

# A Trauma-Informed Analysis of the Song “Rod Aji Keni Pau.” by Zubeen Garg Through Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) in the Context of Women Facing Violence in Assam

Bhaswati Baruah

Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Arunachal University of Studies, Namsai

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## ABSTRACT

Violence against women often produces long-lasting psychological, emotional, and social consequences that are not always expressed through direct testimony. In many socio-cultural contexts, particularly within patriarchal societies, survivors frequently communicate experiences of suffering through symbolic and narrative forms such as songs, poetry, and oral traditions. This study examines the Assamese song “Rod Aji Keni Pau” by Zubeen Garg as a trauma narrative and explores its potential significance within the framework of narrative healing. Using a qualitative textual and narrative analysis approach, the study interprets the song through Trauma Theory, Narrative Therapy, and Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET). The analysis focuses on recurring symbols, emotional imagery, lyrical progression, and narrative structure to understand how the song represents trauma, emotional fragmentation, hopelessness, and healing.

The findings reveal that the song functions as a culturally embedded trauma narrative that reflects emotional disorientation, relational instability, existential despair, and the search for meaning after psychological suffering. Symbols such as darkness, lost pathways, silence, and inaccessible sunlight represent the fragmented emotional experiences commonly associated with trauma survivors. The study further demonstrates that the song's narrative progression closely mirrors the therapeutic process described in Narrative Exposure Therapy, where fragmented memories and emotions gradually move toward narrative articulation and meaning-making. Additionally, the research highlights the role of Assamese musical traditions as culturally meaningful spaces for emotional expression, particularly for women whose experiences of violence are often silenced by social stigma and patriarchal structures.

The study concludes that Assamese songs can function not only as artistic expressions but also as emotional testimonies, trauma archives, and narrative healing spaces. By bridging Western trauma frameworks with indigenous cultural narratives, the research contributes to trauma-informed literary studies and highlights the potential of Assamese musical narratives in women-centered healing practices and culturally sensitive approaches to psychological recovery.

## Keywords-

Trauma, Healing Through Narratives, Narrative Exposure Therapy, Assamese Music, Women and Violence.

## INTRODUCTION

Violence against women leaves deep and enduring psychological, emotional, relational, and existential wounds. Survivors often continue to carry the effects of trauma long after the violence has ended. Experiences such as anxiety, emotional numbness, hopelessness, disturbed attachment, shattered self-worth, and identity erosion become part of everyday psychological reality (Herman, 1992, pp. 33–52).<sup>1</sup> Trauma frequently disrupts

<sup>1</sup> Herman, J. L. (1992). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence—from domestic abuse to political terror*. Basic Books.

a survivor's ability to trust, to feel emotionally secure, and even to perceive life with meaning and continuity. In many cases, women struggle to verbally articulate these painful experiences because trauma itself fragments memory and language. Judith Herman explains that traumatic experiences are often stored not as coherent narratives but as emotional and sensory fragments that repeatedly return through intrusive thoughts, silence, fear, and emotional withdrawal (Herman, 1992, p. 37).

Within patriarchal socio-cultural settings, this silence becomes even more intense. Women are frequently conditioned to suppress suffering to preserve family honour, social acceptance, and emotional survival. As a result, emotional pain often finds indirect modes of expression through songs, poetry, folklore, oral narratives, and symbolic cultural forms. These creative expressions become alternative emotional spaces where suppressed grief, loneliness, longing, and despair can be communicated without confrontation. Narrative theorists argue that storytelling and symbolic expression allow individuals to externalize trauma and gradually reconstruct fragmented identities (White & Epston, 1990, pp. 12–15).<sup>2</sup> Thus, songs often function not merely as entertainment but as emotional archives carrying hidden psychological realities.

In this context, the song “*Rod Aji Keni Pau*” can be interpreted as a layered trauma narrative that reflects emotional isolation, psychological fragmentation, and the search for healing. The recurring imagery of darkness throughout the song symbolizes emotional collapse, despair, and the inability to experience emotional warmth or safety. Conversely, sunlight appears as a distant and inaccessible symbol of hope, recovery, and emotional clarity. The speaker's repeated questioning “*Rod aji Keni pau?*” (“Why can I not find sunlight today?”); reflects the repetitive and intrusive thought patterns commonly associated with trauma survivors. Trauma psychology suggests that survivors often become trapped in cycles of unanswered questioning, emotional confusion, and unresolved pain because traumatic experiences resist closure and coherent understanding (Herman, 1992, p. 41).<sup>3</sup>

The repetitive structure of the lyrics further mirrors the cyclical nature of traumatic cognition. Rather than progressing linearly toward resolution, the emotional movement of the song repeatedly returns to absence, emptiness, and longing. This reflects what Bessel van der Kolk describes as the “re-experiencing” nature of trauma, where painful emotional states continue to resurface through memory, sensation, and symbolic expression (Van der Kolk, 2014, pp. 66–68).<sup>4</sup> The inability to “find sunlight” therefore becomes more than poetic sadness; it represents emotional disconnection, psychological exhaustion, and the struggle to regain inner stability after suffering.

At the same time, the song also opens a subtle possibility for healing. The very act of questioning darkness indicates that the desire for light still survives within the traumatized self. From a narrative therapy perspective, healing begins when individuals start expressing pain rather than completely suppressing it. White and Epston argue that alternative narratives can challenge trauma-dominated identities and create space for emotional reconstruction and renewed meaning (White & Epston, 1990, p. 15).<sup>5</sup> In this sense, “*Rod Aji Keni Pau*” becomes both a representation of suffering and an emotional attempt to search for hope beyond despair. The song transforms silence into expression and emotional fragmentation into a shared cultural narrative, allowing listeners to emotionally connect with experiences of pain, survival, and healing.

### Objectives of the Study-

1. To analyse the symbolic representation of trauma in the song “*Rod Aji Keni Pau*” by Zubeen Garg.
2. To explore the applicability of Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) within Assamese socio-cultural contexts, particularly in relation to women survivors of violence.

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<sup>2</sup> White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. W. W. Norton & Company.

<sup>3</sup> Herman, J. L. (1992). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence—from domestic abuse to political terror*. Basic Books.

<sup>4</sup> Van der Kolk, B. A. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Viking.

<sup>5</sup> White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. W. W. Norton & Company.

3. To investigate how narrative reconstruction and emotional storytelling contribute to psychological healing, identity restoration, and emotional resilience among women survivors of violence.

## Theoretical Framework-

### Trauma Theory-

Judith Herman (1992) explains trauma as a psychological condition that disrupts memory, identity, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relationships. Survivors of trauma frequently experience fragmentation, hyperarousal, dissociation, emotional numbness, and a persistent sense of fear or instability (Herman, 1992, pp. 33–52). <sup>6</sup>Within the song “*Rod Aji Keni Pau*” by Zubeen Garg, these traumatic conditions are symbolically reflected through recurring images of darkness, confusion, emotional emptiness, and disorientation. The inability to perceive “light” or “sunlight” metaphorically reflects trauma-induced emotional disconnection and distorted cognitive perception. Janoff-Bulman (1992; pp. 5- 7) <sup>7</sup>argues that trauma shatters an individual’s basic assumptions regarding safety, trust, and meaning, resulting in psychological instability and hopelessness.

### Narrative Therapy-

Narrative Therapy, developed by Michael White and David Epston (1990), emphasizes that individuals understand and interpret their lives through stories and personal narratives. Trauma often creates what they describe as “problem-saturated narratives,” where suffering dominates identity and emotional experience (White & Epston, 1990, pp. 12–15). <sup>8</sup>Healing begins when survivors externalize traumatic experiences and gradually reconstruct alternative meanings about themselves and their lives.

In the context of “*Rod Aji Keni Pau*,” the fragmented emotional expressions in the lyrics can be interpreted as an attempt to convey pain that cannot be expressed directly. The song moves from emotional confusion and despair toward symbolic articulation, allowing trauma to be expressed through metaphor, repetition, and imagery. Thus, the song itself becomes a narrative space where hidden suffering is voiced indirectly through cultural expression.

### Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET)-

Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET), developed by Schauer et al. (2011), is a trauma-focused therapeutic approach that helps survivors organize fragmented traumatic memories into coherent chronological narratives. NET assumes that traumatic memories often remain emotionally disconnected and sensory-based, causing survivors to repeatedly relive distress without achieving psychological integration (Schauer et al., 2011, pp. 3–7)<sup>9</sup>.

The lyrical progression of “*Rod Aji Keni Pau*” closely mirrors the emotional movement identified within Narrative Exposure Therapy. The song reflects fragmented recall, emotional disorientation, relational dependency, hopelessness, and symbolic collapse. Rather than linearly presenting trauma, the lyrics reveal emotional fragments that gradually form a deeper psychological narrative. This makes the song particularly significant within Assamese socio-cultural contexts, where emotional suffering is often communicated indirectly through music, folklore, and symbolic expression rather than explicit disclosure.

### Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) in the Assamese Context

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<sup>6</sup> Herman, J. L. (1992). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence—from domestic abuse to political terror*. Basic Books.

<sup>7</sup> Janoff-Bulman, R. (1992). *Shattered assumptions: Towards a new psychology of trauma*. Free Press.

<sup>8</sup> White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. W. W. Norton & Company.

<sup>9</sup> Schauer, M., Neuner, F., & Elbert, T. (2011). *Narrative exposure therapy: A short-term treatment for traumatic stress disorders* (2nd ed.). Hogrefe Publishing.

The song “*Rod Aji Keni Pau*” by Zubeen Garg can be closely connected with the psychological framework of Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET). According to Schauer et al. (2011), NET helps trauma survivors transform fragmented and emotionally overwhelming memories into coherent life narratives (pp. 3–7).<sup>10</sup> Trauma survivors often struggle to express painful experiences directly because trauma disrupts emotional processing, memory organization, and self-understanding. As a result, emotions frequently emerge through fragments, symbols, sensory memories, silence, and repetitive questioning rather than through structured narration. Within the song, this fragmented emotional condition becomes visible through recurring images of darkness, emotional confusion, disorientation, longing, and hopelessness. The lyrical movement of the song gradually mirrors different emotional phases commonly associated with trauma narratives, including fragmented sensory recall, relational instability, psychological helplessness, and existential despair.

At the same time, the song also reflects an attempt to organize suffering through emotional expression. The repeated questioning within the lyrics suggests a mind searching for meaning, emotional safety, and inner clarity after psychological collapse. This closely aligns with the central idea of Narrative Exposure Therapy, where survivors begin healing by transforming painful emotional fragments into meaningful narrative testimony. Rather than presenting trauma directly, the song uses metaphorical and symbolic language, which becomes culturally significant within Assamese society, where women often experience socio-cultural silencing regarding violence and emotional suffering. In many patriarchal settings, women may not openly communicate trauma because of shame, fear, stigma, or emotional suppression. Consequently, songs, folklore, and cultural narratives become alternative emotional spaces where hidden pain can be expressed indirectly yet powerfully.

The song further demonstrates how Assamese musical narratives can function as culturally rooted healing spaces. The emotional familiarity of music creates a sense of containment and psychological safety for listeners who may identify with similar experiences of loneliness, abandonment, grief, or emotional exhaustion. Through metaphor and melody, trauma becomes externalized rather than silently internalized. This process of emotional externalization is significant because trauma often isolates survivors within silence and emotional fragmentation. By listening to or emotionally engaging with such narratives, survivors may feel recognized, emotionally validated, and less alone in their suffering.

The analysis of “*Rod Aji Keni Pau*” therefore strongly supports the idea that narratives themselves can become therapeutic spaces. According to Michael White and David Epston (1990), healing begins when individuals externalize trauma and reconstruct alternative meanings beyond pain and victimhood (pp. 12–15).<sup>11</sup> Within this framework, healing occurs through naming suffering, expressing silenced emotions, reconstructing fragmented identity, and reclaiming emotional voice. The song symbolically performs these functions by transforming internal pain into a shared emotional narrative. Instead of remaining isolated, psychological suffering and trauma become culturally expressed, emotionally witnessed, and narratively organized.

Thus, songs such as “*Rod Aji Keni Pau*” function not only as artistic expressions but also as emotional testimonies, trauma archives, and cultural healing mechanisms. They preserve hidden emotional realities while simultaneously opening possibilities for resilience, connection, and psychological reconstruction. The study ultimately demonstrates that Assamese musical narratives can create an important bridge between Western trauma theories and indigenous expressive traditions, allowing healing to emerge through culturally meaningful forms of storytelling, memory, music, and emotional expression.

The analysis of the song “*Rod Aji Keni Pau*” reveals that Assamese musical narratives can function as powerful emotional and psychological representations of trauma among women facing violence. The study finds that the recurring imagery of darkness, emotional emptiness, silence, and disorientation symbolically reflects the fragmented psychological condition often experienced by trauma survivors. The repeated inability to “find sunlight” metaphorically represents emotional hopelessness, loss of safety, and disconnection from meaning and stability. Through this symbolism, the song portrays trauma not merely as an isolated emotional

<sup>10</sup> Schauer, M., Neuner, F., & Elbert, T. (2011). *Narrative exposure therapy: A short-term treatment for traumatic stress disorders* (2nd ed.). Hogrefe Publishing.

<sup>11</sup> White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. W. W. Norton & Company.

event but as a deeply internalized psychological condition affecting identity, relationships, and emotional perception.

The study further finds that the repetitive questioning structure within the lyrics closely mirrors the cyclical nature of traumatic cognition. Trauma survivors frequently experience intrusive thoughts, unresolved emotional confusion, and repetitive mental distress because traumatic memories often remain fragmented and emotionally unprocessed (Herman, 1992, pp. 37–41). Within the song, this fragmented emotional state emerges through recurring expressions of longing, uncertainty, and existential exhaustion. The emotional movement of the lyrics does not follow a stable linear progression; instead, it repeatedly returns to emotional absence, despair, and confusion, reflecting the psychological repetition commonly associated with trauma.

Another important finding of the study is the role of metaphor and symbolic expression within Assamese musical traditions. The analysis demonstrates that the song communicates suffering indirectly through images of darkness, smoke, silence, distance, and emotional searching. This becomes particularly significant within Assamese socio-cultural contexts where women survivors of violence may experience social stigma, emotional suppression, and patriarchal silencing. In such situations, songs and oral narratives become culturally acceptable spaces where hidden pain can be expressed without direct disclosure. Thus, the study identifies Assamese musical narratives as alternative emotional archives that preserve psychological experiences often excluded from public discourse.

The study also finds that the song strongly aligns with the principles of Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET). According to Schauer et al. (2011), trauma survivors gradually begin healing when fragmented emotional memories are transformed into coherent narrative testimony (pp. 3–7). The lyrical progression of “*Rod Aji Keni Pau*” symbolically mirrors this movement from emotional fragmentation toward narrative articulation. Although the song remains emotionally melancholic, the very act of expressing pain through narrative and musical structure suggests an attempt to organize suffering and search for emotional meaning. The repeated search for “light” amidst darkness symbolically reflects the persistence of hope even within psychological collapse.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates that narrative reconstruction plays a significant role in emotional healing and identity restoration. Through storytelling, metaphor, and emotional expression, trauma becomes externalized rather than silently internalized. This process allows survivors to gradually reclaim emotional voice, reconstruct fragmented identity, and emotionally reconnect with experiences that were previously suppressed or disorganized. The song therefore functions not only as a musical composition but also as a therapeutic narrative space where pain, memory, silence, and healing coexist.

The discussion ultimately suggests that Assamese songs, poetry, and oral traditions possess significant potential within trauma-informed and women-centered healing practices. By integrating trauma theory with indigenous cultural narratives, the study highlights the importance of culturally sensitive approaches to emotional healing. Assamese musical narratives provide emotional familiarity, collective resonance, symbolic expression, and cultural belonging, all of which can contribute meaningfully to psychological resilience and narrative recovery among women survivors of violence.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative textual and narrative analysis approach to examine the Assamese song “*Rod Aji Keni Pau*” by Zubeen Garg. The research primarily focuses on interpreting the symbolic, emotional, and psychological dimensions embedded within the lyrical structure of the song. Through close textual reading, the study analyzes recurring metaphors, emotional imagery, repetition, and narrative progression to understand how trauma, emotional fragmentation, hopelessness, and healing are represented within the song.

The study is theoretically grounded in Trauma Theory, Narrative Therapy, and Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET). Trauma Theory is used to examine the psychological effects of violence, including emotional disorientation, identity fragmentation, helplessness, and existential instability among women survivors of violence. Narrative Therapy provides the conceptual framework for understanding how storytelling and

symbolic expression help individuals externalize suffering and reconstruct meaning beyond trauma. Additionally, the study applies the framework of Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) to explore how fragmented emotional experiences within the song gradually transform into narrative articulation and emotional testimony.

The research further situates the song within Assamese socio-cultural contexts, where songs, oral traditions, and symbolic narratives often function as indirect spaces for expressing emotional suffering and collective memory. By combining textual analysis with trauma-informed theoretical frameworks, the study investigates how Assamese musical narratives can contribute to emotional healing, identity reconstruction, and culturally rooted therapeutic understanding.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the song “*Rod Aji Keni Pau*” reveals that Assamese musical narratives can function as powerful emotional and psychological representations of trauma among women facing violence. The study finds that the recurring imagery of darkness, emotional emptiness, silence, and disorientation symbolically reflects the fragmented psychological condition often experienced by trauma survivors. The repeated inability to “find sunlight” metaphorically represents emotional hopelessness, loss of safety, and disconnection from meaning and stability. Through this symbolism, the song portrays trauma not merely as an isolated emotional event but as a deeply internalized psychological condition affecting identity, relationships, and emotional perception.

The study further finds that the repetitive questioning structure within the lyrics closely mirrors the cyclical nature of traumatic cognition. Trauma survivors frequently experience intrusive thoughts, unresolved emotional confusion, and repetitive mental distress because traumatic memories often remain fragmented and emotionally unprocessed (Herman, 1992, pp. 37–41).<sup>12</sup> Within the song, this fragmented emotional state emerges through recurring expressions of longing, uncertainty, and existential exhaustion. The emotional movement of the lyrics does not follow a stable linear progression; instead, it repeatedly returns to emotional absence, despair, and confusion, reflecting the psychological repetition commonly associated with trauma.

Another important finding of the study is the role of metaphor and symbolic expression within Assamese musical traditions. The analysis demonstrates that the song communicates suffering indirectly through images of darkness, smoke, silence, distance, and emotional searching. This becomes particularly significant within Assamese socio-cultural contexts where women survivors of violence may experience social stigma, emotional suppression, and patriarchal silencing. In such situations, songs and oral narratives become culturally acceptable spaces where hidden pain can be expressed without direct disclosure. Thus, the study identifies Assamese musical narratives as alternative emotional archives that preserve psychological experiences often excluded from public discourse.

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<sup>12</sup> Herman, J. L. (1992). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence—from domestic abuse to political terror*. Basic Books.

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reconstruct fragmented identity, and emotionally reconnect with experiences that were previously suppressed or disorganized. The song, therefore, functions not only as a musical composition but also as a therapeutic narrative space where pain, memory, silence, and healing coexist.

The discussion ultimately suggests that Assamese songs, poetry, and oral traditions possess significant potential within trauma-informed and women-centered healing practices. By integrating trauma theory with indigenous cultural narratives, the study highlights the importance of culturally sensitive approaches to emotional healing. Assamese musical narratives provide emotional familiarity, collective resonance, symbolic expression, and cultural belonging, all of which can contribute meaningfully to psychological resilience and narrative recovery among women survivors of violence.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of the song “*Rod Aji Keni Pau*” by Zubeen Garg positions the song as far more than a melancholic Assamese musical composition. The song emerges as a culturally embedded trauma narrative that reflects emotional fragmentation, hopelessness, relational instability, existential despair, and psychological collapse among women facing violence. Through recurring images of darkness, emotional disorientation, longing, and silence, the lyrics symbolically communicate the inner psychological condition of trauma survivors who often struggle to express suffering directly. The song, therefore, becomes an emotional testimony where pain is articulated through metaphor, repetition, and symbolic narrative expression. Viewed through the framework of Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET), the song illustrates how storytelling and emotional narration can transform fragmented traumatic experiences into meaningful psychological testimony. According to Schauer et al. (2011), trauma survivors frequently experience memories in disconnected emotional and sensory fragments, making coherent self-expression difficult (pp. 3–7)<sup>14</sup>. Within the song, the fragmented lyrical progression reflects this psychological condition while simultaneously creating a narrative pathway toward emotional articulation and meaning-making. The repeated search for “light” amidst darkness symbolically reflects the human desire for emotional safety, healing, and reconstruction even within conditions of despair.

The study further demonstrates that Assamese lyrical traditions hold significant therapeutic and cultural value within trauma discourse. In socio-cultural contexts where women are often silenced by patriarchy, shame, fear, or stigma, songs and oral narratives become alternative emotional spaces where suffering can be expressed indirectly yet meaningfully. Assamese musical narratives provide emotional familiarity, cultural belonging, symbolic externalization, and collective emotional resonance. Through these culturally rooted forms of storytelling, survivors may gradually externalize pain, reclaim emotional voice, and reconstruct fragmented identity. This study ultimately establishes that trauma narratives are not merely expressions of suffering; they also function as mechanisms of survival, resistance, and healing. Cultural storytelling forms such as songs, poetry, and oral narratives can therefore operate as therapeutic interventions by helping individuals process emotional pain through narrative reconstruction rather than silence and suppression. Healing emerges when traumatic experiences are emotionally acknowledged, symbolically expressed, and integrated into meaningful narratives of survival and identity.

Thus, Assamese songs, poetry, and oral traditions hold profound potential within trauma-informed research and women-centered healing practices. By bridging Western trauma frameworks with indigenous expressive traditions, Assamese musical narratives create culturally sensitive pathways for emotional healing, psychological resilience, and narrative transformation.

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