

Exploring the Patriarchal Oppression and Predicament of Women: A Radical Feministic Analysis of Mitra Phukan's *The Collector's Wife* and Arupa Patangia Kalita's *Felanee*

T S Dhileep¹, & Anu Baisel²

¹ Research Scholar, Department of English, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, India

² Associate Professor Department of English, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, India

Correspondence: Anu Baisel, Associate Professor, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, India - 632014. E-mail: anu.baisel@vit.ac.in

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Abstract

This Research paper aims to investigate the violence against women and the repercussions of political upheaval as reflected in Mitra Phukan's *The Collector's Wife* and Arupa Patangia Kalita's novel *Felanee* in the northeastern Indian literature. Women have long endured social injustices based on patriarchy and experience a range of socially imposed discrimination. Society regards women as mere by-products of sentimental domesticity, whereas males dominate and sphere head all the public domain as the rightful inheritors. Women are the worst affected by these geopolitical manoeuvres and are more physiologically affected. Not only do these acts of discrimination jeopardise public safety and tranquility, but they also have a profound impact on the lives of women. The literature of North-East India has several instances of this exploitation. This paper also highlights the radical feminist theory, Mitra Phukan and AP Kalita clearly explained the patriarchal system, which is based on gender roles and is characterized by prioritizing men's domination and interests over women's and reinforced by sexuality and motherhood while valuing female sexuality and fertility in Assam culture.

Keywords: patriarchy, social sciences, sexual orientation, subjugation of women, northeast culture. political upheaval. etc.

1. Introduction

The Northeastern region of India, characterized by its extraordinary ethnic and linguistic diversity, is a veritable tapestry of abundant natural resources, rich folk culture, and a vibrant past. Its lush tropical environment has long served as a wellspring of inspiration for authors and poets, who use nature as a potent metaphor for their ideas and emotions. Within the Northeastern States reside many indigenous peoples, each with their languages, cultural identities, and distinctive ways of life. This study delves into the exploration of feminist themes in North Indian English novels, with a particular focus on celebrated authors like Mitra Phukan and Arupa Patangia Kalita, who have risen to prominence in Assam. "The Collector's Wife" by Mitra Phukan is a pioneering work, one of the first Assamese novels published internationally. Drawing inspiration from the Assam Student's agitation and the feminine struggles of the 1970s and 1980s, it boldly portrays the character Rukmini navigating a landscape marred by instability, pervasive threats of violence, and the exploitation of women in Assam's culture (Chetia, 2020).

On the other hand, Arupa Patangia Kalita, an accomplished academician, novelist, and short story writer, hails from the same region. She has become a chronicler of socio-political transformations in her homeland through her eleven short story collections and six novels. Kalita's literary voice passionately advocates for women's welfare and rights in Northeastern India, where women continue to grapple with male dominance and sexual exploitation, exacerbated by the region's political instability (Sharma, 2015). The North East has experienced its fair share of turmoil, from political upheaval to military conflict. In this complex milieu, the study employs gender studies to analyze the female characters in two remarkable novels, "The Collector's Wife" and "Felanee," both of which illuminate the struggles of women in a patriarchal society, bravely challenging gender barriers within Assam's cultural context (Swami, 2020).

The selected novels within this study delve into the depths of feminist theory, addressing the portrayal of women's vulnerability, widowhood, and the complex reproductive system within the northeastern cultural context of Assam.

2. Objectives of the Study

This study examines the portrayal of women as socially and economically independent in Assamese literary works, primarily focusing on female writing and equality in societal domestic standings. This paper also deals with the propositions of Overtone of Patriarchal subjugation of women - an exploration of interpersonal exploitation and self-identity in Assamese culture. The study investigates the portrayal of modern, socially independent widows in Northeastern Indian literature. focusing on their quest for identity influence of traditional customs in the select novels of Mitra Phukan and Arupa Patangia Kalita.

3. Research Questions

- i. What are the dominant thematic representations of patriarchal subjugation of women within Assamese literature, specifically examining interpersonal exploitation and the struggles of self-identity, and how do these themes reflect cultural norms and societal structures?
- ii. How do Assamese literary works depict the evolution of female independence in social and economic spheres, particularly focusing on the portrayal of women's equality within domestic settings, and what impact does this portrayal have on societal perceptions?
- iii. In what ways do the novels by Mitra Phukan and Arupa Patnagia Kalita explore the quest for identity among modern, socially independent widows in North-eastern Indian literature, and how do these narratives illustrate the influence of traditional customs on their journey towards self-realization and autonomy?

4. Methodology

The paper uses primary and secondary sources to study contemporary Assamese culture, specifically focusing on feminism, Northeast Indian culture, and discrimination against women. *The Collector's Wife* and *Felanee*, by Mitra Phukan and Dr. Arupa Patnagia Kalita, have been used as primary sources for the study. At the same time, secondary sources include articles, research papers, and e-resources data related to Assamese culture that are collected from the university libraries.

5. Literature Review

Few scholarly articles exist on northeast Indian famine studies, especially Mitra Phukan and Arupa Kalita's novels in Assam culture. Authors have criticized the portrayal of women and patriarchy in Northeastern culture in these novels, such as *The Collector's Wife* and *Felanee*. The literature review reveals that several studies have been conducted on the issue of gender inequality and exploitation of women at the national and international levels. The following is the list of literature reviews carried out on *Collector's Wife* and *Felanee*.

Anashi Bora explores the desire for agitation and militancy in Assam during the 1970s and 1980s, focusing on the experiences of feminist writers Mitra Phukan, Rita Choudhury, and Arupa Patnagia Kalita. Bora highlights the importance of interior space in Assam culture, highlighting the challenges faced by women in India (Bora, 2022). Chetia, 2020 examines in his paper titled 'Representation of Women in the Novel *The Collector's Wife*: A Feministic Study of Women in Violence-torn Areas' the predicament of women in social life, and the scholar argues that sexual exploitation is more common in these places due to the view of women as having a place in the private world of the home. In contrast, males are in the public sphere in a male-dominated society in Northeastern India. The scholar Priyanka Kakoti, in her research paper titled 'Voices from the Periphery: Indian English Writing from the Northeast', that the North-East Indian literature, Homogeneous, discusses the significance of matriarchy and against patriarchy, presenting stereotypical views of northeastern culture ethos. She also presents various obstacles and ordeals faced by the northeastern folk (Kakoti, 2017). Likewise, Chaterji, P. (2020). In his paper titled 'Understanding Women-Nature Dynamics Chaterji the gender dynamics of Assam communities, expounds the quest for identity and eco-feminism, emphasizing the importance of eco-consciousness in promoting ecological values and gender equality. Contrarily, Koubar's article explores the role of women in war trauma, focusing on male chauvinism, women's madness, and gender identity disorder, using a gender studies perspective to analyze authoritarian relationships, gender hierarchies of women in war literature. Madness can be understood as a form of social marginalization that is closely linked to imprisonment and discrimination. She also posits that the most pronounced manifestation of this exclusion is observed in times of war, where numerous individuals, including women, are rendered invisible and rendered powerless (Koubar, 2023).

Similarly, Chutia's research paper, entitled 'The Womanist and Feminist Characters in Indira Goswami and Mitra Phukan's Novels,' examines the lives of oppressed and abused women in Assam culture in northeast Indian novel, *The Collector's Wife*. The scholar delves into the diverse representation of female characters in northeast Indian literary works, highlighting factors like sexism, racism, caste, social stratification, fanaticism, ethnic cleansing, and apartheid, contributing to discrimination and injustice (Chutia, 2019).

On the other hand, Krishna, (2018) examines in her research paper on the plight of women during the Assam agitation movement, talks about helpless women subjected to horrible acts by various military forces and rebels, demonstrating women's lifestyle and struggles, especially in northeastern Indian culture.

Moreover, the complex relationship between displaced womanhood and the relentless pursuit of self-identity and freedom in the context of survival is significantly emphasized and brought by the scholar Choudhury's research article on 'Violence and Marginalization of Women in Arupa Patnagia Kalita's *Felanee*'. Felanee provides a comprehensive analysis of the various factors that contribute to the plight of displaced women, shedding light on the social, cultural, and political dynamics that shape their experiences (Choudhury, 2014). Similarly, Carlos M. Picos III explores in his article that the intricate connections and paradoxes arising from the interplay of class, gender, and race within the context of cosmopolitan mobilities in Southeast Asia. The article centers explicitly on the experiences of female domestic workers and the manifestation of male chauvinism in the Philippines (Picos, 2021). In contrast, Zeidanin, (2020) elucidates in his scholarly article titled "A Comparative Study on the Chauvinism of Nationalist Discourse in Selected Poems by Mahmoud Darwish, Maya Angelou, and Rudyard Kipling" the impact of Kipling's pro-imperial literary works in India. Zeidanin argues that these works intensified postcolonial identity crises among colonial subjects, perpetuated racial and chauvinistic ideologies, depicted the portrayal of women in Indian culture, and exemplified British supremacy while revealing a lack of societal understanding of Indian society. Critics such as Anu Baisel investigates the themes in Sohaila Abdulali's novel, 'What We Talk About When We Talk About Rape.' The text examines the detrimental consequences arising from misconceptions surrounding sexual abuse. The paper further investigates the

shifting societal attitudes towards sexual abuse and the portrayal of rape victims, particularly women, within male-dominated societies (Baisel, 2023). However, significant effort has yet to be made to examine the issue in northeast India. In this regard, the present paper is a modest endeavor to bridge the research gap which is the examination of the depiction of women in north-eastern India.

6. Relevance and the Need for the Study

The current study draws attention to the persisting challenges faced by women globally despite advancements in science and technology. Specifically, it highlights the social injustices, sexual abuse, and racial discrimination faced by the tribal and outcast women in Northeastern India. On that score, the present study is very germane. It has unique relevance to the present geo-political and economic scenario of the present northeastern community since the critical analysis delves deeply into the nuanced exploration of gender dynamics, socio-political realities, and the struggle for women's empowerment within the Northeastern Indian context. By focusing on the literary works of Easterine Kire, Arupa Patnagia Kalita, and Mitra Phukan, the researcher aims to shed light on the multifaceted aspects of gender issues and the socio-political landscape depicted in their novels.

Above all, the present study not only attempts to recognize pragmatic feminism in India but also aims to highlight the significance of the Northeastern tribal communities, thus underscoring the need to bridge the gap in understanding gender dynamics and feminist paradigms specific to these regions, where cultural intricacies often intersect with gender roles and societal structures.

7. Theoretical Overview of Radical Feminism

Radical feminists believe that society is fundamentally structured as a "patriarchy," wherein men possess dominance and exert oppressive control over women. Radical feminists endeavour to dismantle the patriarchal system to emancipate women and girls from a perceived inequitable societal structure through questioning and contesting prevailing social conventions and established institutions. This endeavour encompasses the opposition to the sexual objectification of women, the promotion of public consciousness regarding issues such as rape and other forms of violence targeting women (Firestone, 2015).

In contrast, Daly, M. (1968). An autonomous feminist writer who is recognized for her substantial contributions to radical feminism, in her celebrated work titled 'The Church and the Second Sex', critically analyses the Catholic Church and its involvement in the perpetuation of gender-based oppression. In order to provide further understand the concept of radical feminism it is imperative to delineate several fundamental constituents of radical feminism (Thompson, 2001).

Thus, the primary objective of radical feminism is to examine the correlation between societal disparities and variations in sexuality. The statement acknowledges the primary political oppression experienced by women. Women are categorized as a subordinate group based on their biological sex. Radical feminism, in addition to its primary objective of advocating for gender equality, aims to mobilize women collectively to challenge and ultimately dismantle the prevailing hierarchical system based on sex. Radical feminists acknowledge the perpetual power dynamics that exist between women and men. Consequently, it was postulated that advocating for equality within a society characterized by injustice held intrinsic value and was deemed worthy of pursuit. In both Indian and Western contexts, radical feminism critically examines the pervasive influence of male dominance that subjugates women across various domains. Significantly, it is worth noting that in the early stages of Western radical feminist discourse, the focus was primarily directed towards men as the agents responsible for perpetuating systems of oppression.

- i. Patriarchy as the Root Cause: Radical feminists argue that patriarchy is the fundamental system of oppression that underlies all forms of gender-based discrimination and inequality.
- ii. Gender Role Critique: The rejection of conventional gender roles and the notion of a rigid, dualistic conception of gender is highlighted, emphasizing the socially constructed nature of these roles and their enforcement as a means to uphold male hegemony.
- iii. The Social Construction of Gender: Radical feminists emphasize that gender is a social construct rather than an inherent biological trait.
- iv. Liberation from Male Dominance: The objective is to emancipate women from the pervasive influence of male dominance across various spheres of existence, encompassing politics, economics, and interpersonal connections.
- v. Emphasis on Women-Exclusive Spaces: Some proponents endorse the establishment of women-exclusive spaces and separatist movements as a means to cultivate environments where women can seek refuge from prevailing male-dominated societal norms.
- vi. Intersectionality: It is widely acknowledged as a crucial concept, highlighting the interconnectedness of gender with other social identities such as race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and disability.
- vii. Sexual Liberation: The proponents of sexual liberation advocate for women's empowerment, emphasizing their right to exercise bodily autonomy and make autonomous choices about their reproductive health.
- viii. Critique of Heterosexuality: A critical perspective scrutinizes heterosexuality as a societal construct that perpetuates the reinforcement of male hegemony and the objectification of women.
- ix. Transformation of Society: The proponents of this ideology envision a society that has undergone a significant transformation characterized by dismantling patriarchal systems and attaining gender equality. This transformation necessitates fundamental alterations in political, economic, and social frameworks.

8. Discussion of Radical Feminism

8.1 Patriarchal Oppression and Predicament of women in *The Collector's Wife*

In their analysis, Mitra Phukan and Arupa Kalita delve into the intricate psychology of a female protagonist, meticulously portraying the profound sense of silence and subjugation that permeates their existence. The portrayal effectively depicts unfavourable reactions to social injustice and the mistreatment of women. Their works examine different facets of radical feminist ideology portrayed in the novel, with specific relevance to the Indian context. Both authors generally explore the role of women in promoting female empowerment and delve into the concept of women being reduced to mere "breeding objects," which symbolizes their vulnerability in the face of patriarchal dominance. The novel *The Collector's Wife* examines matriarchal oppression inherent within societies predominantly governed by males. The narrative sheds light on the oppression experienced by women and their relentless protest to establish and assert their identities. The gripping plot of "*The Collector's Wife*" revolves around the protagonist Rukmini who, despite her marriage with her better half, Siddhartha, is deemed 'barren', looked down upon by her society, more so by her family members, which is a form of conspicuous form patriarchal exploitation. The sufferings of Rukmini are akin to that of the mental ordeal experienced by Dielieno in *A Terrible Matriarchy*. In that both the protagonists are terribly at the receiving end of matriarchal oppression (Dhileep & Baisel, 2023). Her cup of suffering has yet to be consummated. In essence, "*The Collector's Wife*" is not only stories of individual struggles but also a powerful narrative that reflects the broader societal need for gender equality, highlighting the importance of recognizing women's agency and their right to live free from the constraints of patriarchal expectations. The novels encourage us to reflect on the complexities of gender dynamics in our societies and the urgent need for change. The following passage from the collector's wife is a testimony to the claim that the protagonist, Rukmini, is the victim of patriarchal subjugation and oppression (Gogoi, 2021).

“...Rukmini was a barren woman...when a childless female took an undue interest in one’s offspring, it was time to ward off the evil eye by going home as soon as possible, roasting mustard seeds on an open fire, murmuring mantras over the head of the child whose name was taken by the barren women” (Pukhan,2005, pp.167)

Like rubbing salt her depressed mind. to her wound of conjugal bliss, her husband’s premature death comes as an excruciating blow to Rukmini which only aggravates the burden of oppression under her yoke. The perpetrator of such domestic violence and gender discrimination brings about a sense of narcissistic arrogance (Kumar & Christopher, 2022). As such, the Rukmani’s in-laws and family members encroachment on her personal life is very evident throughout the novel. Her desire for a re-marriage to Manoj Mahanta is too shunned by her male chauvinistic society that conforms to patriarchal conventions, thereby endorsing the prevailing patriarchal ethos wherein women endure silently within the confines of domesticity in a society characterized by male dominance (Rohit, 2022).

Despite being married, she experiences a sense of loneliness, a longing for parenthood, and a loss of her identity. She engages in extramarital relations and occasionally accompanies the man on leisurely outings. The novel demonstrates the author's deliberate effort to establish a liberal space and self-esteem. The author avowedly advocates for the emancipation of women and their self-identity within the societal framework. Individuals require a distinct sense of self, apart from societal roles such as being a spouse, to recognize their fundamental humanity as a primary aspect of their identity. The characters of Oholya-jethai and Rukmini exemplify a faithful representation of social reality. In addition to their socioeconomic rank, the anguish and suffering experienced by these individuals only represent the universal out cry of women which is a clarion call for redression against women exploitation in general.

“She said, her voice as normal as thought the discovery of a husband’s faithfulness was an an everyday affair...the attraction had been friendly, rather than sexual. It was, perhaps her conventional upbringing, but she couldn’t help feeling that her that her own betrayal had been greater. After all, a wife’s chastity was the foundation-stone on which the entire edifice of patriarchal society rested. What right, did she have to judge Siddharth?” (Phukan, 2005, pp.275).

In her exploration of the protagonist Rukmini's psychological state in the male-dominated society of Assam, Mitra Phukan delves into Rukmini's quest for identity and freedom. Rukmini grapples with challenging decisions and begins to confront the hopelessness of her situation within her family. This deep-seated patriarchal influence is starkly evident in Rukmini's perspectives on her husband's affair with her colleague, Priyam. Despite being aware of her husband's infidelity with Priyam on multiple occasions, Rukmini, as a barren woman, experiences profound loneliness and disillusionment within her family life. Simultaneously, Rukmini finds herself sharing a moment of intimacy with Manoj only once, but she perceives her betrayal as a greater transgression. Following her husband Siddharth Bezboruah's sudden passing, Rukmini's estrangement from him seems to push her into an extramarital affair with Manoj Mahanta.

“The girls...were now dressed in simple yet traditional *mekhela-sadors* to emphasize their regional identity. As she looked at the eager, bright young faces of the boys and girls, she couldn’t help noticing the facial features and contours before her. The almond eyes, the golden skins of the Mongoloid, the curly hair of the Austric, the dark complexions of the Dravids, the fine features and fair coloring of the Aryans, were all present in the crowd of young faces before her. And they wanted to rid the land of foreigners!” (Pukhan,2005, pp.91).

Rukmini finds it ironic when she notices the diverse ethnic features of the protesting students. She endeavors to empathize with the challenge’s others face through meaningful conversations and a genuine concern for their well-being. Rukmini, despite being a barren

woman, wholeheartedly loves and supports women in society, while also excelling as a teacher. Her actions showcase her compassionate nature and her commitment to helping those in need, particularly in the context of the male-dominated Assamese culture, setting her apart from the majority of her colleagues.

8.2 Patriarchal Oppression and Predicament of women in Felanee Tale

Felanee is a novel by Arupa Patnagia Kalita that explores the issues of patriarchy and female subjugation in Assam, a region marked by political tensions. The story revolves around Felanee, a woman who faces the harsh realities of being thrown out of her village after her mother's passing. Despite the odds, Felanee's journey is a testament to the unwavering determination of displaced individuals enduring life in refugee camps and improvised dwellings. The novel highlights patriarchy's pervasive and stereotypical overtone, which confines women to subservience within their households and broader societal contexts. The protagonist, Felanee, symbolizes the connotation of being discarded due to unfortunate circumstances. The novel also introduces other female characters, such as Ratnamala, a widow embarking on a clandestine journey with Mahout Kinaram Bodo, and Jutimala, a victim of riots in a male-dominated society. The novel also explores the lives of characters like the driver's wife and Lata Didi, both involved in prostitution due to cultural restrictions and the struggles of being widows in Assam (Devi, 2018), (Thakur, 2023).

“He saw how the roof had almost fallen on the unconscious Jutimala (Felanee’s mother). suddenly he heard a splash. Someone had thrown born baby into the pond! the gang of the marauders then disappeared. The new There in the long grass lay the baby.... This was Felanee. Her name remained Felanee- the thrown - away all her life” (Kalita, 2011, pg.9).

The narrative of Felanee revolves around an individual who navigates her existence amidst a pervasive and impactful backdrop of violent interethnic strife. The road abruptly terminated, marking the final sighting of any individuals. Subsequently, Jutimala underwent parturition, giving birth to a female baby, after which she lapsed into a state of unconsciousness. One of the individuals belonging to a group known as the marauders callously throws a baby into a pond, initiating a narrative that revolves around the subsequent experiences of the forsaken, abandoned, and uprooted individual. Felanee, a female individual from Assam, tragically lost her mother during her birth due to their unfortunate victimization by violence. Her upbringing was marked by the prevailing cultural gender discrimination that existed in Assam at the time. Throughout her life, Felanee encountered many instances of discrimination and faced significant challenges within the male-dominated society of Assam's culture. However, she was fortunate to have the support of a guardian who assisted her in navigating these obstacles and facilitated her growth and development. From this heart-breaking beginning, Felanee's life is a testament to resilience and the human spirit's capacity to overcome adversity. Growing up in Assam, she faced the daunting challenges of cultural gender discrimination that were prevalent at the time. Despite the male-dominated society that surrounded her, Felanee refused to be held back.

“She held up Felanee's wrist with the white shell bangles, traditionally worn by married Bengali women, and asked, "Is this the reason for neglecting her?" Another boy in a white coat flung angry words at her, "Why do you have such a soft spot for these people?" "Because they are human beings," she retorted. "Do you call these locusts human beings? It is because of people like you that the Assamese people are in this plight," the boy said accusingly” (Kalita, 2011, pg.30)

In Assam culture, women, including Felanee, embrace their existence and acquire survival skills in the refugee camp. Her encounter with a doctor epitomizes the suffocating impact of ethnic and gender discrimination during times of conflict. The doctor's perplexing question, "What are you?" directed at a pregnant woman, underscores how these prevailing prejudices strive to overshadow every facet of a person's identity. In this male-dominated society, the prospects for women's health and freedom are actively discouraged, as evident in Felanee's bewildered response when she utters the word "Women." This moment highlights the enduring influence of ethnic discourse on women within a society dominated by men.

“Felanee kept looking at the boys. What did they want to do? Who will live in their independent country? And who will live in Bulen's state? What all will they divide? Could they divide the sky over their heads? Will they divide the water in the rivers; the trees, the land, the people? Will they separate Kali Boori from her, and Minoti from Sumala? Will they divide Jon's mother, Jaggu's wife, Kali Boori and Phool? How would they be divided? Would they be cut into pieces and divided?” (Kalita, 2011, pg.184).

In Assam culture, women, including Felanee, embrace their existence and acquire survival skills. They face mistreatment, marginalization, and oppression, often being discarded like refuse. Despite these challenges, some women find the strength to assert themselves and resist patriarchal norms. Women in the oppressed class experience a dual form of marginalization, enduring the consequences of their subordinate status within a male-dominated societal framework. They find strength in navigating the turbulent vortex and embracing their future. Furthermore, the current study illustrates the real-life experiences and challenges confronted by tribal women community in northeastern region of India. Such an ill-treatment triggers needless unease that could possibly result in self-induced psychosomatic disorders endangering the mental health of women (M & G, 2023). The arduous circumstances and prevalence of violence endured by certain individuals have resulted in severe health afflictions, as exemplified by the character Jaggu's wife in the novel. Specifically, her prolonged engagement in physically demanding labour and the unfortunate experience of two abortions have led to her developing a prolapsed uterus. Consequently, Jaggu exhibits a rejection of his wife and seeks solace in the companionship of the driver's wife. The author comprehensively analyses the pervasive presence of stereotypical undertones and the systematic subjugation of women within a

societal framework predominantly governed by males. This framework actively discourages the promotion of women's health and autonomy, thereby perpetuating gender inequalities and limiting women's agency.

9. Limitations of the Study

Mitra Phukan and Arupa Patnagia Kalita have employed their literary works to raise feminist consciousness, vividly illustrating the struggles of women seeking to break free from societal norms and establish their identities. While the paper has made valuable contributions in highlighting the feminist themes, it acknowledges its limitations, primarily focusing on Assam and excluding other authors

Even though *'The Collector's Wife'* and *'Felanee'* deal with the theme of patriarchal dominance and portrayal of women, the current research paper has a few limitations in that the patriarchal manipulation of the Assam women tribe alone is being considered. A comprehensive scrutiny of the Assam culture and tradition inhabiting the Northeast region, especially the patriarchal yoke laboured by the women community inhabiting the North-eastern region, must be examined. In addition, only the two-specific works of Mitra Phukan and Arupa Patnagia Kalita are examined, while the other authors' works are kept out of the literary purview. This limitation suggests that a more extensive and inclusive analysis of the literature from the North-eastern region could offer a more holistic perspective on the theme of patriarchal dominance and the portrayal of women in the context of Assam cultural traditions.

10. Conclusion

The novels *The Collector's Wife* and *Felanee* explore patriarchy's oppressive nature in a male-dominated society. Both novels highlight the subjugation of women, their struggle to forge their own identity, and the exploitation of the female body in a consumer society. In the case of Rukmini, the Collector's wife faces different forms of patriarchal subjugation even though she is a well-educated lady, while in the case of Felanee, who had been deserted in the dustbin by anonymous parents and raised under the care of Ratna Mala also encounters myriad forms of oppression by male-dominated society in the refugee camp. Rukmini is experiencing a sense of dislocation and disillusionment because of her husband Siddhartha's constant transfer to different locations, which ties her emotionally to her native land. The premature death of her husband adds to her anxiety-stricken and lonely spirit, which yearns for emotional companionship. Despite experiencing distress, Rukmini discovers peace in the companionship of Manoj Mahanta, whom she met during a wedding ceremony attended by her co-worker.

Similarly, Felanee, who admits meeting with her boyfriend in her helpless condition, rekindles her longing for companionship and assurance. The characters of Rukmini and Felanee, as well as the other female roles, call for reevaluating societal values and the importance of empowering women to define their identities and roles on their terms. Rukmini's mutual educational background and common literary interests contribute to developing a profound connection. Manoj assuages Rukmini's emotional void by assuming the role of a trusted friend and offering her a look into his profound inner self. In conclusion, this research paper underlines the resilience and empowerment of female protagonists in these novels, challenging societal perceptions of female weakness. It delves into women's economic empowerment, emphasizing the influence of patriarchal structures on women's rights in the face of ethnic conflicts. The feminist consciousness in Arupa Patnagia Kalita's *Felanee* and Mitra Pukhan's *The Collectors Wife* is explored through radical feminist theory, emphasizing the patriarchal system's domination, gender role enforcement, and commodification of women. The paper recognizes the emergence of a literary tradition in English writings from the North-eastern region, mainly through the influential contributions of women authors like Mitra Phukan and Arupa Patnagia Kalita, challenging restrictive cultural conventions. The selected novels significantly contribute to the ongoing conversation about gender equality and women empowerment, particularly in north-eastern Indian's unique cultural regional context (Luikham, 2020), (Rani, 2021).

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Dhileep T S has conceptualized, collected resources, analysed, and wrote the original draft. Dr Anu Baisel is the corresponding author and supervisor. He edited, reviewed, and developed the final draft.

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