



## Crossing the threshold of Patriarchy: A reading of *DAWN* by Arupa Patangia Kalita

<sup>1</sup>Author Dharitri Kaman

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### ABSTRACT

Patriarchy is a social system where male authority is central. The system can be related to the subordination of women throughout the ages. The role and importance of women in the patriarchal society are always overlooked and women are expected to keep themselves within the framework constructed by the society. The space of women in the patriarchal society is unlike men. Women also play an important role in the society. They are the creator of progeny. But the patriarchal system has neglected the importance of women as a creator of new life. In the patriarchal society, the male exerts their complete power over the female. The patriarchal system has constructed certain rules for women and the women are confined within this constructed system, they are not allowed to cross the patriarchal threshold. The women in modern society have tried to cross the patriarchal threshold and they have succeeded to some point. But it would not be unchallenging to bring the desired changes in the system of patriarchy. This paper examines the role of women in the patriarchal society of Assam and how a woman tries to cross the threshold of the patriarchal society. This paper is a reading of the novel Dawn by Arupa Patangia Kalita.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Society, Women, Submissive, Resistance.

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author : Assistant Professor, Deptt. of English, Lakhimpur Girls' College,  
Email - [kamandharitri@gmail.com](mailto:kamandharitri@gmail.com) , Contact No. 8399040971



## INTRODUCTION

'Patriarchy', the word which is related to the male members of the society gives importance to the needs of men and their areas of interest are preferred. Men have authority over women, children and property. Women are excluded from participation in any space of high power. Men in the patriarchal society are seen to own women's bodies and lives and also the children of the family are named after the father. The system of child marriage cannot be excluded and also the education of a girl after a certain age is very complicated. Amidst such type of a society, it is the primary need of a woman to have a space of her own. It can be called as the feminist space. The feminist space should be able to empower women and help them in decision making.

## OUTLOOK OF THE NOVEL

The novel *Dawn* by Arupa Patangia Kalita is about the patriarchal system in a small town of Assam. Arupa Patangia Kalita is from Assam and she is considered as one of Assam's leading novelists. The story in this novel starts before independence and ends with the changes brought by modernity. It portrays the condition of women in the society during that period. The society of small-town is dominated by male members and the women are considered to be the voiceless being.

In this male-dominated society, a girl named Binapani grows up and tries to resist the system. She is the one who tries to cross the threshold of the patriarchal system and change the situation of women. Space and respect given to women in the society are limited. The children in this society face differences from a very early age. Society is constructed by the behavior of women in the social context. Growing up in a society that has constructed norms and traditions, Binapani was not happy to accept the societal norms. She has lots of questions against the system and the discrimination she faces as a girl child adds curiosity to her mind. As a girl child, she is discriminated from



the very beginning of her life. She resisted the system. Binapani has many questions about certain things like the education of a girl child, the outcaste people in the society and also the women considered as 'bad woman' in the society.

### **SEQUENCE – THE AUTHOR'S VIEWPOINTS**

The novel clearly shows the sympathetic condition of women in the patriarchal society.

The patriarchal society expects women to be always dependent on their husbands to live a happy life. A woman has to look after the husband and children. Women are happy at the success of their husband and children. The male members never realized that there is a need for space for the women too. An important space is essential where they would be able to express their talents, dreams and desires. They would be able to discuss certain things in this space which would allow them to think for themselves instead of their husband and children.

“Weren't they happy and content to rest in the shadows of their husbands' achievements and proud to be mothers of their progenies? They were, indeed”.

(Kalita 14)

Here, Arupa Patangia Kalita writes about women in the patriarchal society who were dependent on their husband.

Binapani is not with this system prevalent in the society. She yearns for the feminist space in a small town in Assam. She wants to take her own decision in her life instead of following the male- dominated norms of the society. The changes she is about to bring in the society may not appreciated by many women who are living in the male- dominated society. She has looked after the child of the mad woman whom the society ignored. She questions the society when a girl is considered as bastard, makes friendship with Jeuti when the society considers her as a taint.



As a young girl, Binapani was not aware of the societal norms or restrictions imposed upon girls. For the young girl, every work is meant for both boys and girls. She had no idea that discrimination is made even in the activities performed by children. A child that should be kept away from such discrimination realized it at a very young age. A girl child is brought up in the society to behave in a good manner. She is expected to be docile and she is to live in fear because she is a woman and she may face danger at any moment.

“A girl shouldn’t be so bold” (Kalita 30).

Binapani is warned by her grandmother Jashoda when she rides a horse. According to Jashoda, a girl should follow all the societal norms. She is only fit for household chores and after her puberty she should be married off. This is the practice followed by the traditional women in the patriarchal society. But Binapani’s dreams were high. She wished to study further like the memsahibs and when she was teased about her education that has to be stopped she reacts angrily which shows her resistance towards the system. People considered that an educated girl suffers if she tries to compete with the boys. The suitable place for a girl is her home.

“The house is a girl’s real school. If girls try to be like boys they are bound to suffer” (Kalita 39).

Binapani has secured very good marks and had come first in the class. She was very excited to disclose the special news to her grandfather. But the presence of Darhiya Gossain, Upen Sharma, Jatin Phukan and a few others along with her grandfather, made her stop for a moment before disclosing the news. They were discussing the issues concerning the women of the society like marriage and education. When Binapani showed her progress report to them they reacted in a negative way. They do not encourage the higher education of a girl. According to them, only boys should be



allowed to get higher education and the education of girls should be stopped after her puberty. The male-dominated society does not give importance to the education of women. According to them, an educated girl would try to go against the society and she would create problem in the society. After puberty, Binapani's education was also stopped. She tried to resist it. But her resistance could not give her the desired result.

Binapani faces discrimination very often. When she wanted to go swimming along with her cousin boys, she was being commented that swimming is not for girls. Binapani dares to question the system.

Society has the concept of 'good woman' and 'bad woman'. The one who follows the traditions of the society is considered as the good one and the one who questions the societal norms is considered as bad.

"Who are we to judge who's good and who's bad? Society has made certain rules. If you go by them, you are considered good; if you don't, you are bad".  
(Kalita 206)

Binapani had seen enough of the society after she grew up. The things happening around her are not acceptable. Only a woman is always considered as a bastard and wicked for her mistake. What about the man who has committed the mistake? The patriarchal society never talks about those men as bastard or wicked. No one in the society where Binapani lives dares to question it.

Women have already submitted to the system of patriarchy. They have accepted the fact that they are bound to be submissive and docile. Binapani's grandmother submitted herself to the system. Many things have happened in the society that can be considered as cruel but her grandmother did not dare to speak against it.

"Can we women do things the way we want?" (Kalita, 79)



Here Arupa Patangia Kalita speaks about the voiceless women living in the society. They have already stopped dreaming and never thought of resisting the system.

The issue of marriage cannot be ignored. Marriage is more important than education for the traditional society. A girl cannot marry a partner of her choice. It's the family that selects the suitable groom for her and the girl does not have the courage to refuse the marriage. Binapani's grandmother does not want her to talk to the boy who was considered to be an outcast. According to her grandmother, women are like a piece of white cloth. If they are stained they lose their value. This system of forced marriage destroys the lives of different people. Binapani wanted some change to all those existing norms. The forced marriage or marriage without the consent of the girl destroyed the life of Ruma. She became mad after she was being married off to the person of her father's choice. Even Binapani was also married off to a person who is elder than her and also whom she hated because of his weakness towards girls. But her resistance could not stop the marriage.

Marriage can change the status of a girl in the patriarchal society. In the novel, Jeuti was considered to be a 'bad girl' in her area. She was considered wicked because she acted in a film and the Ukil has decided to marry her to be his second wife. No one visits her house. Binapani went against the society and made friendship with her. After the marriage of Jeuti, Binapani is surprised to see the changes among the people in her society.

"Just because of one man? Because of one man she had turned into a good woman now? In one stroke, from a disreputable girl she had turned into somebody fit to sit in the front row of society?" (Kalita 267)

The changes in the life of Jeuti show the importance of marriage in a woman's life. A



woman does not have her own identity. She is given respect and importance because of her husband. Binapani decided to change all these traditions in the patriarchal society. A woman who has the courage to question the system will always search for her happiness. She can never submit to the will of her society. She would try to help the other women in the society, to be independent and carefree. In the novel Dawn, Binapani fights with the society. She leaves her family, husband and children to live her life as she wishes. This was a bold step taken by Binapani and she has crossed the limit set by the male-dominated society. She has crossed the patriarchal threshold at last.

### CONCLUSION

Thus, Arupa Patangia Kalita observes the role of women and their resistance through the character of Binapani in the novel Dawn. The rules of the society constructed for women are not easy to oppose. One who opposes it has to come across many obstacles. Resisting the existing norms of a society is to question the societal norms. Rules made by the patriarchal society are mainly for the women who are considered to be the weaker section in the society. Women in the society who resist the patriarchal system are bold and their perspectives of looking into life differ from the women who submit to the traditional system. The bold women cross the threshold of the patriarchal system and live the changes they wanted in the society. Crossing the threshold of the patriarchal system gives them freedom, happiness and a sense of independence. Life can be looked in a better way and the magical moment of feeling the freedom can be preserved forever.

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