Ambika, it is

implied that Ambika is still in her youth and capable for a youthful attraction.

“বেৰখনত পৰা তাইৰ ছাঁটো এজনী সুখাম গাভৰুৰ ছাঁ যেন লাগিছিল।” (Shrinkhol, p. 8)

(Translation: “By the mellow light of the lamp, Ambika’s face looked very serene and soft. However might she be, her shadow on the mud-plastered wall seemed to be that of a youthful woman with fullness of body).

In the Indian context, Meenakshi Tapan states that “the female body becomes an instrument and symbol for the expression of caste, class and community honor in society. Chastity, virtue and above all, purity are extolled as great feminine virtue embodying the honour of the family, community and the nation (Thapan 1997:6; Macdonald 2009:4). When Dayaram wanted to make Ambika understand about Kalidas and how he longed to have meal cooked with the hands of Ambika, she got furious and alerted and warned Dayaram to not instigate Kalidas, as her virtue and honor as a woman and a widow was at question.

“তোকো মই আজি ক’লোঁ, সি আহক তাকো ক’ম,-আজিৰপৰা যেন সি চোতাল পাৰ হৈ মোৰ দুৱাৰডলিত ভৰি নিদিয়ো।” (Shrinkhol, p. 11)

(Translation : “I’m warning you today and let him come, I’ll warn him as well—that from today onwards, he doesn’t ever cross the courtyard to set foot upon my threshold!”)

Bound by societal convention, Ambika felt uncomfortable listening to Kalidas' discourse and tried to maintain her widow status by rejecting all his temptations towards her, but most of the times she sat motionless under the weight of shyness and fear. She started getting frightened even thinking of just his shadow. In indirect ways she made him understand—that he sever all relations with Ambika and Ambika’s household. Even when the old man Dayaram wanted to make Ambika understand about Kalidas’s interest in her, she negated his arguments saying that she is a single woman and it will be really difficult for her to continue to stay in the village if something unforeseen happens.

“অম্বিকাআই আৰু টান মাতৰে সুধিলে, তই তাৰ হৈ ওকালতি কৰিছ কিয়? মই অকলশৰীয়া মানুহ , আজি সি মোৰ লগত মেল মাৰক, কাইলৈ মোৰ হাতৰ ভাত এসাঁজ খাওক, পৰিলৈ এটা চুকত থৈলা এখন পাৰি শোৱক, চ’থাদিনালে মোৰ বুকুত –।” (Shrinkhol, p. 11)

(Translation: “Why are you advocating so much for him? I am a single woman. Today he would chat with me, tomorrow he would eat a meal from my hands, the day after he would spread a sack in a corner and lie down there and the next day, on my bosom...!”)

As if for a moment anxiety clasped Ambika’s throat and choked her. After a while, on the verge of crying, she said, ‘How may I continue to stay in this village after that?’ Reflected evaluations, self-perceptions, and social comparisons have received a lot of attention from social psychologists as sources of knowledge on the self. In Janeki readers witness that her self-image is influenced by their reflected appraisals which are ‘other people’s reactions to them’; their interpretations of these reactions being most consequential and also the society.

“সাতাইশ বছৰ বয়সীয়া জানেকী। একুৰি বছৰ বয়সৰপৰা কেইবাঘৰ মানুহে ঠায়ে-চিয়াৰে তাইক জনাই থৈ গৈছে, কইনা হোৱা চেহেৰা তাইৰ নাই আছে তেইশ বছৰীয়া ভনীয়েক সাবিত্ৰীৰ। গাত মঙহ আছে, গালৰ হাড় ঢাক খাই আছে বুটীমাক সুগন্ধীক তাই কেইবাদিনো কৈছে, মই থকাৰ কাৰণেই যদি তই তাইক তেনেকৈ ঘৰত বহুৱাই ৰাখিছ, তেনেহ’লে মই ক’ৰবাত পানীয়ে-দুনীয়ে পৰিহে মৰিমগৈ।” (Shrinkhol, p. 37)

(Translation: Janeki is twenty-seven years now. Since she was twenty years old, numerous visitors have subtly helped her realize that she does not possess the appearance of a bride. Instead, it’s her 23-year-old sister Savitri, who has a body that is filled with flesh and covered cheekbones, making her look more like a bride. For several days, Janeki has warned her grandma Sugandhi that if she keeps Savitri at home because of her, she will have to go somewhere and commit suicide by drowning).

In a detailed discussion of individual identity, Hewitt (1989) describes it as “the continuity, integration, and identification, that a person constructs, not in relation to his community or his culture, but to himself”. Ambika’s individual identity as a widow and Janeki’s self-perception as a woman past marriageable age because of her unimpressive looks determined their behavior in society and in the company of those around them. Self-awareness is our observation of our actions and their consequences. From these observations we draw conclusions about our abilities and tendencies (Bem 1972). Humans are similar

to or different from others by the standards of self-evaluation designed for social comparison, in other words, by observing how we are similar or different from others. Women's feelings about their bodies are primarily also influenced by the verbal and nonverbal reactions they receive from others regarding their appearance.

Dissatisfaction with physical appearance can cause much emotional pain as well (Dennison and Coleman 2000). Janeki was repeatedly refused marriage by everyone who came close to her. Sometimes it didn't even take two days to receive the news that the marriage proposal has been rejected and the basis of the rejection was primarily her looks. Even men like Rudro, Tapodor, Manumohan and Lilakantha tried to establish intimacy with her but rejected her when it came to marrying her. A woman's sense of her gender, her sexuality, and her body may assume a different, perhaps a more prominent, shape in her conception of her self than these factors would for a man. Janeki often believed her body as a "source of pain, guilt and embarrassment" (Taub, 2003 qtd. Begum, 1992).

“গালখনত হাত দি খেপিয়াই খেপিয়াই তাই মাজে মাজে চায়। আইনাৰ ওচৰলৈ তাই বহুদিন যোৱা নাই, যাবলৈ এৰিলে। ... তাইক বেৰি থকা শ শ মানুহৰ চকুৱে তাইৰ কাৰণে আইনা।“ (Golpo aru Xilpo, p. 40)

(Translation : She tries to check her looks by rubbing her cheeks from time to time. She has almost given up looking at herself at the mirror... The eyes of hundreds of people around are a mirror for her).

Later, when Janeki received the stained, creased *sador* back through the hands of the little boy, it left her with a sense of dejection and unwantedness, her existence resembling to that of a fallen leaf.

“নিজকে তলসৰা পাততকৈও সৰু বুলি ভাবিবলৈ তাই অভ্যস্ত হৈ গৈছে, তথাপিও এক মুহূৰ্তৰ কাৰণে তাই নিজকে প্ৰবোধ দিব নোৱাৰিলে। চাদৰখনত এচমকা সেন্দুৰৰ দাগ, ---দাগটোলৈ চাই তাইৰ এনেকুৱা লাগিল যেন ওচৰৰ মানুহঘৰত ভোজ পাতিলে, তাইক ভোজলৈ মতা নাই, অথচ খাই এৰা-চুৱা পাতবোৰ জেওৰা পাৰকৈ তাইতৰ ঘৰৰফালে দলিয়াই পেলাইছে।“ (Golpo aru Xilop, p.37)

(Translation : She felt as low as a fallen leaf. Still for one moment she was unable to understand. The *sador* was stained with vermillion; she felt leftout as if she was uninvited to her neighbour's feast; moreover the leftover plates are thrown over the fence towards her home).

Janeki revealed feelings of inadequacy about her appearance and low self-esteem. For Janeki, the benchmark of self-assessment relied on the beauty standards reflected by her sister Savitri and the non-verbal treatments she received from Rudro, Monumohan, Tapodor and Lilacanta. Infact Monumohan chose Savitri, Janeki's younger sister, for marriage, over her.

“আইনাত নিজৰ মুখখন চাই ভনীয়েকলৈ চকু পৰিলে তাইৰ ভয়েই লাগে। (Golpo Aru Xilpo, p. 37)

(When she looks at her face in the mirror and then sees the beautiful face of her sister, she feels scared).

Ambika's life's situation has left her with nothing to be proud of or feel happy about, especially regarding her own body and her appearance. In fact, she forgot how to see herself with her own eyes, through her inner self, or through a mirror. It were the words of Kalidas that made her feel the existence of her body and the desires associated with it once again. A hot flush came over Ambika's ears and her head when Kalidas started to chuckle. Shame changed the colour of her face.

Ambika: “মোক চাবলগীয়া কিটো আছে?” (Shrinkhol, p.15)

(Translation: 'What's there in me to look at?')

Kalidas : “তোক চাবলগীয়া কিটো আছে, সেইটো তই জান নে নেজান, নে জানিও নজনা ভাও ধৰি থাক, সেইটো তোৰ কথা। কিন্তু আমি যিটো জানো জনোৱেই আমি জনাটোহে খাটাং কথা। কালিদাসে অশ্বিকাৰ চকুলৈ চালে। তাৰ চকু দুটা তিৰবিৰাই উঠিল। অশ্বিকাই যেন তাইৰ গোটেই গাতে কালিদাসৰ দৃষ্টিৰ উত্তাপ অনুভব কৰিলে।“ (Shrinkhol, p.15)

(Translation: 'Whether you know what's there in you to look at or you don't, or whether you know it and yet feign ignorance, that's upto you. But what we know, we know for sure. And that is definite.' Kalidas looked into Ambika's eyes. His eyes twinkled. As if Ambika felt the heat of Kalidas's glance all over her body').

Ambika felt as if something was wrapping her up from one side. She sensed a bizarre, tingling sensation all over her body. She felt as if a snake wrapped her body, but she was not scared. Not that her body tingled and tickled upon the touch of a snake's cold body. Rather, she sensed a heat.

4.3 Personal Identity

Identity which is at the core of the self, define behaviour in social interactions. Janeki, a 32-year-old woman, is tall,

skinny, and lacks in beauty due to her body's lack of voluptuousness and sufficient levels of fat and muscle to give it a fuller appearance. At the age of fourteen - fifteen years, when she grew up lanky and tall she felt confident that she was not short and stout like some girls of the village. At the age of seventeen-eighteen, the age which is considered the prime of youthful beauty, when her body did not meet the required fullness, she felt that it was for her good that she would be slender. At the age of thirty two and still single, she feels dissatisfied with herself when she sees the shadow of her own body, which resembles that of a tall beetle nut tree. Her skinny hands resemble a "Dotor haat". Her hands are so slender that her bones are visible even through her skin, and the large finger joints resembled the "kothua." Her face had become noticeably bonier, her eyes closed in, her skin had dried out and her face had speckled with black blotches. Janeki's perception of bodily harmony was defined by the 'arrangement of the body parts in terms of symmetry' and on the ideal proportion. As such, Janeki's unattractiveness and ordinary looks made her a victim for insults and discrimination.

According to Holman, a holistic view of the body argues that the attractiveness of certain physical characteristics depends on the body's overall assessment of its deviation from ideals.. Furthermore, women often feel ashamed of their bodies (Viswanath: 1997) because they have learned that a woman's body is nothing to be proud of (Das 1988:200 Macdonald 2009:4). Janeki is deeply troubled about her identity and existence with the ugliness of her body and looks

“এই দেহা লৈ ৰঙা ফুল দিয়া পাৰিৰ চিন্ধুৰ চাদৰ পিন্ধাৰ বাঞ্চা জানেকীৰ নাই, থাকিলেও নুশুৱাই সেই কাৰণে লীলাকান্তই বিচাৰি আহোঁতে চাদৰখন দিবলৈ তাই সামান্য আপত্তিও কৰা নাছিল।” (Golpo aru Xilpo, p.37)

(Translation : Janeki doesn't want to wear a red flowered silk *sador* with this body, and even if she does wear, it doesn't suit her. Therefore, she did not object to giving him the *sador* when Lilakanta came looking for it).

In *Shrinkhol*, the illumination that falls upon the episode when Ambika and Kalidas goes to the market to sell the pigeons is like the glare of a furnacemouth; it reaches the depths of the inner struggles and turmoils in which the scene is enacted, relieving it with sharp and fantastic shadows. According to identity theory (Serpe 1987, pp. 44-45; Stryker 1980, pp. 59-62), commitment to an identity depends on two things: the number of relationships a person has that are premised on the identity, and the strength of the good feelings that are

derived from the activities and relationships the identity affords. Repeated rejection on the basis of her appearance has left Janeki question her identity. When Lilakanta expressed his interest for her, instead of feeling happy at the kind words of Lilakanta, she felt like shouting at the top of her voice and say 'Folks! Look, how people are lying to me in the broad daylight'.

“লীলাকান্তই তাইৰ মুখলৈ থৰ লাগি চাই থাকি পৰিষ্কাৰ মাতৰে ক'লে, তোক দেখি বৰ ভাল লাগে।

(Translation : “Lilakant looked at her face and said in a clear voice, 'I feel happy when I see you’”).

“জানেকীয়েও তাৰ মুখলৈ চাই ব'ল, কিন্তু তাইৰ এনেকুৱা লাগিল যেন তাই চিঞৰি দিব, “ৰাইজসকল, চোৱাহি চোৱাহি, এই মানুহবোৰে দিন দুপৰতে মোক মিছা কথা কৈছে।” (Golpo aru Xilpo, p. 84)

(Translation : “Janeki also looked at his face , but she felt like shouting out saying “Folks! See how these men lie to me in broad daylight)

Commitment thus is a consequence of the extensiveness and emotional intensiveness of the social relationships that are premised on playing a particular role and adopting the associated identity. Ambika's identity is premised in the role of a wife and a mother, constricted by an array of societal challenges. At the market place, when Kalidas suggested that instead of selling the pigeons, they should cook the pigeon meal and eat together Ambika wiped her face and neck with the end of her *sador* and made an attempt to move a little and sit. And as she moved, as if a whole lot of flesh in the various parts of her body too moved and swayed. Her body shook in the same manner as did a pitcher half-filled with water. As if she hadn't noticed that there was so much flesh on her body.

“মুখখন আৰু ডিঙিটো চাদৰৰ আগেৰে মচি অম্বিকাই অলপ লৰচৰ হৈ বহিবলৈ চেষ্টা কৰিলে। লৰচৰ কৰোঁতেই তাইৰ গাৰ বিভিন্ন ঠাইত মেন বহুত মঙহে লৰচৰ কৰি উঠিল। গাত ইমান মঙহ আছিল বুলি তাই যেন ইমান দিনে মনেই কৰা নাছিল।” (Shrinkhol, p. 19)

One fundamental dimension of the bodily self is the sense of body ownership that refers to the special perceptual status of one's own body, the feeling that “my body” belongs to me, experience of this body as mine”. Women and their bodies are expected to ‘work’ to uphold social, communal and national identities. Ambika has almost given up on the perceptual status of her own, the feeling

that 'her body' belongs to her or understand the experience of the body as hers. It was at this point that Ambika realises the urges of the body that still existed although she had long neglected at the death of her husband. After the death of her husband and bound by all the challenges and struggles of life, Ambika has almost forgotten that she too has desire in her body that called for fulfilment.

“অস্থিকার মুখৰপৰা কোনো শব্দ নোলাল। কিবা এটাই যেন তাইক এফালৰপৰা মেৰিয়াই আনিছে গোটেই গাতে তাই এক আচৰিত ধৰণৰ পিৰপিৰণি, চাঞ্চল্য অনুভব কৰিছে সাপে মেৰিয়াই ধৰিলে এনেকুৱা লাগে নেকি কিন্তু ক'ত? তাইৰতো তেনেকৈ ভয় লগা নাই বৰঞ্চ তাই এটা উত্তাপ অনুভব কৰিছে।” (Shrinkhol, p.16)

(Translation : Ambika couldn't speak a word when Kalidas mentioned about the taste of pigeon curry. She felt a strange kind of feeling wrapping her body. All over, she feels a strange kind of flutter, excitement. Does it feel like a snake wrapping it up? But where? She is not so scared of this feeling. Rather she is feeling a warmth).

“গাত ইমান মণ্ডহ আছিল বুলি তাই যেন ইমান দিনেই মনেই কৰা নাছিল।” (Shrinkhol, p17)

(Translation : It was as if she had almost forgotten that she too had so much of warmth and heat in her body).

Saikia uses Ambika's 'body work' to 'unite sexual desire and motherhood which serves to demythologise the idealised chaste virginal body of the all giving mother' (Macdonald, p.14). Ambika bound by the conflict between tradition and individual desire, decides to sell the pigeons and maintain her chastity, then giving up to Kalidas her honor and her identity of a widow.

V. CONCLUSION

Although we do not frame our analysis in terms of identity theory, the paper attempts in its conclusion to show how a consideration of body image and self-image lead to the formation of self-identity in a woman. Concluding it can be said that woman who do not embody appearance standards possess a stigma, or discrediting attribute. Stigma derives from cultural expectations and reflects the norms and values of individual is in the dominant group. Identity is demarcated on social conventions and representations concerning the female ideal. *Shrinkhol* and *Dhura Xaap* are excellent example of the inner and outer struggle a woman has to face in life based on self-image and identity.

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