



## Striving for a Promised Land: A Reading of Arupa Patangia Kalita's *Dawn*

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### ABSTRACT

People live in a society with certain norms and traditions and they always want to be free from the domination of foreign forces. This paper is a reading of Arupa Patangia Kalita's *Dawn* translated by Ranjita Biswas. This paper aims to examine the role played by people of various social statuses living in the patriarchal society of Assam towards the attainment of a Promised Land. The land which will give them freedom and bring certain changes in their life is the desired land. The writer discusses the Assamese people dominated by the whites, their ways of resistance, and their contribution to achieve the goal. The visible changes in the independent Assam are also portrayed beautifully by the writer.

### Keywords:

Resistance, society, modernity, freedom.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

'Promised Land' is the place where someone expects great happiness and, in this paper, 'Promised Land' is the perfect place that is dreamt of by the people under colonial rule. When a place is under colonial rule, the people of the society always strive for a land where they will be free from colonial domination. This paper aims to discuss the situation of Assam during the pre-independence period and the roles played by some people to free their motherland from colonial rule. There are conflicts in society that may be the result of the impact of colonialism and tension among the individuals living in the society. The people working towards a free land are often rejected by some of the educated people in society. People will be gradually alienated from their own culture due to the influence of the culture of the coloniser. After the advent of colonialism, there was a mixing in the culture of the society. Also, there were many changes in the society that benefited the Assamese society as portrayed in the novel taken for study. So, colonialism was important not only as a foil, opponent, and stimulus, but also helped in the construction of the state. They played an important role in the field of education, literature, and the contributions of the missionaries towards society by looking after the poor and needy people cannot be ignored.

This paper aims to examine the condition of people in the pre-independence period of Assam, the sufferings of the families who are working towards a Promised Land, the participation of women in attaining a free land, and also the changes brought by the Europeans in the post-colonial state of Assam. Certain characters of the novel strive towards a Promised Land. The land where people will be able to breathe freely, where the poor will not be tortured by powerful people, and there will be changes in the position of women in society. The contribution of women towards an independent society is visible in the autobiographies of women in pre-independence society.



Women have to face double oppression in the pre-independence patriarchal society. In the text Dawn, the writer portrays the contribution of women through the characters of Jashoda, Bina and Ruma. They are not successful in resisting the Patriarchal system of the society but they are bold enough to help those people who are resisting the Europeans.

### **OBJECTIVES**

- 1) To examine the condition of people in the pre-independence period.
- 2) To explore the factors for the changes in the Assamese society in colonial Assam.
- 3) To study how women contributed towards the development of a promised land.
- 4) To observe the effects of western culture in society: its advantages and disadvantages.

### **HYPOTHESES**

- 1) Poor families became the victim of society in the pre-independence period.
- 2) Influence of western culture in the lives and the way of thinking of Assamese people.
- 3) Resistance to White domination and acceptance of modernity are the means to achieve the desired goal of the people.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND SCOPE FOR RESEARCH**

Chinua Achebe, in his essay "Colonialist Criticism", discusses the European attitude towards Africans and their literary works. He gave the example of the criticism made by a British woman named Honor Tracy. According to Achebe, the Europeans think that they are responsible for changing the inglorious past of Africa and making them



civilised. This attitude of the Europeans is applicable in the novel taken for study. They try to bring changes to society. Edward Said's Orientalism establishes the binaries of 'self' and 'other', 'superior' and 'inferior'. The East was always considered as the 'other' and 'inferior'.

Much research work has been done about the condition of the Assamese people in the colonial and post-colonial periods, the treatment of women in the society, and the influence of foreign culture. This paper will examine the efforts of the people to achieve a Promise Land. The land where the poor will not suffer, women will have freedom from societal restrictions and the land will be free from the domination of the whites. Looking into the contribution of people will result in exploring the advantages and disadvantages of white domination in Assam.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study aims to use both primary and secondary sources. The primary source is the text Dawn by Arupa Patangia Kalita. The secondary sources are the texts and articles related to domination and resistance against the whites in society. These articles will be read and analysed to understand the various factors presented in the primary text.

Resistance against the colonial rule is the only way of attaining freedom. Edward Said in his work Orientalism (1978) discussed the concept of orientalism. It is a style of thought developed by the Occident which considers the Orient to be different from them. "Orientalism is a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said 88). The East is always considered to be inferior, and uncivilised, and they are the one who needs to be controlled. The Europeans tried to impose their own culture on the people. They try to bring changes in society. Antonio Gramsci developed the idea of hegemony in his Prison Notebooks (1929-35). According to Gramsci, a



social class gains power over another social group and influences it not by direct means but by making its ideologies that cannot be ignored. So, the culture of the dominant social group is accepted in society. It is a way of domination by the ruling class. It greatly affected the thought process of the colonised and its impact can be on the system of education and literature.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The novel Dawn by Arupa Patangia Kalita is about Assamese society during colonial rule. Through the characters of the novels, the writer presents a picture of Assamese people who fought for a Promised Land. The whites did not care about the low-caste people. They dominate and punish them for their mistakes. "Oof, of all people coolies are afraid for their lives? As if they have a life worth worrying about!" (Kalita 6). The Sahib considers the coolies as worthless; those coolies who have decided to resist the order of the sahib. It is mostly the poor people who are striving for freedom. The high-class people have started to accept the Western culture. Some of the high-class people of the society like Nanda Barua, Upen Sharma, Indra Gossain, Karuna Barua are busy discussing the incident that happened near the Hamdoi field. Someone has derailed the train filled with white soldiers and it was on its way to Kenduguri. The soldiers suspect Mahananda Barua for this act. "He's done the right thing by derailing this train. This is how we should drive away the foreigners" (Kalita 47). This incident can be considered as a step of resistance against the whites. Among the high-class people, Indra Gossain was the one to support those acts of resistance. His opinions differ from the other educated people of the society.

Through the family of Mahananda Barua, the writer has portrayed the lives of people who are the victims of white domination. His family lives in a dilapidated house and do not have sufficient food to fill their stomach. Moreover, the soldiers destroy everything



in the house. They had to hide the utensils under the water. But Mahananda Barua's son was proud of his father. But the white soldiers had crossed their limits. They kicked the pregnant wife of Barua and her chador was wet with blood. Those incidents were witnessed by the children. "Our land is in turmoil. The fire has singed even the children" (Kalita 75). Jashoda is concerned about her granddaughter Bina who has involved herself in helping Barua's family.

The dream to achieve a promised land by facing the questions of society without violence is seen in the character of Kamini Mohan Bora who was also called Jakho Bora. He is laughed at by society for his ways of living and is known for his stinginess. "He got up at dawn and come rain, come shine; he could be seen planting trees by the roadside" (Kalita 72). People ignored his behaviour and the children made fun of him. He had a big field of around eight to nine bighas but he never cultivated or used the land for any purpose. In his mind, he has other dreams which society never thought of. "Bina stood transfixed. So, the man had been dreaming this dream all these years? He saved every coin, starved and saved, silently bearing all the ridicule because he wanted this to happen" (Kalita 310). After more than thirty years when Bina saw the college named 'Kamini Mohan Bora College' she understood that Bora had dreamt of education in a free land. Higher education will be an opportunity for women too.

On the other hand, a part of the society was busy adopting the foreign culture. The gramophone was brought to the house and it is compared to the dhutura flower. And people were excited about this new thing. "Her three sons were discussing something with the white man. And Jashoda saw something she had never seen before. The room turned smoky as her sons puffed on the cigarettes offered by the white man" (Kalita 76). The sons had adapted themselves to the new culture of the society. Instead of resisting the whites, they tried to develop a friendship with the whites. In a way, people



are accepting the changes brought by the whites. It can be said as the advent of modernity. The Europeans established a missionary school for society. And Bina had the opportunity to be a student of the school. She was happy to learn new things in her school.

Gossain's opinion about women is against the tradition of society. He has spoken about the remarriage of a widow and how society would have treated her if a widow marries for the second time. Also, he was against the system of society which gives education to a girl child till her puberty. Gossain accepted changes but these changes could only be achieved in a Promised Land. "One day, women will become doctors, lawyers, and magistrates. That day is bound to come" (Kalita 39). In a land dominated by whites, people have started to nurture a ray of hope for the future.

Women also played a role in fighting for freedom. The characters of Jashoda, Bina and Ruma helped Mahananda Barua and Jatin. When Mahananda Baruah was injured, he was hidden at the backhouse of Nanda Baruah and it was the duty of Bina and Jashoda to supply food to him. 'Ruma gave her the packet and told her "Don't show it to anyone"' (Kalita 60). Ruma, the lover of Jatin, was also helping them in their mission. She supplied Mahananda Barua with a gun. And Bina was to deliver the packet to Barua.

Assamese people were seen converting to Christianity. The son of Dhaniram Bora has converted to Christianity and will become Father McPherlin and dedicate his life towards society by helping the poor and needy. "Bora's son but a McPherlin. In your language an outcaste" (Kalita 138). After Ratan had converted to Christianity, society considered him an outcast. But the missionaries are doing a lot for Assamese society. They have started printing books, publishing a book regarding the ancient scriptures.



People like Dariya Gossain who are concerned with women have started writing books on women.

Ratan was now talking about Calcutta, how the people there were fighting for widow remarriage and how they had stopped the system of Sati. Reformers were doing a great deal for the education of women. Bina visualised a wide world opening out in front of her (Kalita 165).

Everyone was looking forward to a land filled with education and freedom. Their dreams will be fulfilled but it will cost the lives of a few. Mahananda Barua and Jatin had to sacrifice their lives to make the state free from colonial rule.

## **CONCLUSION**

Towards the end of the novel, the writer presents a different picture of the free society. The whites have left the land and elections had been held twice in the independent country. The dream of a Promised Land by Mahananda Barua and others had come true. Society has accepted the changes, and women have become independent. The town has changed; old-styled houses were replaced by new houses. These are the results of acceptance of modernity by people of society. Fighting against obstacles and accepting new ideas which are benefited for society is the means to achieve a desired goal.

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