
Seven Circles Round the Fire: Arupa Patangiya Kaltia's Fiction in the Light of Jane Austen's Concept of Marriage

KARABI HAZARIKA

Associate Professor of English
Naharkatiya College, Assam, India

In *A Literature of Their Own*, Elaine Showalter shows how women's literature has evolved, starting from the Victorian period to modern writing. She breaks down the movement into three stages — the Feminine, a period beginning with the use of the male pseudonym in the 1840s until 1880 with George Eliot's death; the Feminist, from 1880 till the winning of the vote in 1920; and the Female, from 1920 till the present-day, including a "new stage of self-awareness about 1960." (Showalter: 13). Showalter finds in each subculture, and thus in women's literature, first a long period of imitation of the dominant structures of tradition and woman's novel ...” moved in the direction of an all inclusive female realism, a broad, socially informed exploration of the daily lives and values of women within the family and the community” (Showalter: 29). This Feminine phase includes women writers such as Jane Austen, Brontes and Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot. These women attempted to integrate themselves into a public sphere, a male tradition, and many of them felt a conflict of obedience and resistance which appears in many of their novels. They “explored and defined womanhood. They rejected the ideal of self-sacrifice and stood up the male establishment in an outspoken manner” (Habib: 692). “The language with which they could fully express their experience as women and their sufferings as they still identified themselves within the confines

of Victorian bourgeois propriety was a part of this 'subculture'(Habib: 692). The gender discrimination and perpetuation of patriarchy are the root cause of the agony of womanhood all over the world at all times. The fight of women in an unequal arena is sometimes voiceless giving spur to issues which permeate the socio-political culture of a nation affecting daily existence. Fiction is used for deconstructing sexual differences and to undermine patriarchal power in 19th century England when women emancipation became the catchword for every household. The focus was on the problems of marginalization of women and since ages the gender bias against women witnessed by ages of human history generated great debate in fiction of the period and Jane Austen pioneered the literary movement in the ever possible realistic way with her six great novels where she was loud and vocal to erase politics of gender from the countenance of society. Male preference in cultural construct and resultant angst ordaining tenets for female existence is the target of attack and object of satirical portrayal. Stories of gender discrimination sounds always dull for a patriarch and this may be one reason why the novels of Austen were regarded more as 'domestic novel'. It was an age when Lord Halifax's *Advice to a Daughter* was running to seventeen editions in English before 1791 but it was detrimental to the growth of female individuality. Jane Austen in her Letter stated 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) Quite naturally Jane Austen's fictional voice created a tremendous pressure on the patriarchal psyche of the society. The attitudes of men and women towards marriage and family in her novels bespeak their level of the internalization of cultural traditions of the time. But even today we may regard Jane Austen as our contemporary and the novels have not lost their relevance reminding us of what Simone de Beauvoir in her famous treatise *The Second Sex*

on the marginalisation of women has concluded that women is 'the inessential who never goes back to being essential ... the absolute Other without reciprocity (Beauvoir: 159). The assertion of Austen in the novels like Beauvoir's fits for women in almost all communities irrespective of being rich or poor, developed or underdeveloped, of all countries and of all times. In India too Jane Austen's outstanding popularity like Balzac is chiefly due to the fact that never before her, women were identified in fiction as a mere third in a society that customarily reduces women to the 'other'. In this context of universal appeal of Jane Austen's novel, we may attempt an analysis of women centric novels of Arupa Patangiya Kalita who also pioneered among the young generation of novelists of the North East India the female emancipation movement in the literary world by visualizing the archetypal image of women in multiple socio political perspectives. She in fact added a third dimension to the female predicament imposed upon them by the vicious cycle of patriarchal machinations. The long tenure of insurgency and militancy and the consequent aftermaths rendered the female community of Assam, nay the North East devastated economically and psychologically depriving them of any social position in the ethnic conflicts in a society which defines women as inferior, outsiders and failures. The militancy and insurgency additionally create a third burden for North East women. It is hard to reconcile with a long enduring stigma of socio – economic exploitation despite the passage of centuries. The condition of women of Jane Austen's women is now better than these women of North East India of our time. Infinite mental and physical strength initiated the women of this society to fight against pernicious social and economic oppression coupled with domestic deprivation. A social consciousness born out of their triple oppression compelled them to assert their identity by talking back in their own voices by penning down what they felt through generations on being poor and anonymous.

Patriarchal Hegemony and Feminist Perspectives:

Writers like Arupa Patangiya Kalita following the feminists of other countries set themselves upon the task of highlighting the impact of established doctrine of patriarchal hegemony and constructed cultural authority. Arupa's success as a woman writer is a landmark in the struggle for female emancipation and assertion of sexual identity of women. It is long and winding road to reach the height of success in carrying the accountability as a woman writer and to show finer shades of perception like a great literary figure like Jane Austen although she maintains her unique individual approach as an Indian writer of fiction with the sensibility of an Indian woman in her focus on the identity crisis of women. The adverse effects of patriarchal and other power structures force the females to a lifelong subordination in a society that values maleness and worships male potential for dominating women. What is more Arupa like Austen suggests a cultural transformation in the attitude of the female to the males and vice versa. A hope of resurrection is roused in removing the patriarch-inspired clichés from the social structures. Arupa in her novels explores the inner complexities of capitalist and sexist Indian society and the difficulties it poses to those who constitute its non-creamy layers. She sets forth to voice the struggles, hurdles and aspirations of the suffering women who have remained out the focus of not only the feminine version of social history but also ignored in the modern re-interpretations. She responds to the urgency to relate the tale of this triple suppression of women in the male dominated society of an Indian state which lags far behind the developed ones in matters of education, literacy and other social parameters.

Social role theory proposes that one reason women and men confirm gender stereotypes is because they act in accordance with their social roles, which are often segregated along gender lines. This theory believes that women and men

confirm gender stereo-types in large part because the different roles that they perform place different social demands upon them.

The feminist thought and feminist movement in the West have some influence on the woman's movement in the developing country like India. Yet, feminism as it exists today in India has gone beyond its western counter parts. In the Indian context several feminists have realized that the subject of women's invasion in India should not be reduced to confrontation or conflict between men and women. The woman in order to literate herself and for advancement needs to empower herself to confess different institutional structures and cultural practices that subject herself to patriarchal domination and comfort. In Indian Context, Feminism means, an awareness against the women's oppression and writing their experiences of exploitation in male dominated society especially at work places, at home. It also builds awareness among women to change the situation of women subjugation and suppression on the basis of gender, patriarchy.

Both Jane Austen and Arupa Patangia Kalita used 'Marriage' as the main theme of their novels. In going to depict the pictures of 'Marriage', they expressed their bold views regarding the rights of women that are reflected in their novels. They have chosen the problems and issues faced by the women in today's male dominated world as the theme of their books. Many Indian women novelists have explored women related issues as theme in their writings, and Arupa Patangia Kalita's novels published in very recent times have treated the agonized stories of marriage to give us a picture of gender discrimination and ostracized life of women in the North East India. But Kalita at the same time shows how a woman fights against this domestic imprisonment and patriarchal designs.

Today women's movement has not only grown but also matured. Voices of self criticism are being increasingly raised. The commitment of many women to the movement has created

greater awareness. But there is enough of an effort to address the middle class consciousness which is an important catalyst for change. A number of Indian feminists have a hands on problem solving kind of approach. But Kalita in a close resemblance to Austen, goes beyond this propagandist approach as it is interspersed with artistic profundity and sensibility. Her success in reaching the readers occurs because of her effort to tackle the problem from within the community rather than imposed from outside .She takes up issues which show the maturity of concepts. In Jane Austen' novels we see the preoccupations with certain burning issues related to women suffering in a patriarchal society. But now in modern times a novelist like Arupa aims at empowering the entirety of a woman's experience.

The Indian women's movement has a history of its own. No doubt some urban activists may have been educated in the West, but the female agenda comes from a reality rooted here. While the West may have fallen prey to "introversion" and "depoliticisation", Indian feminism is in the summertime of its campaign years. While the rather narrow sphere of sexual politics may occupy trans-Atlantic thought, here it is the nuts and bolts of the female predicament that are central. How to secure one's livelihood, to stop menfolk from consuming too much alcohol, to ensure that women get good post-natal care and to guarantee literacy for children. In the turmoil of modernising India, campaigners must be made of sterner stuff than theories. This is suggested in the writings of Arupa as her novels are not just the snapshots on female suppression.

In a situation of extreme poverty, trying to secure equal rights for women is meaningless. To create a non-oppressive, non-patriarchal society for women is the dream that is roused in the novels of Arupa. We have walked a long road since Jane Austen wrote her first line for her *Pride and Prejudice*. Bygone are days when a woman in not possession of a vast fortune is in need of a husband. Indian Novelists like Arupa have shown

us to think in this bold way . The clamour for economic self sufficiency is more important in the present society rather than seeking a wealthy husband.

The custom-bound Indian women of conservative family feel inhibited to raise their voice against male domination in the society. This was because of their inferiority complex and rigid code of conduct which was imposed on them years back. Their ambitions, desires, sense and sensibility are faithfully expressed in the novels of the women novelists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Their novels show how an educated woman too sometime suffers psychologically due to an inferiority complex and deep sense of inhibitions. They depict the image of the new women waiting for emancipation and liberation in a fast changing world. The Indian women novelists belong to other pre-independence period during which both Hindu and Muslim communities in India were being governed rigidly by their traditions. Due to the miseries, the women novelists of feminist perspective committed themselves to women's cause with a view to ameliorating their position. With the increasing awareness of feminism as a new revolutionary idea, the trend of feminist writing persisted in Indian literature.

Women of late 21st century in India as well as in Assam, are still deprived of required level of socio-cultural, educational and economic advantages usually enjoyed by men in Indian society. Women in Assamese society like many other societies of India are still under the pressure to conform to traditional concepts of womanly behaviour, to be self-effacing and to invest all their efforts to serve their husbands.

It is evident that the writing that might give expression to a very personal emotion, it becomes universal and symbolizes human emotions itself when readers get identify with it. Through the writings, a writer gives shape to human feelings and so it is a part of a social movement. Many novelists have exploited their skill in projecting the agonized mind of the

suffering women. Both Austin and Arupa Patangia's portrayal of women characters bear authenticity to their feminist perspective. These women novelists focus on the existential predicament and travails of the subdued women in a male dominated society which are governed by rigid traditions and restrictions. They are found going deep into the inner mind of the repressed women by virtue of their feminine sensibility and psychological insight and bring them into light. Though the country has attained tremendous progress, the role of Indian women remains the same and it is very well reflected in the literary works of Arupa Patangia.

The distinctive feature of the women's movement in the 90's is the strong links between women of the Third World as distinct from the West as well as alliances with other democratic citizens. Days of putting up 'women's only' signs are over. Women now reach out to all other democratic forums because women's rights are human rights. The selected works of Arupa Patangia taken for the study very well reflect the patriarchal dominance in Indian as well as Assamese society over the years has reduced the status of the women.

Marriage as a Theme

Almost every language of the Northeast region has thrown up some remarkable women writers, sensitive, outspoken and critical of the state of affairs in the region. They have responded to gender issues in the regional and national context questioning the complicity of power structures with patriarchy. Women writers like Indira Goswami, Nirupama Borgohain, Temsula Ao, Mamang Dai, Easterine Iralu, and many others have poignantly captured many unforgettable stories of women registering their protest against patriarchal hegemony. So, a distinctively female literary tradition in Northeast India has developed the authentic female voice is heard in women's texts where the writers shared the varied experiences of women's

lives. These texts can be related to their global counterparts. Thus the exploration of the Marriage concept in the writings of Northeast India where the feminist upsurge is recognizably strong is required as in a woman's life marriage is a vital issue. Arupa Patangiya Kalita's fiction deals with the marriage theme from multiple perspectives of Assamese life and society and her texts may be related to those of Jane Austen whose novels also offer a detailed study of Marriage in the life of a woman of her time. Even on a first reading Jane Austen's novels make the readers aware of a world of complacency cohesiveness and stability. In the society that Jane Austen depicted a young woman's avowed intention is to trap men into marriage rather than fall truly in love. All personal accomplishments were therefore a preparation to become the best possible bride, committed to: "contributing daily and hourly to the comfort of husbands, of parents, of brothers and sisters... in the intercourse of domestic life" (Gisborne qtd. in Monaghan 1981: 106) Outside family the recourse available for a woman was to be an arbitrator of manners. Moreover, as Christopher Gillie comments: "Unless a woman had a private income, happy matrimony was the only way in which middle and upper class women could normally hope to find themselves satisfied, esteemed and secure. But limited mobility restricted choice" (Gillie:98) Arupa Patangiya looked at marriage from a different perspective and her attitude to women springs directly from the social and political environment which surrounded her in the typical Assamese society, which is very much common with the North East life in its wholeness.

Women had been considered naturally the weaker sex and are built biologically, emotionally and socially weak for their role as child bearer and homemaker. In the eighteenth century English society, as in all other societies, there seems to be a certain cultural, traditional belief that men and women are different from each other. The society treats boys and girls as they grow up, on an unequal basis, with regards to anticipated

gender-defined roles for them. The severe restrictions laws and customs of eighteenth and nineteenth century England placed on women made women look to marriage as a means of stability and made women even more dependent on men. Middle class women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not expected to think of themselves as members of the nation of individuals. Jane Austen is now considered as one of the greatest pioneers of the feminist movement in English literature. Her portrayal of women provides an interesting outlook to the future aspects of feminism, which may be even better considered by looking at earlier writings. The voice of certain social types is heard through dialogues in Austen's works. Austen's novels contain an elegant state of social criticism of the community in which she lived because they touch on women's place and outlook. The daily lives of women and their thoughts and emotions are the themes of her novels. Austen's novels, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* are the excellent examples of how playfully Austen refuses the silence and position of women in the society. Furthermore, Jane Austen is talented in balancing the social roles of her characters with their inner feelings and thoughts

Importance of Marriage in Jane Austen's novels:

The issue of marriage as a patriarchal institution has been thought important and has been addressed by feminists because it contributes to women's powerlessness. Feminist scholars today find it imperative to expose all forms of power in order to eradicate women's subordination.

The unsatisfactory conditions of unmarried women in British society in the eighteenth century often led to the phenomenon of matchmaking and husband hunting practiced by their relatives. One of the most important themes of Jane Austen's novel is 'Love and Marriage' Being an unromantic person in the eve of romantic age she deals with the theme of

love with a very calculative and clever manner. During her time women were not allowed to inherit or make money for themselves. Therefore marriage was the only option left before them for achieving a secured future. According to Mary Evans:

“... with the very few exceptions (Emma Woodhouse being one) women in eighteenth century England be they members of the gentry, the urban middle class, or the rural poor needed to marry in order to guarantee for themselves economic support.” (Evans:8)

Rachel M. Brownstein remarks that “Except for Emma, all Austen’s novels are about girls who are in some sense homeless and in the end find homes.” (Brownstein 1994:133). Even Elizabeth too is threatened by the loss of home at Longbourne as her parental home is entailed to Mr. Collins. Towards the end of the novel she succumbs to the allurements: ‘she does, as she claims, fall in love with Darcy’ upon first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley” (Brownstein 1994:133). True to the spirit of romantic comedy, Elizabeth’s marriage is the long –promised happy end to an otherwise sombre realistic story of the search for home and money.. Thus the principal theme of Jane Austen’s novels is always based on matrimony. Being a realist, Austen draws her materials from actual life as she sees around. She depicts the social life of her time in her novels in a very realistic manner. During her period, marriages took place within a class. Young women aim at marrying a wealthy man. Likewise, Men also aim to marry suitably to someone of their social class and preferably with some money or property of her own. The 19th century England had serious social problems from the heyday of Royalty and Nobility. One of the most significant of these was the tendency to marry for money. A person sought a partner based on the dowry receivable and their allowance. This process went both ways: a beautiful woman might be able to catch a rich husband, or a charming and handsome man could persuade a rich young girl. In these marriages, money was the only consideration.

Love was left out, with the thought that it would develop as the years went by. As David Cecil suggests-

“Her books express a general view of life. It is the view of that eighteenth-century civilisation of which she was the last exquisite blossom. One might call it the moral realistic view” [Cecil, *Poets and Story Tellers*, 115].

Austen illustrates her attitude towards the position of unmarried women in the society of her time.

Stone Lawrence describes four basic reasons for getting married which influenced a choice of a partner for life in the eighteenth-century Britain. The first and most traditional motive for marriage was the economic or social or political consolidation. Marriage was thus primarily a contract between two families for the exchange of concrete benefits, not so much for the married couple as for their parents and kin. The second motive was personal affection, companionship and friendship based on the moral, intellectual and psychological qualities of the prospective spouse, tested by a lengthy period of courtship. The third option was physical attraction, stimulated by some degree of mutual experimentation before marriage, a possibility open to young people of high rank only when away from home, or people from lower classes among whom physically intimate courting was customary. The fourth possible personal motive was romantic love as portrayed in fiction and on the stage, an obsessive concentration upon the virtues of another person, blindness to all his or her possible defects, and rejection of all other options or considerations, in particular such important matters as money or property [Stone, 181-183].

But Jane Austen was never in favour of match-making business. She frequently emphasizes how the conditions concerning position of women and marriage existing in British society lead to humiliating measures, as matchmaking and husband hunting testify. Austen uses the Bennet's marriage to illustrate the consequences of marriages of convenience that were very common in her time.

Austen's *Mansfield Park* describes a plutocratic family and patriarch struggling to maintain the stability of their economy, social status, and hierarchy as well as introducing the conditions that lead to either rebellion against or submission to patriarchal control. It is a reflection of Britain's struggle to deal with the economic and moral consequences of slavery and its abolition. *Mansfield Park* exposes the ways in which gentlemanly conduct contributes to the maintenance of systemic marginalization.

Jane Austen believes that women are as intelligent and capable as man and she considers the inferior status of women in the society to be unjust. Through the plot of the novel of *Pride and Prejudice* she wants to show how Elizabeth refuses to marry Darcy only for financial support and at last she accepts his proposal of marriage for being the person whom she truly loves and respects. Moreover, a young lady's elopement is a cause for great scandal to the entire family. Austen reveals that act of scandal through the elopement of Lydia with Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice* and Maria with Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park*. Through her novels Jane Austen gives the readers a message that wealth, the pursuit of property and craziness to achieve it does not constitute virtue. Through her novel *Mansfield Park* Austen shows that the ownership of property is not in any sense a guide to the moral worth of the individual.

The 18th century is a very significant period in order to analyse how the society at that time dealt with women. Women in the 18th century were not considered independent. They were not educated to become individuals but were merely to obey some established codes of society. On matters of marriage they could reject a proposal, but could never make their own choice. They were expected to wait patiently until marriage conferred upon them an identity and a future. "Marriage in Jane Austen is closely bound up with money. In an age where there are no social services, no insurance schemes, no national, medical care,

pension schemes for sickness or old age; where large families are the norm and where divorce is virtually out of the question, a man who romantic himself to heavy responsibility, and the woman who marries, stakes the rest of her life on his performance of them. An adequate income is not merely desirable, it is vital. Hence, it is a very reasonable concern on everyone's part with the assets of a possible suitor, and the fortune of a possible wife." (Craik 1969:93-94) .

Austen's fiction also exposes the economic and social system for enforcing marriage and for enfeebling women. In addition, it illustrates some of the realities and pitfalls of marriage. In her novel *Sense and Sensibility*, Jane Austen reveals the gender limitations involved in the society of late eighteenth century.

Though some critics disagree with the view that she is a feminist in her writings, but it is obvious that Austen may have found it necessary in her time to hide her dissatisfaction with women's status in a man-made and male-favouring world. In the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century, the male-favouring social system of the time often not only denied women the right to a proper education but also left them with no choice but to get married. Though Austen lets her heroines marry for the sake of her own survival in a male-favouring society, this does not mean that we should discard her feminist awareness.

In Austen's novels, the significance of social roles and the discrimination between genders while developing social roles can clearly be observed. Besides, Austen's construction of her characters and the interaction between those characters reveal that she is aware of the values of her time. The protest of her heroines against the secondary place of women shows that Austen creates heroines that have a self-conscious identity. In spite of her sincere effort in this regard, Jane Austen has always been criticized for her muteness and covertness in sharing the universal message of female voice with her audience. But we must realise that as a middle class woman,

Austen's rights for expressing her thoughts were restricted by the rules of the community in which she lived. The pressure of social regularities was so strong that she could not even use her name in the first publications of many of her novels. Nevertheless, Austen's efforts to react against the patriarchal values of eighteenth century England make her a feminist writer of modern times. Through her novels Austen subtly encourages a restructuring of society in which the limitations of patriarchal capitalist ideologies are abolished in favour greater freedoms of expression.

Marriage is a patriarchal institution of entrapment that more often leaves women feeling unfulfilled. Sarah Gamble in says that marriage remains an "*enduring institution...a form of compulsory heterosexuality, and the means by which the oppression of women is perpetuated sexually, economically, and socially*" (Sarah Gamble: 269).

Importance of Marriage in Arupa Patangia's Novels/ Short stories

In Assamese society during Colonial era, the social status of women seems to be very much dependent on men. The religious tradition ascribed for their humility and subordination to men in all matter. They were denied the opportunity of education and refinement. Women were treated generally as maids or slaves as if they had no will or desire of their own. They had to follow their husbands and other elder members of the family in all matters. They had no power of choosing their life partners. Eminent woman writer of Assam Arupa Patangia Kalita presents this pathetic plight of the women of that time in her celebrated novel *Ayananta* (hereafter mentioned as *Dawn*) which has been translated into English with a new name *Dawn* by Ranjita Biswas. The novel set in the thrilling years before independence, revolves around a young girl Binapani, growing up in a small Assamese town. Since her childhood she has been

rebellious in nature who always poses question on the does and don'ts imposed on womenfolk in the name of custom and tradition. But she also had to sacrifice her hopes and aspirations of life under the pressure of her family members.

Women in India are second-class citizens, oppressed, controlled, dominated, and undervalued by their fathers, husbands, and sons. The taboos and traditions of society restricted their activities and this harsh is presented in many literary works. This novel also tells us a few stories of the love that were remained unfulfilled due to the pressure of patriarchal society.

A woman character of the novel Ruma is introduced by the author as a girl with rare beauty and charm. Her physical beauty and talent is presented before the readers through the observation of the protagonist of the novel Binapani who is her great admirer. Bina was mesmerised by Karuna Barua's eldest daughter Ruma's beauty. "...*how pretty she was! With her slim figure, fair complexion and the long hair fanning out on her back, Bina could compare her with none other than the goddess Lakshmi.*"(Dawn,2004: 45). Ruma was also a good singer. She was in love with Jatin. One day Bina found a portrait of a Ruma drawn with colour pencil which was drawn by Jatin. While Bina was appreciating the drawing, Ruma snatched away it from the hand of Bina with trepidation. She did forbid Bina never to mention about the portrait to anyone for she knew that if somebody comes to know she would be beaten up. With tears in her eyes Ruma said with fear "...*They'll kill me. My father will shoot me.*"(Dawn, 2004:46) Exactly it happened in her life. When Ruma's father fixed her marriage with the brother of Bina's Bormami (aunt), Bina also got hurt predicting the impending disaster in her favourite sister's life. With a heavy heart after hearing the news of marriage when Bina reached Ruma's house, she heard the sound of weeping instead of the sweet notes of organ which generally she experiences while coming to her house. Moreover she saw Haitha Sarai

scolding his daughter with a stern voice—*“Shut up! I don't want to hear anything.”*(Dawn, 2004:92) There was also a gun in his hand. Ruma's father fixed her marriage with a man who according to Bina is an *ugly demon*. (Dawn, 2004:91). Karuna Barua, popularly known as Haitha Sarai compelled his daughter Ruma to marry the man against her will. Ruma's plea and her tears could not melt her father's heart. Bina also noticed that *“her fair cheeks showed the red marks of five fingers”* (Dawn, 2004:92). Bina asked Ruma *“Why don't you marry Jatin dada?”*(Dawn, 2004: 92). Bina, a small girl is ignorant of the helplessness of Ruma. She was forced to marry a wicked man living her love apart and as a result one day she lost her mental balance. That beautiful goddess turned into an insane under the pressure of the patriarchal autocracy. One day Bina found —*“Ruma was tied with a chain used for tying elephants. The beautiful fair girl had become dark, her hair had come off in places, she laughed raucously once and then she cried pitifully.”*(Dawn,2004:98)

The protagonist of the novel Bina also had to submit herself to the patriarchal demands against her will. She had to marry a much older, plump womanizer resisting the charms of first love Ratan, a Christian boy who became a Father - Father Ratan McPherlin. It was his company she could feel that *“as if she had wings and was flying in a wide, blue sky.”*(Dawn, 2004: 241) Bina prefers to be a Sister like Sister Louisa. She asks Ratan—*“Can't I become like Sister Louisa and the other in your school? I'll teach the small children, I can sweep the country yard and wash the cloths. Will you take me?”*(Dawn, 2004: 243) She also begs her father—*“I wouldn't get married, Deuta. I want to become like Sister Louisa. I'll go away with him.”*(Dawn, 2004:243) Father Ratan too requests Bina's father —*“Your daughter is too young to get married. She is very sensitive. Let her study further.”* (Dawn, 2004: 243). But her father is also helpless in front of the pressure coming from his wife and his in laws house. In Indian society, when a daughter reaches a

marriageable age, parents play a pivotal role in the choice of her partner. The process of choosing a husband or wife begins when parents express to kin, friends, that they are seeking a marriage partner for their child. Sarma-Compounder could feel that *"the doctor is finding it hard to adjust to the idea of his daughter getting married."*(Dawn, 2004:245).But the high-spirited girl Bina's continuous refusal of getting married could not melt the heart of hard hearted Sita, her mother. Jayanta Chaliha,with whom Bina's marriage was fixed by her family tried to console his mother while she said that Bina looks pretty but she seems a little stubborn by saying that-*"She's a bit young ,Ma"*(Dawn,2004:245).

The story of the novel shows that women are not only treated as subordinate to men but are also subject to discriminations, humiliations, exploitations, oppressions, control and violence in a patriarchal society. Sylvia Walby in *"Theorising Patriarchy"* calls patriarchy *"a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women"* (Walby, 1990) According to Walby Patriarchy is indispensable for an understanding of gender inequality and there are six key patriarchal structures which restrict women and help to maintain male domination. Another observation is also important in this context. Female children belong to their fathers until they are married, at which time they become the property of their husbands and are expected to be of service to them (Gangrade & Chander,2011)

Nearly in all human societies male takes active parts and female are the objects of entertainment of the males and in some societies they are only chattels contractible, saleable and endowed with the duty to serve males. Assamese society is also not exempted from that practice though to an extent it is said to be quite liberal to the women folk compared to other parts of the country. The widespread denial of women as beings capable of mastering and deploying their own desire, oppressed in their ability to love freely and for themselves, began to set them

apart from men in a very strong distinction between the two sexes. If men were able to choose whom they loved, or to initiate desire for both himself and his wife, then women must need men in order to achieve the fruition of true feelings and desires. Men are sexual beings, so women must necessarily become models of modesty.

Another love story presented in the novel is that of Jeuti and the lawyer. Jeuti was socially boycotted because she acted in a film where she had to rest her head on Rupkumar's chest. The society treats her like a street dog. She is not even allowed to fetch water from the same *ghat* which is generally used by the villagers. Bina meets this beautiful girl in the ghat. Not only the village women and her mother but Jeuti herself warns Bina not to talk to her. Jeuti warns- "*I told you to go...If you stick to me, you too will be stamped as a bad girl.*" (Dawn, 2004::191) Jeuti is in love with a lawyer who is almost of her father's age. But Jeuti is very happy. Because, he saved her from the torture of the society. He gave her the hope of life. Jeuti confesses that had he not been there she'd have swallowed poison to get rid of the torture she received from her neighbours. Jeuti confesses in front of Bina - "*If it wasn't for the Ukil(lawyer) my mother and I would have died long ago...I've never got so much love from anybody else.*" (Dawn, 2004::199) Though he is much elder to her for her 'he is the most courageous young man in the world'. When Bina's family is much more concerned about Chaliha's social status rather than his character and nature the poor needy girl Jeuti is not interested in the money and property of the lawyer. She likes him because of his nature. Bina begins to consider the lawyer as a hero who has sacrificed so much for Jeuti. He too is despised by the society for his resolution to marry a film girl. Jashoda says Bina- "*If we go to his house, others will boycott us because he has discarded society on account of that girl.*" (Dawn, 2004::206) Bina's craze for meeting that man becomes a headache for her family members. Her father even forbids her

from meeting that man. Bina tries to convince her simple minded father- "*Deuta, had he not been there, Jeuti and mother would have died in that half-broken hut. Isn't it natural for me to want to see what he looks like? After all he's sacrificed everything to help this young girl*". (Dawn, 2004::231) Her father understands her feelings but he is also well aware of the social conduct of the society. Therefore, he advises Bina- "*Look you don't understand. Society weilds a great deal of power. How can you ignore it? You are a girl. Please don't go about doing these things.*" (Dawn, 2004::231) It is seen that discrimination against girls and women in the developing world is a devastating reality and tragically, female children are most defenceless against the trauma of gender discrimination. From the day she is born until the day she dies, an Indian woman is expected to be under the control of a man and to serve him without question (Baig, 1988; Kelkar, 1992; Narasimhan, 1994).

Although social rules differ greatly, all cultures have rules which govern women's lives. Across a wide range of cultures, widows are subject to patriarchal customary and religious laws and confront discrimination in inheritance rights. Many of these widows suffer abuse and exploitation at the hands of family members, often in the context of property disputes. In the novel *Felanee*, there is a distinct revelation of the status of women in the Assamese society. Here Ratnamala, the grandmother of Felanee, is introduced as a widow who lost her husband in a very young age. But we also find that the death of her husband did not make her depressed; she felt a kind of relief living alone. The author says- "*She was relieved when the man that she was married to and when she was so afraid of, had not come to her for almost a month...Each night she was alone she slept peacefully, her little heart singing songs of joy.*" (*Felanee*:1) It clearly shows that Ratnamala was a small girl while her parents married her off to a man much elder to her. She could not even understand and enjoy the beauty of husband-wife relationship. Therefore she could not feel the

pain while her husband died. It is the unexpected behaviour of the relatives that broke her heart. Because, they “*suddenly rushed into her room, pulled off all her jewellery, her beautiful cloths and left her clothed in white. They then forced her to sleep on the ground. Her dolls, which she'd dressed with such care, were crushed carelessly and thrown away.*”(*Felanee*:.1-2)

Ratnamala tried to forget everything what had happen to her. “*She tried hard to keep herself busy making rag dolls out of frayed bits of cloths.*”(ibid 2) But her relatives did not allow her to live her life. They used to come to her and hug her and cry. Unknowingly whole situation made her melancholic and she began to “*weep as she sat forlorn, her head down, in hidden corners.*”(*Felanee*:::2)

Her family without probing deep into the reason of her distress sent her to her uncle's place in Palashtoli Tea Estate. She felt terribly depressed as nobody was there to care about her. It was *mahut* Kinaram who gave his pleasant company to Ratnamala. She enjoyed the elephant ride with him. He took that young widow to show how to catch fish. She became more beautiful living a free life amidst the nature in the joyous company of Kinaram. She was drawn towards the *mahut* Kinaram and fell in love with him who gave her a new life. One day she eloped with him and fearing the wrath of her father they had disappeared into the hills. She died giving birth to a girl child. Kinaram too died drowning in a pool where he used to go for fishing. As Ratnamala married to a person according to her own choice, she was never owned by her family. Moreover for a widow such kind of act is a crime in the eyes of society. Even after the death of Ratnamala and Kinaram, the little baby girl Jutimala was kept hidden by the relatives to whom she had been entrusted by her father. Ratanmala's parents did not come forward to rescue the poor child. Felanee, the daughter of Jutimala therefore laments over the plight of her mother. She thinks-“*Was it a crime to belong to the Mazumder's family?*”(*Felanee*:15)

In her short-stories also the theme of marriage is presented with a very heart-touching manner. In her remarkable short story 'Venus's Outfit' (Pas Chotalar Kathakata Jyoti Prakashan 2000:50) Arupa presents the sufferings of an unmarried girl who was rejected by many to marry due to her height. Aataki, daughter of a head Clark of a tea garden, is a beautiful girl with the height of five feet, ten inches. In Assamese society her height was an unusual one and thirty-forty years back that kind of height in women was never glorified and even considered as an ominous one. Her increasing height becomes a headache for her mother and grandmother. There was belief that if a pressure is given putting a heavy stone on the head of the victim regularly making her sitting in the tail of a *dheki* (rice pump), her height stops to increase. That was a regular practice in case of Aataki but her mother failed to stop her height. Whoever comes to see her with a marriage proposal goes back with disappointment due to her excessive height. Her height turned to be a curse for her life. Aataki's sufferings and her sister-in-law's words clearly shows how the standard of women's beauty is fixed by the society besides fixing their subordinate status in the society. 'Venus's Outfit' is really a heart touching story where the author reflects the changing mindset of people along with the passing of time. It is also clearly shown that women are always the sufferers even with the changing concept of beauty. In both past and present society is found fixing a standard of beauty for women. Beauty is an essential qualification for women especially for the girls of marriageable age.

Arupa Patangia Kalita's another heart-touching short story where she deals with the theme of the problem of marriage in Indian society is –"B.D.D and the Dream Seller Girl". In this story also, the author presents how a girl is considered a burden to her family and how her own brother or parents become desperate to marry her off without any serious concern about her happiness and future. Urmi, a beautician girl

takes the responsibility of running the house after the death of her father with her hard earnings whereas her brother is useless and contributes nothing to the expenditure of his home. Besides he marries a girl and Urmi compels to take the burden of her as her brother never spend his little earning for the family. After knowing all these surprisingly Urmi's mother never shows any compassion towards her. She has a special soft corner for his son and son takes the advantage of his mother's weakness. In Indian society it is very common. Male child is given more importance than the girl child. Urmi's hard work and sacrifice for the family is never valued by her brother, sister-in-law and even by her own mother. It hurts her but she is strong enough to bear that pain. They are trying to marry her off so that her brother can enjoy the property which their father has left for them. We are introduced many women especially marriageable girls who are trying to make themselves beautiful and attractive with the help of Urmi to get a life partner to fulfilling the dreams of their parents and relief them from a burden.

In Indian patriarchal society, within the national culture there exists a "son syndrome" which entails giving preference for sons over daughters and placing a greater value on the male child as compared to the female child. This cultural norms breed gender discrimination in families, schools and communities. A girl is is not a value to the family or in the larger sense to society, but rather a problem to be dealt with. They are subjected to what can be considered the rhetoric of a society in which they are considered "*paraaya dhan*" (which literally translates to property of another/other).

"This Side and that Side of the Hillock" is also a canvas where the authoress puts all the colours of pain and sufferings of girls in Indian society. Here she describes a family with five daughters and a son where the mother pays her whole attention to her son. The author says that they are not just girls but "five strong machines". From the household work to family

business they carry out all the works from morning till night. All the girls go to school but their school is not a luxurious English school to which their brother goes. He goes to school by school bus but they have to go by bicycle. Mother has to attend the son just like a maid servant to fulfill his each demand and if mother fails father will never spare her. Girls are hardly paid so much attention by their parents. For most of the Indian parents daughters are burdens and headaches. Because from the day their daughter is born they become conscious about the dowry. Dowry is given by the bride's parents to ensure a happy married life for her by fulfilling the basic necessities to live comfortable living. Dowry is blow to women status in India. One very important issue that exists in our Indian society is Dowry system. There is lot of confusion regarding the practice of dowry in Indian society. Today we may be witnessing that there is loss in stature of Indian women but that was not the case in beginning of Indian civilization. In today's scenario dowry has become a potent weapon to harass the Indian women. It is now legally banned, but still this practice exists in our society.

The boundaries of social conventions of marriage are challenged in favour of personal liberty which challenges the traditional concept of marriage and love. Strong romantic passions are replaced by logic and rationality as in the novels of Arupa and Austen. In this regard we may recall Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria* or *The Wrongs of Woman* where we get a picture of the economic, legal and emotional oppression of the middle and lower class women through the life stories of two women characters. The novel is set in a metaphorical prison- which is similar to the 'patriarchal dungeon' designed by marriage and the big question is echoed: "Was not the world a vast prison, and women born slaves?" Marriage has bastilled the life of Maria and here she attempts to tear down the Bastille imprisonment by falling in love with Henry Darnford who guides Maria out of the prison of legal marriage.

This kind of attempt is not there in either Austen or Kalita. They are critical of the institution of marriage in their own way, but they accept it for the female empowerment. In Kalita's novels a wife feels powerlessness in the absence of her husband. So is a woman like Elizabeth who maintains a perfect balance in her life, feels elated and happy to see the big house of Darcy. Austen is not critical of marriage as an institution like Mary Wollstonecraft, but she is critical of the general female obsession with the institution. We see that both Arupa and Austen views marriages principally from the wife's viewpoint and this is true even of the truly fulfilling marriage of Darcy and Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*. But Arupa seems to be highly critical of the institution of marriage. In *Dawn* where Binapani is forced to marry Jatin and the marriage is a curse for the woman. Her life became the veritable 'patriarchal dungeon'. While the novels of Arupa Patangiya Kalita directly accommodates the sociological and political developments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in her novels and accurately delineated the external reality of insurgency and militancy, Austen confronts experience in a different mode. Her novels become the archetypal constructs of the social imagination.

Marriage is the only option of their economic security in Indian society presented by Arupa Patangia Kalita in most of her novels and short stories. In *Venus's Outfit*, we see how the parents as well as other family members become desperate to marry off Ataki, the only daughter of the house. In this story – "*B.B.D and the Dream Seller Girl*" too the author presents how a girl is considered a burden to her family and how her own brother or parents become desperate to marry her off without any serious concern about her happiness and future.

The two novelists have been successful in driving home their fundamental point of argument that the male dominated society always wishes to suppress the visibility of a woman as an individual identity and also cherish viewing her on trial. If

any woman tries to cross the *lakshmanrekha* she is given a bad name

Studies on women's issues are now current all over the world. Various issues relating to women have been evolving in the feminist movement in India from the demands of changing socio-economic values and norms. In the 19th century for the first time women issues come to the forefront. Social reformers all over the world started showing concern for women centric issues and women were seen as human beings. Issues of Sati, girl child marriage female infanticide, purdah sparked off debates among the social thinkers. From the first decades of the twentieth century in India the articulation of women issues was based on liberal principles of equality in every fields of society. Arupa wrote in this atmosphere of women emancipation. In the North East the tribal society was matriarchal. But still in the society of the tribal and non-tribal, female rights were hardly recognized. Hard working women were denied social and economic freedom. Thus in the treatment of the theme of marriage, 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*, 43).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

1. Kalita, Patangiya Kalita, *Felanee*, Translated by Deepika Phukan New Delhi: Jubaan, 2011, from Original, *Felanee*, Guwahati: Jyoti Prakash, 2004 in print.
2. Kalita, Patangiya Kalita, *Pass Chotlar Kathakata*, Guwahati: Jyoti Prakashan 2000, in print.
3. Kalita, Patangiya Kalita Dawn translated by Ranjita Biswas, New Delhi: Jubaan, 2004 *Ayananta*, original Book, Guwahati: Lawyers' Book Stall, 2008 in print.

- 4.. Kalita, Patangiya Kalita *Felanee* (Assamese Original text) Guwahati: Jyoti Prakash,2004 in pirnt.
5. Kalita, Patangiya Kalita 'Venus's Outfit' *Pass Chotlar Kathakata* Guwahati: Jyoti Prakashan, 2000, in print.
6. Kalita, Patangiya Kalita. 'B.D.D and the Dream Seller Girl' Sonali Eagale Kani Parile, Beliye Umani Dile, Collection (Translation by me) of, Chandra prakash , Guwahati, 2010 in print.
7. Sarkar, Shubh Brat. *Jane Austen's. Pride and Prejudice, A Critical Appraisal*, Shubh Brat Sarkar Ed. Kolkata: Booksway, 2009 in print.
8. B. Mangalam .Ed. *Jane Austen: Pride and Prejudice* Delhi, World View Publication, 2002 in print.
9. Sunanda Datta Ed. *Pride and Prejudice* Mumbai: Orient Longman 1994. In print.

Cited References

1. Elaine, Showalter. *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977 in print
2. Habib, M.A.R. *A History of Literary Criticism and Theory*. New Delhi: Willey. 2005 & 2009. In print.
3. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley New York: Bantam/ Alfred A. Knopf 1961 in print
4. Gisborne qtd in Monaghan, David eds. *Jane Austen in a Social Context* . New Jersey: Macmillan, 1981) in print
5. Gillie. Christopher. 'Women in Life and Literature'. A Preface to Jane Austen. Revised Ed. New York: Longman Group Ltd. 1985.
- 6.Evans, Mary *JaneAusten nd the State* London: Hulton Educational Publications, 1962 in print 7.Monaghan,David eds. *Jane Austen in a Social Context* . New Jersey: Macmillan, 1981) in print

8. Gillie, Christopher. 'Women in Life and Literature'. A Preface to Jane Austen. Revised Ed. New York: Longman Group Ltd. 1985. in print .
9. Evans, Mary *Jane Austen and the State* London: Hulton Educational Publications, 1962 in print
10. Brownstein Rachel M. "Irony and Authority", New Casebooks, "Sense and Sensibility" and "Pride and Prejudice ": *Contemporary Critical Essays* ed. Robert Clark. Hampshire & Lonson: Macmillan, 1994 in print
11. Cecil, David. *Poets and Story-tellers. A Book of Critical Essays* London: Constable and Company, 1942. in print
12. Stone Lawrence. *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*. London: Penguin Books, 1990 in print
13. Craik. W.A. *Jane Austen in Her Time* London: Nelson, 1969 in print
- 14..Sarah Gamble *The Routledge Critical Dictionary of Feminism and Postfeminism* (1999) in print
15. Sylvia Walby. *Theorising Patriarchy* London: Wiley-Blackwell 1990 in print.
16. Gangrade & Chander, *Social Legislation in India*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1978, rpt. 2011. in print
17. Virginia Woolf. *A Room of One's Own*. San Diego, New York/London: Harvest /Harcourt Brace 1966 in print

Prof. **KARABI HAZARIKA** is a bi-lingual writer of English and Assamese literature and she has to her credit two very significant books *Women in Dictionary*, and *Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya*. She writes regularly in the national dailies on various topics related to Feminism and women rights. Her articles on literature and language are published in national and international journals in the country and abroad. At present she is the Associate Professor of English, Naharkatiya College, Dibrugarh, Assam. Email: karabih19@gmail.com