



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Helplessness / Loneliness

(Stories of Dillip Behera)

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Abstract

Life itself is a deception—a self-delusion. Life is a strange world. Within ordinary events, there lies an inherent perspective. What appears worthless from a common viewpoint is the artistic essence of his stories. Like the works of Kafka, Camus, and Sartre, his stories create a vast world of loneliness.

Words: Mirage/Illusory, Fire, Restlessness, Glimmering/Firefly, Betel-chewer.

Introduction to the Author

In the world of modern Odia short stories, Dillip Behera is a talented and recognized name. He is well-known among Odia readers for his sensitive creation, presentation of context, establishment of human values, and his transformative efforts regarding the inconsistencies of helplessness and system-based dynamics.

Dillip Behera was born on April 13, 1988, in Matampura village under the Udala block of Mayurbhanj district. Born to father Bhanu Prasad Behera and mother Lavanya Devi, he exposes the inner workings of an extraordinary life and a value-depleted society through his stories. He is proficient not only in stories but also in poetry and playwriting. Through his creations, he offers readers a glimpse into the various problems

occurring in society. For his literary talent, he was honored with the Central Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar in 2011. He has also received the Justice Harihar Mahapatra Natya Sahitya Puraskar.

Core Themes: Helplessness and the Modern Man

It is true that at the beginning of the 19th century, the rapid progress of science filled the human mind with countless possibilities and endless expectations. Because of this, man disregarded the traditional values and religious beliefs of his ancestors. The overwhelming success of science filled his mind with dreams of various prosperity. Consequently, "man, blinded by delusion," felt the presence of scientific wonders at every step.

However, after the First World War, that perception changed abruptly. He saw that the beautiful and meaningful world science had promised to build was merely a terrifying illusion. Man had already lost his traditional roots, and now he felt suspicious of progress as well (Barik: Anwasha, pg. 11). Standing upon the ruins of war, he felt that his social identity was false.

In a lonely world, he felt as if a helpless individuality was consuming his entire life. He became a bewildered entity, whose present was shattered and whose future was dark. Seeing such a distorted version of himself, man's delusion was broken. Doubts, disbelief, and terror filled his heart. Therefore, in the modernity following the war, man's disillusionment, the tragedies and

failures of his life, and above all, the stinging pain of living in a world of destruction, became extremely vivid to him.

Even in dreams, man experiences a sense of insecurity. The complexity of the soul, health, and mechanical processes makes his condition unstable and agonizing. In this context, there is a conflict between the external society and the internal psyche. Neither is completely independent of the other. Here, external life does not provide security to the internal life, nor does the internal attraction create a sense of belonging with the world.

Like the character in Kafka's 'The Burrow' (The Burrow), man builds a tunnel within himself. He lives inside it. He tries to separate himself from the noise and chaos of the external world. He thinks that the external world will destroy his inner peace, so he seeks refuge in the darkness of the cave to mingle with his own existence.

But this very desire to escape from reality makes the mind even more restless. For how many days? Even within that uncertainty, he remains anxious. The sound of the external world enters his ears even there. "A sharp sound—like a scratching or scraping, sometimes here, sometimes there. In the walls, in the floors, in the ceiling. It is his own heartbeat, or perhaps the sound of his own existence breathing" (Mahapatra: Akashara, pg. 25). Sometimes he tries to find peace within that tunnel, and at other times, he unintentionally connects with the noise of the outside world. Therefore, loneliness, solitude, fear, internal conflict, and the struggle between the internal and external make human life extremely miserable. Man's life, caught in the trap of insecurity, finds no peace or rest, only constant wandering.

Helplessness is a constant companion in human life. From birth to death, man continues to struggle at physical and mental levels to lead a healthy, disease-free, and simple life. Despite this, no individual can lead a completely perfect life. Thus, man feels directed by an invisible power.

The helplessness of the modern man is a distinct direction in today's modern story literature. When a storyteller observes life closely and enters the deepest chambers of the heart and soul, the helpless state of man falls clearly before their eyes. Today's literature reveals this image and nature. Outwardly, people may appear simple,

gentle, and educated, but the extent of the deception and depression they carry within is explored in most of today's stories.

Analysis of Key Stories

"Chhai" (The Shadow): The author depicts the helplessness of the protagonist, Pradip. Pradip has NO attachment to his ancestors or his birthplace, where he spent his childhood. He has sold his ancestral house in the village. However, the shadow of that house haunts him. He cannot express his inner feelings even to his loved ones.

"Hati" (The Elephant): This heart-touching story depicts the helplessness of an old man named Shukra Budha, who loves nature and animals. While he used to play with elephants in the forest, he feels helpless and lonely upon hearing the news that his companion Rama has not returned from the forest.

"Lanthana" (The Lantern): This story portrays the helplessness of women's lives. It reflects the life of Premalata, a widow. Despite being married, a character named Subal loves Premalata. After Premalata's husband dies of malaria, Subal helps her and her daughter, but he harbors physical intentions. The story highlights the physical, mental and social exploitation women face.

"Tikie Andhakara" (A Little Darkness): This depicts the helplessness of today's youth. It shows how a young man named Nilotpala, from a middle-class family, feels helpless due to financial and mental stress. His financial lack becomes a barrier in his love life.

Conclusion

Dillip Behera has beautifully depicted the modern life of the 21st century. His narrative relies on a poignant, colloquial language. His style of expression is swift, fluid, and deeply impactful, reflecting the struggles of the middle class, the complexities of relationships, and the inherent loneliness of the human condition.

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