

Women and their Quest for Identity in Arupa Kalita Patangia's Short Stories

S. Himabindu¹ and R. Soujanya Kumar²

¹Degree Lecturer, TSWRDC (W), Kamareddy, Affiliated to Telangana University, Nizamabad, Telangana, INDIA.

²Assistant Professor (C), Department of English, OU PG College, Osmania University, Siddipet, Telangana, INDIA.

²Corresponding Author: soujanya009@gmail.com



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ABSTRACT

The stories woven in these tell-tales of women are enveloped with the responsibility of the stories as testimonies of trauma which need attention and focus. The theme of displacement and estrangement are seen in these texts. According to Freud, when one witnesses a truth which is not available to them, the other and the subject are to bear the testimony. This other, subject or the listener become the witness of the trauma. The regular lives of the characters are enveloped with traumatic events. These survivors, the mere witnesses to the brutality cannot explain their experiences in words. They sometimes get into the guilt of forming a false memory due to silence which completely distorted their memory. They reach the saturation point wherein they are unable to explain the situation they are dealing with. Looking at a different perspective, this silence functions as a secured wall for them, as they live in this enclosure without any past memories or may be distorted memories of past. Once they step out of this wall, they relive the disaster again in their distorted memories of past. This paper examines various female characters within their geographical settings, dwelling in the patriarchal society, limited to the horizons set by the dominant males, their thought processes and patterns, aspirations, feelings, beliefs and ultimately their own way of looking at life. My research focuses on few observations of portrayal of women and their subjection in the patriarchal domain in the selected short stories of Arupa Patangia Kalita with a view of exploring the female characters and their responses to their circumstances amidst the conflicting themes of identity.

Keywords- women, identity, feminist concerns, patriarchal, memory, trauma, guilt.

I. INTRODUCTION

Arupa Patangia Kalita belongs to the Assamese literary canvas and is a prolific writer and a voracious reader. Most of Kalita's writings focus on the complex realities of the contemporary Assamese society. Her works have been translated into several Indian languages and have also been translated into English. Kalita achieved her Ph.D. degree from Guwahati University on Pearl S. Buck's women characters. She is a retired professor in English Literature, at Tangla College, Darrang.

Kalita's Works:

Kalita's most prominent works and short story collections are – Maru Jatra Aru Anyanya (1992), Moruyatraau Anyanya (1992), Mriganabhi (1987),

Maarubhumit Menaka Aru Anyanya (1995), Millenium Sapon (2000), Ayananta (1992), Pass Sotalor Kothakata (2000), Arunimaar Swadesh (which is a collection of three novellas in the year 2001), the most famous work Felanee (2003), Kaitat Keteki (1999), Jalatarangar Sur (2016) and Tokora bahar SonarBeji (2014).

Ranjita Biswas translated her novel Ayananta (Dawn) which was published by Zubaan, New Delhi. Her another important work, the novel Felanee (2011) was translated into English by Deepika Phukan. This work of Kalita was also published by Zubaan, New Delhi, and was shortlisted for the Crossword Book Award.

The select text, "*Written in Tears*", is an English translation of the Assamese Asrulipi by Ranjita Biswas. The handpicked fictional texts of Kalita were later translated into English by Arunabha Bhuyan and was titled as Invitation.

Awards & Recognition:

Arupa Patangia Kalita received the Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad Award (1995), Katha Award (1998), Sahitya Sanskriti Award (2009) and Lekhika Samaroh Sahitya Award (2011) for her incomparable literary contribution to Assamese literature. She was the recipient of Sahitya Akademi Award (2014) for her short stories book titled “Mariam Austin Othoma Hira Baruah (2012). The eminent writer and translator, Ranjita Biswas, received the Sahitya Akademi Award for her translation work in the year 2017. The literary contribution of Ranjita Biswas of this collection of short stories translated into English helped the readers with the availability of such texts in English.

Kalita was recently awarded The Assam Valley Literary Award (2016) for her literary contribution to the field of Assamese literature. She recently released a collection of short stories titled “Aleksaan Banur Jaan (2015), and a novel “Atokora Bahara Sonar Beji (2014). It is quite noteworthy to mention that she has also written dialogues for Kothanodi, Assamese feature film also known as The River of Fables.

As per Anil Yenigul’s work, “Witnessing and Testimony of Traumatic Events and the Function of Cultural and Collective Memory in Harold Pinter’s Ashes to Ashes”, the characters impose silence on and around their self and get into the web of ‘emotional imprisonment’. The stories woven in these tell-tales of women are enveloped with the responsibility of the stories as testimonies of trauma which need attention and focus. The theme of displacement and estrangement are seen in these texts. According to Freud, when one witnesses a truth which is not available to them, the other and the subject are to bear the testimony. This other, subject or the listener become the witness of the trauma. The regular lives of the characters are enveloped with traumatic events.

These survivors, the mere witnesses to the brutality cannot explain their experiences in words. They sometimes get into the guilt of forming a false memory due to silence which completely distorted their memory. They reach the saturation point wherein they are unable to explain the situation they are dealing with. Looking at a different perspective, this silence functions as a secured wall for them, as they live in this enclosure without any past memories or may be distorted memories of past. Once they step out of this wall, they relive the disaster again in their distorted memories of past.

However, within this protecting wall of silence, survivors do not find any comfort; it is just a protection from the outer world. It is also a barrier between the survivor and the daily life and the actual events. This situation can be called “self-inflicted emotional imprisonment” (Felman and Laub 1991: 79). Laub comments on this silence: None find peace in silence, even when it is their choice to remain silent. Moreover, survivors who do not tell their story become victims of a distorted memory, that is, of a forcibly imposed “external

evil,” which causes an endless struggle with and over a delusion. The “not telling” of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny. The events become more and more distorted in their silent retention and pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor’s daily life. The longer the story remains untold, the more distorted it becomes in the survivor’s conception of it, so much so that the survivor doubts the reality of the actual events. (Felman and Laub 1991: 79)

Women in the text, *Written in Tears*, and *The Loneliness of Hira Barua*, are portrayed possessing ambition, grace, they navigate family, bear the violence and suffer the trauma and are yet resilient. As per the article published in *The Week* on 26th September 2020, according to the Sahitya Akademi, these short stories reflected the humanitarian outlook and sincerity of the author and her lucid style of writing and the suggestiveness in the language are remarkable in themselves. The Akademi also termed the collection as an important contribution to the genre of Indian fiction in Assamese.

Apart from being a writer, Kalita, is also a catalyst in the movement of feminism. With the essence of feminist perspective, she writes boldly and questions the society with the help of her female characters. In her interview with Indrani, Kalita admits that she has an element of empathy for the women engrossed in her texts. She says –

I am a woman and hence, I write about women in my society. In this uneven society that I belong to, I always feel I have a lot to say about women as a woman.. I take a gendered view of it.... Women are thrown away like garbage, oppressed, marginalized, rejected, but even in the midst of this are vibrantly asserting life. And I glorify their existence. (Kalita, 8. Jan. 2017)

Kalita is one of the terrific powerful voices in contemporary literature in Assamese language. The collection of short stories, “Written in Tears”, creates a spell-bound effect with her novellas and the beautiful landscapes amidst the conflicting atmosphere. Most of Kalita’s works are engrossed in realizing ones’ self, the identity of self, the concept of existence, spatial location of individuals and their identity with regard to their location and relationships in society, subjectivities, marginality and subaltern voices. Women are poised as central characters in her works displaying social realities which are an integral part of the society they live in, triggering their mere existence in relation to the identity, if they possess. Kalita questions the society through her works and female characters, she being a leading feminist from Assam.

Vaishna Roy in her article, “Ferns on her sador”, published in *The Hindu*, comments that these simple short stories render more imbibing customs and manners. She adds that the fifteen stories are soaked in nostalgia for a way of life slowly disappearing from the

interior regions of Assam. Roy remarks that the writer becomes a cultural anthropologist, engaging her text with the customs, traditions, manners, festivals and food in vivid and intricate detail.

Kalita says – A woman is invaded not only through physical atrocity; there are other means to violate her. However, a patriarchal society etches a different history ignoring the women alongside the real one in order to shadow the existence of women.... She also says, “*I believe if women keep silent, it is that they are allowing the male-dominated society to continue judging them.*” (Kalita, 2015:216)

Kalita declined the award from Assam Sahitya Sabha, on the grounds that the award was listed in the ‘**women only**’ category. “*Why should I be judged separately in a common ground like literary writing?*”

By rejecting the award which was exclusively meant to be given to women writers and not to the exceptional work or contribution in the literary arena, Kalita proves her point and thus sets herself as an example. She says, “*We women authors do not need any reservation quote*” (8 Jan. 2017)

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The texts proposed for this research works consist of the short stories from the texts – ‘*Written in Tears*’ and ‘*The Loneliness of Hira Barua*’. The select short stories that encapsulate my research area are ‘*Kunu’s Mother*’ and ‘*Ayengla of the Blue Hills*’ which are well-knitted by Arupa Patangia Kalita.

The texts selected for the research study, question and resist the male domination in the patriarchal society and interrogate the essence of such domination and its worth for the well-being. There is an inherent quest in order to establish an identity for one’s own in these works in which the protagonists resist the so-called patriarchal domination and the gender violence of the marginalized communities, especially women, who have always been endowed with, across generations.

The protagonists of the chosen texts challenge their position, oppression in the family and in the society, thereby, raising their voice to establish an identity for themselves. With the help of these texts, I would like to emphasize the power of gender in establishing one’s identity, the scope of ones’ existence and the kind of limitations that women in select stories are endowed with. In these short stories, the types of communities and social entities that women are woven into, the essence of the female bonding and their collective efforts to reaffirm the existence of their identity and the power of their togetherness are quite evident.

These texts examine how the dynamics of gender and identity play a vital role in the development of female psyche and further the process of women empowerment as a whole. I have attempted to reflect the intensity of violence, vested power in the male-dominant society, gender issues and identity crisis, relationships of men and

women through the sensitive portrayal of the female characters and their unending quest for identity during the course of their journey they had embarked on in order to facilitate harmony in their lives and thus in the society they live in.

The Assamese writer, Arupa Kalita Patangia, won Sahitya Akademi Award in 2014 for her book of short stories in Assamese title ‘*Mariam Austin Othoba Hira Barua*’ in the year 2014. This masterpiece was translated from Assamese to English by Ranjita Biswas. This award-winning collection housing 15 short stories brings forth the nostalgia of slippery life in the interior regions of Assam. Kalita displays her literary style as an anthropologist exploring the lifestyle, culture, mannerisms, conventions, traditions, customs, festivals, rituals and food in detail to give a very trivial account of life in Assam. Kalita’s engrossing stories bring to light the interior regions of Assam and its people alive.

Kalita’s characters display intimate portraits, women and their families, grace, determination, tragedy and trauma and ultimately their quiet resilience to their surroundings. According to the Sahitya Akademi, these stories in the collection reflect a humanitarian outlook and the sincere and honest efforts of the author. The intelligible and comprehensive language employed by the author set the ground for the narrative. The Sahitya Akademi also felt that this engrossing collection of short stories is one of the most important contributions to the genre of Indian fiction in Assamese language.

This mind-throbbing collection of short stories written in Assamese language which won the Sahitya Akademi Award, encompasses a variety of writing styles. The collection houses 15 short stories, out of which, a tale about an old woman, Hira Barua, taken as the title story of the book, was published by Pan Macmillan India.

The short stories collections penned by Arupa Patangia Kalita like *Written in Tears* (2015), *The Musk and Other Stories* (2017), and *The Loneliness of Hira Barua* (2020) document the tumultuous episodes in the history of Assam. As rightly said that a writer pens down and records events and experiences in and around his or her surroundings after a thorough investigation and exploration. Thus, giving rise to a textual narrative swelling with the social upheavals fuming the life of people in the vicinity. Kalita’s writings depict the recent history of the North eastern region of Assam using mighty insights from the history, postcolonialism, episodic memories and trauma, with an exclusive focus on women’s experiences from a woman’s perspective.

Gender discrimination has always been a problem faced by many in the society. As a matter of fact, it is the weak position of women in society which is the result of gender discrimination in the social and economic life. The dire need to identify oneself as a woman triggers identity crisis in the society for those who are dormant and living lives aloof in disguise. Through her fictional works, Arupa Kalita Patangia expresses her concern for women and thus provides strong voice to her female characters so

that they break the gender barrier system and uproot it completely from society. Laying emphasis on the role of women, the existing gender barrier system of society, woman's position in society and her voice against the dictated societal norms, need to be relooked upon which bear a deeper analysis to understand the real identity of a woman in the society.

It is a matter of fact that Kalita is one of the poignant voices of contemporary Assamese literature. Her works are quite bold and truthful representing the suppressed human voices of the contemporary society. In her collection of short stories, "*Written in Tears*", many references close to some texts like *The Bluest Eye* penned by Toni Morrison are quite evident. Kalita also translated this work of Toni Morrison into Assamese.

Arupa Patangia Kalita, portrays her characters from real life incidents and they do have an autobiographical touch. She believes that the period of insurgency cannot be fantasized. As she herself witnessed that period of terror and trauma, she is completely aware of the repercussions of the actions of men. Most of her stories are woven focusing the beautiful landscapes of Assam and the surrounding regions with a special focus on the conflicting atmosphere.

The tell-tales of Kalita speak invariably of the beautiful landscapes, the flora and fauna, and admire her hometown. With the help of these tales, she drifts back to the past period with a different perspective. Quite speculatively, she voyages her writing through the violent acts, conflicts and does not forget to describe the beautiful nature and gaping landscapes of Assam. She positions her characters amidst these spectacular landscapes depicting realism. (Jaipur Festival, 16:41-17:24)

Kalita's characters are entwined with the nature, and its family, animals, flowers, birds and tress, etc. She employed ecocriticism by relating her people with the surrounding nature with an attempt to display the close connection between these natural elements. She boldly presents her characters as indigenous people who really affirm their sense of belongingness with their immediate surrounding and nature.

The indigenous characters, thus centered in the story, being a part of nature, drift away from the nature and are subjected to separation due to the emergence of modern ideologies. However, their attempts to regain their self and identify themselves with nature are in vain. The beautiful landscapes and peaceful nature are polluted with the spilling violence of people. These indigenous people identify themselves with their immediate environment.

Kalita's another masterpiece, "*Ayengla of the Blue Hills*", centers around the protagonist, Ayengla. She is a happy woman who has a loving husband and blessed with two children. She is delighted with her paddy fields and a *chang ghar* with pigs and chickens. The blue hills that rise high behind her home is a sight of delight and admiration for Ayengla. Most of the days, these so-called blue hills are covered with cotton-wool clouds and veils

of mist. Describing the surrounding nature and bringing to life the concept ecocriticism, Kalita relates the bonding that humans have with their surrounding environment and nature. On sunny days, these blue hills shine like bright jewels under the sun. When she was away from home, she was always homesick for her blue hills. (203)

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

As per the review updated in Outlook Web Desk, in view of Sahitya Akademi the stories of *Written in Tears*, is collection of short stories which reflect the humanitarian outlook and sincerity of the author, her style of writing which is quite lucid and remarkable use of language.

The book review published on the webpage, emphasizes the notion that the title '*Written in Tears*', is too appropriate, as these stories woven together, perhaps, were really written in tears. Ayengla and her world turn upside down when the masked men crawl out of the dark forests like ants out of the wood work together to complete the tasks at hand. The review talks about the painful, gut-wrenching and dark realities that bring chills in the spine with the suffering of women during that period. Those beautiful images drawn by the writer of the beautiful houses, gardens and blossoming and burgeoning flowers become victims of the destructive fires that start burning everything in close encounters embracing people also in the venomous fire.

The review stresses on the fact that hadn't been these stories translated to English, the world would have been ignorant about the history of violence caused by the agitation in Assam. The readers of other languages, except Assamese, would have never been introduced to the atrocities inflicted upon women in Assam during the period of unrest. Yet, quite remarkably, these women were extremely resilient for us to understand from this quote "*Winners never quit, quitters never win*". Kalita was also found to quote from P B Shelley – "*If winter comes. Can spring be far behind?*", which is a tender and mournful portrayal of the spirit of the Assam people.

The traumatic episode of the army men brutalizing her makes a victim, a sufferer and is left with nothing except grief and insanity. Kalita seems to bring up the question of Women's Apparent Silence (Habib 677). In practical life a woman is – completely insignificant – and is – all but absent from history. (Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 43)

Nilanjana S Roy, in her article, "*Fields of Blood*", published on the webpage of *Business Standard*, remarks that at the end, Ayengla wonders what does people actually want and the reasons behind their intentions in creating problems and conflicts. With these thoughts and the restless ambiguity in her mind, Roy implores further: "*If they did succeed in getting their own land, who would rule it and who would have to leave?*" (204) She also adds that there are timeless and timely

questions which have no answers like the stories in *Written in Tears*.

Parbina Rashid, in her article, *“Tales of Suppression and Uprising*, published on the webpage of the daily, *The Tribune*, remarks that it requires a high degree of maturity for writers to deal subjects like torture, secret killings, rape, subjugation of women in the name of culture without making passions for indulging in voyeurism. (The Tribune)

As mentioned earlier, the true testimony refers to the traumatic experience felt by the subject and its painful recurrence which forces the subject to testify it further. In the story *“Ayengla of the Blue Hills”*, the protagonist, Ayengla, who gets raped becomes silent and imposes silence on herself. However, when the subject encounters the experience or any such related situation later in life, as in Ayengla’s case, the trauma takes over her life whenever she encounters the brook. Ayengla loses her mind eventually after she witnesses the trauma which was duly in store for her.

“The story talked about a girl pretty like the stream, and always laughing happily. Her name was Ayengla. Her grandfather had named her after this character....(206)

As Charner Parry recalls, gendered violence can be in the form of ‘human violence’, the violence which involves man and woman, and usually the female is considered as the victim. The only reason for such consideration is the unequal distribution of power between men and women under the disguise of patriarchal shades that vest more power in the hands of men in the society and consider women as their subordinates.

IV. RESEARCH ANALYSIS

Ayengla of the Blue Hills

Ayengla was not much perturbed by the talk about agitation, bombing, army, dead corpses.... But she never felt tired talking about her muse, Ayengla, of her grandmother’s folktales.

She sang softly the song of the brook’s origin..... Four or five army jawans lifted her up and took her to the jungle near the brook....Ayengla’s own private nook...She then turned into a stone....the happy, every-laughing Ayengla had disappeared, she was a stone-like person without any emotion. (208)

Some people suggested that she would be better if she had a baby..... she would come out of her stupor....painful to watch the pregnant Ayengla. From the stone-like woman came out a stillborn baby, a girl ahead of the due date.....dead.(208)

Through her literary works, Kalita achieves that desired degree of maturity by capturing the pain of her victims. Her style of writing not only evokes the emotions that the characters hold within but the load of thoughts

that engulf them. Her writings display the intensity of protest which is required to establish oneself as a writer thereby endowing a sense of identity to the characters, and thus, Kalita, excels her domain beyond all her limitations, if any.

The story *“Ayengla of the Blue Hills”* is a true testimony to the atrocities induced on women and the trauma that followed. As defined by Cathy Caruth (1995), the definition of trauma is “The pathology consists, rather, solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatised is precisely to be possessed by an image or event”. (4-5)

This gut-wrenching story is a tragic narrative of a beautiful young woman whose family is her world and is much unaware about the happenings in the world outside. Her life takes a tumultuous turn when she gets raped by the army men and this incident cripples her for the rest of her life. She gets frozen with time and is unable to relate to the present. The efforts of her husband and other family members, eventually, rest in vain, and Ayengla, is storm-stricken still.

Failed to revive the lost Ayengla back to her real self, her husband marries another woman. He, thus, starts a new life amidst the new identity of Ayengla. However, unaware of the happenings around her, Ayengla lapses herself into a gloomy world of loneliness and finally death. Through this story, Kalita explores the psychological effects of oppression and the effects of trauma on an individual, exclusively, the transition of a happy young woman into a dead rock. Kalita picks her characters from different communities they belong to, in order to strike a common element of suffering and pathos that the characters encounter in their lives, irrespective of their class, creed and family entitlements of Assamese, Bodo and Naga communities.

The rituals, traditions, customs, beliefs and everyday lives of these Bodo, Naga and Assamese communities differ so as the problems that the people dwell in. The similarity that creates unison is the sad plight of those women seen in times of unrest. Most of the Kalita and her works are woman-centered and represent the different ways in which the insurgency and militancy affect the population, especially, women. However, in the lives of women who are, left destitute, helpless, in a traumatic state of mental and emotional shock, positive developments can be expected which help them to be self-reliant.

Kalita’s efforts voice out not only about the insurgency but the surviving loss, those drastic changes and uncertainty and the insistence that the individual be bestowed with the identity and dignity which is quintessential. Kalita has woven her stories quite intrinsically imbibing the beauty of the flora and fauna adding glimpses of ordinary lives and everyday errands.

Kunu's Mother

In the short story, in the collection, "*Written in Tears*", we have the story of a single mother in "*Kunu's Mother*". The central figure, Kunu's mother, the widowed mother of Kunu, is forced to send her only daughter away from home to save her from a savage surrender.

The female characters portrayed by Kalita go through series of relentless suffering and agony. Mr. Kiren Rijiju, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, at the South Asian Women's Peace and Security Conference rightly admitted that, "Women were the first and worst sufferers in conflict zones worldwide and in the disturbed areas, be it the Northeast or Jammu and Kashmir". The said conference was held at the India International Centre, New Delhi, on 21st and 22nd September 2015.

The minister observing the crimes against women also remarked that it is the result of a deep-rooted social problem which has to be uprooted completely. He remarked that the efforts of the government, police and judiciary alone will not be sufficient to curb the menace of crimes against women, but is possible with the collective efforts of society joining hands with government, police and judiciary. He also remarked that there is a dire need for change in the mindset of the society which is a very crucial element for women's safety. At the inaugural of the conference, Rijiju said, "I cannot imagine such atrocities still happening on women in the 21st century. Gender bias and inequality are very grave".

The said conference had representatives from Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Philippines and Myanmar. He added, "A country cannot claim to progress where women are not safe in society. It is not a question of a man or a woman, it is a matter of humanity".

Another aspect of looking at trauma experience is as a bystander who can be just a mere eye witness but not a participant in the suffering but still experiences the effects of trauma. In the story "*Kunu's mother*", Kunu's mother is seen at the helm of affairs and witnesses crowd gathered at the threshold, who are either as spectators or to support Kunu's mother who is in desperate need for moral support.

It was rightly stated by Jane Austen in her Letter that —Single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor, which is one very strong argument in favour of matrimony. (Austen Jane Selected Letters 1796-1817. March 13, 1816)

Kalita has undoubtedly engaged her text with autobiographical elements, as she has seen, from close quarters, her characters in reality, experience the life and trauma. She was closely witnessed the terror unleash its power and give birth to agitation in Assam and result in the Bodo separatist movement. This necessitates her to genuinely pick up her characters from various sections and tribes from her region in Assam.

The responsibility of the listener is to avoid being an empathic voyeur but to seek the truth by building on the testimony provided. The responsibility, as Derrida says, is however, something which always "remains to be

done" as also "unprogrammable and inexhaustible" (Lucy, 2004, pp 114). In *Kunu's Mother*, an insurgent forcibly wants to marry a young girl, Kunu. However, what remains to be done instead of just becoming a victim, is very well portrayed in this story by Kalita wherein the mother tries every attempt to save her young daughter from the trauma that she would embrace with had not the girl been sent to her relatives' place for her safety.

*That's Kunu's mother. Neither too tall nor too short.
Must be about thirty. Perhaps less, perhaps more....
(161)*

Kunu's mother is a hardworking woman, having her world centered around her daughter, Kunu, in times of strife. The mother daughter duo is happy-go-lucky in times of adversity having their own parts played well to face the future. However, their lovely happy paradise is disturbed when an insurgent lands at the threshold demanding to marry Kunu by all means.

Kalita's characters not only face deadly encounters but dispose their courage amidst chaos and conflicts, in the similar lines, as Kunu's mother displays huge amounts of courage and bravery in ensuring her daughter's safety against the threats of the insurgents, the andolan gangs and she affirms her stand in front of her own people who side up with the insurgents for the safety of their lives and their lands.

The story "*Kunu's Mother*" testifies the vulnerability of women, especially, those women who lack the support of men in their immediate environment. As in every household and a family, a child becomes the apple of the eye. Invariably, Kunu's mother becomes alone and isolated after the death of her husband, however, centers her life around her little ward, Kunu, the apple of her eye.

Ann Oakley (1972) was among the first to make the distinction between the sex we are born with and the gender we acquire. She defined sex as the anatomical and physiological characteristics which signify biological maleness and femaleness and gender as socially constructed masculinity and femininity. Furthering the concept of masculinity and femininity, there is, altogether, a different way of looking at it. Masculinity and femininity are not defined by biology, to attribute these terms in the sex an individual is born into may be considered as an illogical phenomenon. However, these stereotypical mindsets are attributed by social, cultural and psychological attributes. These are the attributes one acquires by becoming a man or a woman over a period of time by dwelling in the society they live in. The physical, mental, behavioural and biological characteristics and the variation between femininity and masculinity define the socially constructed term called 'gender'.

Kunu grows up to be a beautiful young woman and grabs attention of young women. The mother's

intentions for the young daughter's marriage takes a toll in order to finance it to bid a farewell to her daughter.

Well, one day she would have to marry Kunu off. What kind of bridegroom would she get? She was trying her best to give her daughter an education. She was hoping that after passing the school Kunu would go to college. She was hoping to marry her off to a graduate boy, a nice, quiet one..... A girl like her was rare in the community..... In looks, work, manners, she could not find anyone matching up to her daughter... (164)

Ridiculing her dreams for her daughter's future, a young militant drops in at the door step and visits Kunu's home frequently, enamoured by Kunu's beauty. It's quite ironical that he demands to get Kunu married off to him and starts sending alarm signals to Kunu's mother.

One day a 'surrendari' arrived at their house after parking his dazzling new motorcycle. He was plump and fair. He was wearing an expensive pair of jeans and matching jacket. He sat unceremoniously on Kunu's cane chair.... (173)
'Mai ei, this man follows me when I go to school'. (175)

Observing the difficulties that her daughter was facing on her way to school, Kunu's mother decides to send her daughter away to live with her relatives.

Kunu's mother becomes the victim of the wrath of the young man, once she is back home, after leaving her daughter at her relative's place. Ironically, the people of the village advise her to abide by the wishes of the community they live in and succumb to the desires of the young man. They exhibit their lack of power in decision-making, by forcing her to act according to the dictum, if she wants to retain her plot of land which is her asset.

'As the word spread from mouth to mouth, more people gathered. And then in the evening light the people surged towards the house of Kunu's mother. She saw that among them was Mainao's mother too. The people came in and stood silently. Kunu's mother saw that her small courtyard was now full of people'. (180)

It is rightly remarked by Aruni Kashyap, author of *The House with a Thousand Stories*, that people's resilient nature and strong will to protest, question and stand firm are the possible solutions that one gets from Kalita's fiction. It is imperative to enlighten the young readers to intricately analyze the deep-hidden insights with regard to the treatment bestowed to those deprived women in appropriacy with the title. The very idea of the identity they possess is the rubrics to subject them to violence is a prime question which has to be answered by the contemporary society.

Camila Brandstrom in her work *"Gender and Genre"*, rightly cites, "The female protagonists search for knowledge has a more negative effect on her because she

feels burdened by social injustices, as she cannot take action to solve the problem" (16). These chosen texts for the research study, challenge the feminine self and the challenges that the patriarchal society tries to impose upon women.

In reference to Kunu's mother, Ferguson in the work *"The Voyage in Women in Fiction"*, remarks that women who violate the norms and refuse to follow the female pattern of development are perceived as rebels and thus they end up unhappy and insane.

At this juncture, Kunu's mother finds herself surrounded by her people, but seemingly, aloof and alone, amidst her own people. She feels completely devastated, broken from inside, and finds herself absolutely helpless and is unable to decide her future course of action.

Carol Lazzaro Lewis in her essay, *'The Female "Bildungsroman": Calling It Into Question'*, states that a Bildungsroman generally consists of "socially critical answers, in which the individual attempts to transform or transcend social relations.... in which social relations are arranged to foster the growth of the protagonist". At the end, however, the readers are left with an impression of the might of Kunu's mother and her persona to confront the enemy on his face.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the observations of research study, an analysis can be drawn about the psyche of the female characters and their unending quest for identity amidst the challenges in a patriarchal society. From the select texts, we find that Arupa Patangia Kalita has been successful in her attempts to portray the realistic and reliable picture of the weak position of women in the society, and throws light on the gender inequality between the genders in the short stories. The author affirmed the bold voice to her female characters which come to life trying to break the gender barrier and search for their own identity in order to establish their prime existence in the society. These women are found to free themselves from the clutches of the patriarchal society. Based on the study, we can conclude that the female characters belonging to different castes, class grow powerful by the end of the story leave a lasting impression on the minds of readers. These characters are quite deeply rooted with their inherent cultural values and represent the Indian woman. These characters in their unending quest for identity and selfhood exemplify honesty, trust and fight their own battles.

The female characters display independent thought process and are found to be far more simple, fair, fearless and more assertive in nature going through the hardships that they encounter in their everyday lives. The paper discussed about various facets of women, who have been subjected to oppression and suffering. Instead of succumbing to their challenges, these women are found to explore ways to free themselves from the limitations of

the patriarchal society and thus establish an identity of their own.

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