

## Conclusion

The new generation of women's writings are documentary evidences of the burning questions of the day which constitute the sardonic realism of the world around them. Woman inhabits multiple spaces as she can delve into the private world of domesticity and investigates the public sphere of male prerogative with intelligence and insightfulness. The women writers we have taken into consideration have been experiencing through a difficult period in the socio-political history of Assam. Their writings are entrenched in a politically volatile reality that is marked by the rise of separatist movements, counter-insurgency operations, violation of human rights, ethnic conflicts, consumerist culture, to mention a few amongst a host of disturbing issues and problems. Short stories by women writers create textual terrain for investigative engagement with these historical contexts and contending points of views that emerge out of such engagement. Yet there are issues and contexts, which are still unaddressed and interrogated. We feel self-complacent and take pride in the fact that such crises as casteism and the practice of girl foeticide are not prevalent in the Assamese society unlike in the other parts of the country. This, however, turns out to be only a pseudo-truth when reports of dowry death, witch-hunting, girl trafficking, gang rape and similar other incidences with horrific details make headlines both in the print and visual media. Deconstructing the myth of greater freedom enjoyed by the women of Assam in comparison to their counterparts in the other parts of the country, Dr Rituparna Bhattacharyya and Rimi Das, co-authors of an article on the subject of gender discrimination in Assam, point out:

Children, especially girls and young women, are kidnapped/lured by false promises of better lives by the traffickers and sold into affluent households, brothels and marriages and as bonded labourers for fixed prices. While trafficking for sexual exploitation bears a long history, trafficking for domestic labour is a recent trend.(The Assam Tribune. Issue: Monday, January 18, 2016).

Another issue of serious concern is the alarming rise of witch-hunting cases in the state. According to government report, between the period 2005-2012, as many as 105 incidences of witch hunting had taken place in the state and amongst them most of the victims were women. While on the one one hand these statistics reveal the sorry state of women's condition in this part of the country, the other side of the picture is that taking legal action against the

perpetrators of the criminal act will be a futile exercise if the educated class does not act by speaking on behalf of these gendered subalterns, branded as witches, ostracized and killed, in most cases, for personal reason. Women short story writers can certainly play a leading role through their intensive study and sensitive portrayal of the ground reality because until now the writers and readers have ignored the problem as a problem that involves 'others', not 'us'. After all what is sisterhood if it fails to strike a bonding between 'us' and 'them' and who can do it most effectively if not the women authors? To put this matter in perspective, what we need to emphasise is that the question of gender disparity is still a recurring crisis of our society. The young writers cannot afford to call themselves post-feminist by turning their back on these daunting issues of the time with a feeling of complacency that women are now more liberated than what they were before. Variations in approach from that of their mothers' generations is inevitable and yet in the alarming situation where the very physical survival of women is at stake, women writers now are expected to do more research and be more committed than before.

Furthermore, 'women writing about other women' is an important achievement in the field of woman's writing. In a male-dominated culture where women have to frequently face alienation, repression and division, where their voices are silenced or ignored, women writing is a major intervention. The series of stories by Arupa Patangia Kalita titled "Ashrulipi" may be read not just as exploring women's lives in the wake of violence and terrorism but also as exploring the womb. Writing in this case is an act, which can be identified with Julia Kristeva's definition of the semiotic or 'the pre-Oedipal phase of rhythmic onomatopoeic babble which precedes the Symbolic' that defies the logic of paternal discourse. It also is empowering as it enables women to form sisterhood, which are major survival points for them. 'Women writing about other women' (even in the form of fictional characters) itself is a formation of a sisterhood which is furthermore an act of agency for all these women. Amidst differences in perspectives, writing methods and craftsmanship of these women authors, what is consistent throughout is a clear critical sense of the crisis of the movement from twentieth to the twenty first century – as imagined and experienced in woman's everyday life in Assam.

This study focuses upon women's short story writing in the light of their major thematic preoccupations with the exclusion of experiments in the genre of short story as a craft. This, however, is not intended to create the impression that women writers neglect the narrative of short story as a complex form of art that accommodates intricate and multifarious modes of expression. It is interesting to note that there are short stories where the writers address gender

polemics through a carefully crafted art of expression that maintains a dialogic approach to the argument. In most cases, the writers distance themselves from the characters' respective points of views and encourage the readers to engage in the debates and arguments to cultivate a balanced perspective of their own. Contemporary short story writings demand a lot from the readers in the form of their intelligent participation in the interpretive process. This is particularly true in case of stories like *Tritiattar Galpa* (The Story of the Third Space), where the subject of creating a third space in gender is brought to the fore by focussing on the need to embrace competing points of view on gender. A noticeable aspect of the 21<sup>st</sup> century female writing is the exploring of short story as a fluid and flexible narrative form in which all generic distinctions tend to disappear. In Manika Devee's short stories, for instance, prose and poetic idiom coalesce in an easy mode that invests the language of the narrative with deeply suggestive undertones. In her story "Igloo", lyrically evocative and symbolically suggestive language is exploited to frame imaginary dialogues between a mother and her daughter as a result of which the story appropriates an in-between/new character bordering on poetry and drama. Personal symbolism and deployment of the technique of montages, where apparently unconnected word-pictures are superimposed upon one another, invest the short stories of the last fifteen years with a subtle look of modernity never seen before. Intertextuality is also consciously incorporated into the texture of short story. In Arupa Patangia Kalita's story "Xunali Eagole Koni Parile Beliyé Umoni Dile" (The Golden Eagle Lay Eggs, the Sun Hatches), the history of female subordination is mapped through a series of pictures which reads like journalistic clippings, as in another story of her, "Kurusowar Xopun, Mur Xopun, Xihotor Xopun" cinematic discourses are appropriated in the story's narrative framework. Rereading and contextualizing folk tales and epic literature also demonstrate the presence of contemporary narrative devices in women's short story writing. In fact, these stories give ample evidence that after all the short story is closely enmeshed with oral literature and firmly grounded in the small episodes and anecdotes, which form the base of our cultural and literary tradition.

*Prakash*, a monthly literary magazine, in its March, 2015 issue, published opinions of some critics, writers and book publishers on the subject: The Present And Future Scenario of Assamese Short Story: Prospects and Limitations. Dr Bibhash Choudhury, while responding to a question on the positive and negative dimensions in Assamese short story writing, said that Assamese short story at present does not reflect in-depth intellectual study and cerebral thinking to set a new trend and those few stories where academic and scholarly exercises are

conspicuously present cannot be called successful in provoking unconventional ways of thinking. Repetition of the same thought in various narratorial guises in different stories of the same author also cripples the prospect of novelty in the short story (Choudhury:8). Harekrishna Deka, however, acknowledges that some of the new writers have been showing signs of marked departure from the *Ramdheni* period in the treatment of themes, structure of the story-form and in introducing fresh points of views in the absence of which Assamese short story would have already exhausted itself (Deka:7). Both estimates, showing achievements as well as limitations, throw genuine light on the contemporary trend in the field of short story literature.

Assamese short story writing has been evolving in terms of variation and complex orientation of themes; it has been growing in terms of subtleties in style. And despite that we cannot attach the label of 'postmodernism' to the short story output produced in contemporary literary space. Does it signify a lack or limitation? May be not. We may repeat here the comment of eminent critic Pradip Acharjya that socially and politically devastating phenomenon in the scale of World Wars have not occurred here to uproot our value-system and to make us believe in nothing but chaos. Although this might be a justification of the absence of postmodern character in our short story writing what needs to be reminded is that postmodernism is not merely a negative agenda of finding un-meaning rather than meaning, it can also be seen as a positive programme that opens ways of dismantling the myth of centrality and certainty of meaning by embracing the truth of multiple meanings. Even in the case of Modernity it is acknowledged by all that it had contradictory meanings in various cultural contexts: modernity was a condition of loneliness and anxiety of the individual man for the Western world, while in the Indian context it is an enabling experience; modernism does not detach the individual from the society, it makes him/her socially responsible with a reformatory zeal. Similarly, postmodernism must also have a positive orientation without which the recovery of the marginal and lost voices including the non-human voices like that of nature would not have been possible. What is more interesting is that Assamese short story writing follows this trajectory of postmodernism although there certainly is no disavowal of meaning and belief in the values concerning the human society. It is not subject-matter but technique that has invested the works of many contemporary writers of the world like Salman Rushdie with postmodern flavour in the narrative. It is not therefore an exaggeration of truth to conclude our study with the observation that postmodernity in the form of subverting the authority, the centre, the mainstream, has already emerged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Assamese short story writing by female authors.