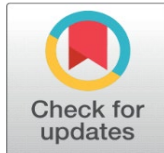
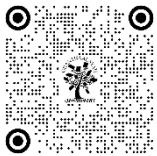


FORGOTTEN ECHOES: SUFFERING, SILENCE IN THE STORIES OF WOMEN IN ARUPA PATANGIA KALITA'S NARRATIVE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to analyze the suffering, violence and silence that prevail in Kalita's oeuvre. Discussing the characters and their circumstances in her works allows us to witness how they traverse their distress, and their dichotomy of conflict, loss, and hope. In addition, these themes are explored in order to provide implications regarding human experience and endurance in the face of adversity on a larger scale. In her work, Kalita implores readers to look where strength and weakness can meet and what being human looks like in a world where it appears that chaos and violence reign. By carefully examining her writings, we are able to uncover the layers of meaning in her storytelling and in her commentary of the cultural and social scenario during a difficult time in Assam. Therefore, this study takes insight into her themes of loss, suffering and silence and makes this discourse a pivotal task in aiding the comprehension of the contemporary Assamese literature and its visions on its society.

Keywords: Silence, Suffering, Vulnerability, Conflict

1. INTRODUCTION

Arupa Patangia Kalita is an important name in the present-day Assamese literature and her contributions to the literary space of present-day Assamese literature is quite seminal contributing to the Indian literary scene as a whole. Her narratives concentrate on the intricate relation between suffering, resilience and vulnerability in general; and in particular, in relation to the colourful and multidimensional socio cultural and political context of Assam. Kalita avoids sugar coating her works instead portraying the hardships that we face in our life and sheds lights to the inadmissible emotions and mental trauma that comes along. Kalita, while sensitive to the human condition, is much less generous to her characters. In this she is able to effectively convey various ways in which her characters are resilient to the overwhelming adversities they find themselves in, as well as showing their vulnerabilities. The fact that it is so poignant is the reflection of the lives of real people clashing against historical events and social upheaval and personally fighting for survival is beautiful. Kalita's characters, for so long, fought with the societal issues and personal uneasiness; and their strength, weakness, suffering, and forgotten silence speaks in their journey. Kalita's works also tends to feature the themes of suffering, survival and vulnerability: a focus on the forgotten or overlooked struggles of women such as

Ayengla who endure violence and marginalization in the context of conflict will echo the same. Kalita's literary take on dignity of the human being and historical trauma is notable.

In addition to being a writer, Kalita serves as a forerunner for the feminist movement. Embodying a feminist perspective, she writes assertively and critiques society through her characters. During her discussion with Indrani, Kalita acknowledges her sensitivity for the women depicted in her writings, asserting –

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, 2017)

She is a formidable feminist voice in current Assamese literature. The anthology of short stories, *Written in Tears*, captivates with its narratives and exquisite settings set against a backdrop of strife. The theme of self-realization, personal identity, existential concepts and people's geographical positioning and the sense of their identities in situational context of their interaction with the other members of the society is the subject of Kalita's works. She delves into violence, marginality. At the heart of her storytelling are women, who encapsulate, through haunting realities, the importance of their society and therefore the imprint of their identity on their life. She questions the social norms through her works and the female protagonists; she stands out as an Assamese feminist.

As Kalita asserts, a woman is not violated just through physical violence, invasion can also happen through other means. However, a patriarchal culture perpetuates another one, which removes women from history, interlacing them with the real one. Arupa Patangia's statement of the violence of women not just on the physical level but also with other mechanisms of violation marks a groundbreaking understanding of the wide range of ways in which patriarchy imposes upon women. Her statement speaks poignantly and profoundly in offering a glimpse into how patriarchal societies have obliterated, silenced and silenced women in the past through eradicating and obliterating their histories, the history of women, as well as marginalizing them from positions of power. This echoes something in one of the multitudes of academic analyses of her work that has looked at themes including identity, trauma, and the ways in which the gendered violence is perpetuated via social structures. As Kalita points out, women's silence actually constitutes a kind of complicity in the continued existence of patriarchal norms without question. Simultaneously silence, identity, and oppression become suffering in Kalita's narratives.

I believe if women keep silent, it is that they are allowing the male-dominated society to continue judging them. (Kalita, 2015)

Violence and conflict are a recurring motif that reverberates in Kalita's body of work. Her characters are often treated in the nature as products of their environment and developed by the harsh socio-political reality of livelihood in Assam. Contextual grounding gives Kalita the opportunity to engage violence and suffering in a richer, more expansive way precisely because her characters must contend with their own suffering as they do with the wide ruined world around them. Habib and Soomro (2021) also points out that characters are often united by personal as well as historical suffering during ethnic violence, which makes Kalita's pursuing of the silence, suffering and vulnerability even deeper. By her storytelling, she is able to show us how the external world magnifies the internal conflict of her characters to give us a much more detailed situation of their emotional landscapes than just some simple emotion stemming from the choice that is made in one particular scene. Kalita beautifully weaves together storytelling as part of every piece of her work, and the power of the telling of one's truth in leading to resilience and healing in those who can't with their experience. Many of her stories feature this very essence: that of a storyteller, one that gets to some of the telling everyday of why oral traditions are important, why cultural knowledge needs to be transmitted from generation to generation. By giving her characters' voice, this also accentuates the history and culture of the people who have been expunged from the prevailing narratives. Besides being an act of resistance against cultural obliteration, this act of storytelling serves as a way to make connection and solidarity among the people who have gone through or are going through the same struggles (Veneracion-Rallonza, 2015). Kalita succeeds in showing how storytelling still remains an important tool in such a difficult task of navigating between resilience and vulnerability's intricacies within Assam's socio-cultural landscape.

The paper will analyse the story of Ayengla from *Written in Tears*. The selected short story is "Ayengla of the Blue Hills," intricately crafted by Arupa Patangia Kalita. For this purpose, this paper will investigate how Ayengla, described as a 'happy woman', has been coping with the trauma of sexual violence by army personnel as witnessed in Arupa Kalita's

narrative and how her silence turned into both a survival mechanism as well as a statement of vulnerability and resilience.

The protagonists in her work endure their circumstances, facing persecution within their families and society, while asserting their voices to forge their identities or losing it in adversity. These narratives underscore the influence of gender in moulding identity, delineating the parameters of existence, and exposing the constraints placed upon women in specific short stories. These accounts elucidate the social frameworks and communities with which women are interconnected, the resilience of female solidarity, and their joint endeavour to regain their identity. Resilience and vulnerability converge in their experience, illustrating how women confront abuse and oppression, acknowledge their existence, and attain empowerment through solidarity, however, the story of Ayengla is agonising.

The story is about Ayengla who lives,

amidst the blue hills. She is a happy woman. And why shouldn't she be? She has a loving husband, two children, paddy fields and a chang ghar with pigs and chickens...Ayengla works hard and runs the household single-handedly, doing all chores, tending the fields and caring for her daughter and son. (Kalita, 201)

but as the life of Ayengla unfolds, she is left with nothing but grief and insanity, made a victim of the barbaric episode of the army men raping her. Habib says that Kalita "addresses the notion of Women's Apparent Silence" in her exploration of Ayengla's narrative(677)

In the short story, Ayengla is raped, thereafter enforces silence upon herself. The trauma resurfaces anytime she later sees the brook or a similar situation, profoundly affecting her life. Ultimately, Ayengla succumbs to madness after experiencing the trauma that was warranted 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.... (Kalita, 206)

The narrative "Ayengla of the Blue Hills" exemplifies atrocities endured by women and the subsequent trauma they experienced. Cathy Caruth (1995) first articulated that trauma, "Pathology consists, instead, in the structure of its experience or entertainment, which is that the event is survived or enjoyed fully at the moment; however, it is only afterward, when it is oppositely retained by the individual who remains distant." It specifically denotes being traumatised as "being dominated by an image or incident." (4-5)

Often during conflict, women are presented as passive victims of violence — experiencing fatalities in their families and social standing. Ayengla and Felanee, two women featured in Kalita's narrations, tire in living their lives with chaos and suffering in the terrible losses. (Thakur, 2023). A poignant narrative about a lovely young woman who remains largely oblivious to global events, with her existence centred around her family. She is assaulted by military personnel, resulting in a tumultuous existence that permanently incapacitates her. She is immobilised by time and cannot connect with the present. Ultimately, her husband's and other family members' endeavours prove futile, leaving Ayengla in profound sorrow. Her spouse is unable to restore the lost Ayengla to her true nature and subsequently marries another woman. He commences a new existence while Ayengla takes on a new one, one that transforms the once happy woman into silence. The weight of her emotions rendered her speechless (Himabindu and Kumar, 2023). Oblivious to her surroundings, Ayengla descends into a desolate realm of solitude, ultimately leading to her demise. This narrative examines the debilitating consequences of oppression and the impact of trauma on an individual's character, particularly focussing on a joyful little girl and her transformation into a 'tomb of forgotten echoes.'

These women went through the same sad plight in the time of unrest and in the same structure that all stories of trauma and violence have. The insurgency and militancy have primarily had an impact on the people, especially the women, and Kalita and her works mostly revolves around women and how insurgency and militancy changed their lives. The women end up in a life of destitution, in the helplessness of a mental and emotional shock, in the reminiscences of silence and sufferings.

Ayengla's story is a layered and complex tale of suffering, trauma and vulnerability that finds its way to the heart of human nature and of human dignity and suffering. Through meticulously illustrated and richly drawn characters who struggle against or with a range of emotions, Kalita manages to do this. The one recurring theme through Kalita's work deals with resiliency with suffering and vulnerabilities is a complicated and interesting study on human experience. (Palmer 2007). Arupa's women are vulnerable in the most tailored ways: by their identities, identities not just of themselves but culturally determined identities. Kalita doesn't flinch at depicting these emotional landscapes' interwoven complications; rather, the story is prone and painfully honest and shows the struggles her characters endure.

By doing this, Kalita asks her readers to feel so deeply in the characters that she invites them to put on the characters shoes and experience their realities. This depiction helps us see the many facets of the human experience and realize together, a person can be a creature of strength and also a creature of weakness. Her stories are brought to life not only by the interplay of resilience and vulnerability but also by the way that our shared human condition convinces us of what each story says to each of us—we struggle, we suffer, we triumph.

Arupa Patangia Kalita's Ayengla's story is a very sad tale of the helplessness caused by war and conflict, a story of how people were made vulnerable by war and conflict, which is addressed in context of vulnerability of life in war and conflict. Kalita's works often deal with how ethnic violence and communal frenzy affects women, represented as helpless victims of such madness. Like Felanee, Ayengla's story reminds us that women who lose social status and suffer losses as a result of pain of conflict. The stories show how the psychological aspects of conflict impose traumatic memories onto women, and how hard it is for them to express what happened. This self-imposed silence is both protective and it distorts the memory of the events they are forced to navigate on their journey toward their own identity and healing. (Bora, 2022).

On the one hand, these narratives are testimonies of the traumatized bodies and the suffering and the pain of women and their silence; and on the other hand, of women's social marginalization. However, there is a broader theme to her stories that weaves their vulnerability vis-a-vis war and conflict onto women's wartime vulnerabilities, especially in terms of identity, memory and trauma, to help women survive in the face of patriarchal order. Kalita's work is storytelling in a testament, a representation- giving a voice to women in conflict who lose their voices. The narrative approach in this paper stresses the importance of documenting and acknowledging women's experiences, their silence and suffering that are not reducible to a simple dichotomy between victimhood and agency.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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