THE IMAGE OF THE FALLEN WOMAN IN THE MODERN INDIAN NOVEL: A STUDY OF SELECT ENGLISH AND ASSAMESE TEXTS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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In affectionate remembrance of my father

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the concept of fallenness that is generally associated with the woman. Femininity, virtue and chastity are words coined to express and contain a woman's sexuality within limits set by society. Sexuality is an abstract concept and it is a variable reality that changes within individuals, within genders and within societies. Nonetheless, it is accepted that a man's control of woman's sexuality is the key factor in ascertaining a woman's position. Male domination is a pervasive phenomenon-culturally, psychologically and socially. In a patriarchy male and female roles are markedly different and a female who fails to manifest the feminine attributes in proper measure is in danger of losing her identity. Once she deviates from the natural sphere of the family and from certain proprietary norms meant for a woman, she is stigmatized and acquires the epithet of a 'fallen woman'. Women are culturally constructed as feminine, pure, obedient and confined. While men occupy the controlling sphere, female sexuality remains under masculine dominance. Sexual deviation is a constant presence in society but it is always the women who are singled out for condemnation. If a question is raised asking what is a woman's sphere, the answer will invariably point towards the domestic. A sheltered feminine upbringing, a suitable choice of a husband and a customary execution of wifely duties sum up a woman's existence.

Assuming that there is no vital difference among the women of India culturally, I have chosen to discuss in this thesis, the character of the fallen woman as portrayed by Indian writers writing in two different languages—English and Assamese and have tried to compare the situations that lead a woman to transgression in any society. My intention has been to observe whether there is any basic difference in the values that indicate a woman's fallen status as it is reflected in these novels. How did these writers who represent different parts of India work in the sphere of femininity and feminine sexuality? While chaste wives and virtuous maidens are the dominant constructs in the realm of feminine ideals, the edifice of a woman fallen from honour have inflected the coding of female chastity and feminine virtue. A person's identity, though deeply personal, indicates multiple social associations. So, if it is troubling on a personal level, it also causes trouble on the social level too. How does then society judge a woman's fall? The image of a woman contains, in essence, all the definitive aspects of the feminine and defying history, this impression has remained unchanged. How does then a woman who transgresses cultural constructs of the idealized feminine, find a place in Indian literature?

I propose to explore the nature of fallenness and account for the diversity in fictional representation of the fallen woman in selected English novels of, R K Narayan, Kamala Markandaya, Khushwant Singh, Manju Kapoor, Arundhati Roy

and Anita Nair and in the select Assamese novels written by Homen Bargohain, Jogesh Das, Sayed Abdul Malik, Bhabendranath Saikia. Mamoni Raisom (Indira) Goswami and Nirupama Bargohain. The thesis is divided into six chapters which apart from the introduction and conclusion also focus on the dominant role patriarchy plays in containing a woman's sexuality and analyses the transgressing woman and the prostitute as depicted in the novels. In almost all the novels discussed here, female desire and its fulfillment in unconventional ways has been a central question. This thesis offers a thematic comparison of the ways in which fallen women are depicted by novelists representing multiple societies where female sexuality is seen and protected only as a procreative agency. It seeks to examine the unconventional female characters and illumine the ways in which literary creativity is shaped by the interaction between the individual perceptions of the writers and the social milieu in which they were writing.

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DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly with due references. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted elsewhere for the award of any degree.

Jonali Sharma

Name of the candidate

Date: 30. 6. 2011.

CERTIFICATE OF THE SUPERVISOR

This is to certify that the thesis titled **The Image of the Fallen Woman in the Modern Indian Novel: A Study of Select English and Assamese Texts** submitted to Tezpur University in the Department of English and Foreign Languages under the School of Humanities and Social Sciences in partial fulfillment for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is a record of research work carried out by Ms. Jonali Sharma Hazarika under my personal supervision and guidance.

All helps received by her from various sources have been duly acknowledged.

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TEZPUR UNIVERSITY
(Certificate of the External Examiner and ODEC)

This is to certify that the thesis entitled The Image of the Fallen Woman in the Modern Indian Novel: A Study of Select Texts in English and Assamese. submitted by Ms Jonali Sharma Hazarika to Tezpur University in the Department of English and Foreign Languages under the School of Humanities and Social Sciences in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English has been examined by us on 17.1.2016 and found to be satisfactory.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations will be used to refer to the novels discussed in the thesis.

- NS--- Nectar in a Sieve
- TV---Two Virgins
- TP---Train to Pakistan
- TG---The Guide
- LC---Ladies' Coupe'
- M----Mistress
- DD---Difficult Daughters
- TGST---The God of Small Things
- TTNS---The Tale of a Nomadic Soul
- TMHT---The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker
- THBD---The Hour Before Dawn
- S----Subala
- A----Aboidha
- DaN—Dawar aru Nai
- JG---Jiyajurir Ghat
- B----Bonjui
- IGSG---Iparor Ghar Siparor Ghar

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

...the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb,
and her mouth is smoother than oil;
but her end is bitter as wormwood,
sharp as a two-edged sword.
Her feet go down to death;
her steps take hold on hell...
Remove thy way far from her,
and come not nigh to the door of her house...
Bible(Proverbs 5.3-5,8)Haywood.

According to Carol Smart, the biology of a woman is such that it encourages disruption and unruliness and she constantly needs surveillance and control. Quite a number of social discourses shape this problematic of a woman and beneath a specific patriarchal veneer there exists a form of a woman who is shaped through different constructions.

> Woman is not a singular unity that has existed unchanged throughout history as certain feminist, religious and biological discourses might proclaim. Rather, each discourse brings its own Woman into being and proclaims her to be natural Woman (Smart 7).

Being a problematic body who in the absence of close surveillance would pose a threat to the moral and social order, a woman is constructed as both powerful

and powerless, as sexual agents but also as victims, as dangerous but in need of protection. At the same time, however, there have been resistances towards such constructions and the subject called woman has not merely let herself to be controlled but also has conditioned her agency in constructing a subjectivity for herself (ibid).Such efforts have at different times alternately proved enabling and restricting for her.

Constructions of gender suppose a woman to grow up with notions of virtue, chastity, honour, humility, obedience and other such normative codes and the woman who questions this patriarchal model of feminine sexuality is degraded to the status of a 'loose woman' and is considered fallen. In a society which is generally patriarchal to a large extent, a great divide is constructed between the 'good' and 'bad' girls and this status is maintained and often alleviated by their potency of sexual acquiescence. The woman who questions all traditional convictions and engages in relationships that border on the forbidden or uses sex as a means of profit or rejects appropriated sexual advances and thwarts all attempts to keep her in the sexual service of male desire, is also a fallen woman because she steps out of the precisely defined confines of the patriarchal concept of 'proper place'. Charles Dickens' Nancy in *Oliver Twist* and Alice Marwood in *Dombey and Sons,* Elizabeth Gaskell's Mary Burton and Ruth, George Moore's Esther Waters, Emile Zola's Nana and Flaubert's Madame Bovary in the novels of the same names, are all women of scandalous repute and they reveal the conventional picture of the gulf between the good and the bad woman. The patriarchal society which readily classifies chastity and virtue in woman as endearing qualities is quick to attribute characteristics of disrepute to all such women who transgress normative codes, either willfully or out of compulsion and call them fallen women. They fall from the ideals of womanhood and by degrading themselves provoke shocking and horrifying reactions from the society. Most unfortunately, however, they fail to drag their male associates to ignominy even though they are often the demanding partakers in a mutually profitable exercise. Society is and continues to be indignant with the women, conveniently disregarding the fact that they are often victims of circumstances and it

is always by capitalizing on the needs and desires of men that they themselves become victims of sexual subordination and acquire for themselves a fallen status. Given the gendered nature of all social constructs, a man's experience in such instances will always differ from those of a woman.

> When a woman falls from her purity there is no return for her — as well may one attempt to wash the stain from the sullied snow. Men sin and are forgiven; but the memory of a woman's guilt cannot be removed on earth. Her nature is so exquisitely refined that the slightest flaw becomes a huge defect. Like perfume, it admits of no deterioration, it ceases to exist when it ceases to be sweet. Her soul is an exquisitely precious, a priceless gift, and even more than man's a perilous possession (Starbuck qtd in Mitchel xvi).

Considering the nature and the position of woman in society, it is always her feminine purity that is counted as the marker of her virtue. As a daughter and a wife she is expected to remain within the strictly defined spaces of virtuousness. Any sexual relation that transgresses marital codes dooms a woman and she becomes a deviant. She may be a seduced victim of male sexual dominance or she may be a woman fallen from the standards of morality set for a woman. Alternately, she may be a liberated woman free in thoughts and actions, hence capable of choosing her destiny. Whatever her reasons for transgression, the fallen woman seldom finds a respectable position in society and likewise, a favourable depiction in literature.

She is the castigated character who is delineated according to the dictum of patriarchy.The term fallen would encompass all those who do not adhere to the codes of femininity. Since sexual behaviour is one of the most sensitive areas in a person's life, aberrations and promiscuity on the part of the female stand as a striking deviation from what society declares to be an acceptable form of social behaviour. Though all fallen women are not prostitutes, they are also one of the

kind and it is still relevant to note the observations of Sumanta Banerjee regarding the social standing of prostitutes.

> ...like other wage workers...the prostitute also is pushed into a strictly defined narrow space. She is condemned to the exclusive role of a specialist in sexual entertainment. Stripped of all emotional and intellectual attributes, she becomes the female body...an input required at one level of the production process in a capitalist society. Reduced to a source of purely utilitarian needs, her body is expected to produce the regular nocturnal fantasy of pleasure ... She represents the ultimate in alienation ... (Banerjee 19-20)

Throughout history prostitutes have been regarded as fallen women but Simone de Beauvoir is of the opinion that to preserve the safety and sanctity of a part of the female sex, it is necessary that another part of them should be sacrificed. The prostitute is the scapegoat who faces the social anathema towards their behaviour. At the same time men unleash their turpitude upon her and discard her after use (Beauvoir 569). Michel Foucault also remarks that men are generally granted a greater degree of liberty than women and they are allowed to be sexually frivolous. So prostitutes should exist to satisfy the sexual needs of men (Rabinow146).

In her argument on prostitution, Barbara O. de Zalduondo opines that there are two social discourses on the problematic of prostitution. The first which is more pragmatic is rather evaluative in nature and focuses on the immoral behaviour of the prostitute. The other, on the contrary, is more prescriptive and supposes women's sexuality to be a dangerous ground—an aspect that has to be guided and controlled. While the latter chose to concentrate on socio-sexual ideology that motivated such behaviour and actions by ignoring social constructs on gender and power relations, the former adopted a critical view of the women in prostitution.Nevertheless, both these discourses choose to ignore the perspective of

the woman in question and negate the needs and constraints that motivate a woman to sell sex. It also ignores the customers who are also a 'part of the problem' and serves to confuse the issues (O. de Zalduondo 308-10).

In ancient India the ideals meant for a woman were not much different from those for men though as mothers, and as creators and sustainers of life they were expected to follow certain elevated ideals that lent them an aura of greatness and fullness.Her ingrained inclinations towards observing a high ideal of spirituality and domesticity always makes the Indian woman attain a high standard of discipline, moral values and devotion towards her duties in the household and in the society. The Vedic literature, the epics and the *Puranas,* and the grammatical literatures all insist that an ideal woman is one who is endowed with "infinite purity of heart, strength of character, courage and confidence" (Chaudhury 605).With the passage of time, the position of women in India gradually deteriorated and they were bracketed with the *sudras* and denied the rights of having any access to the Vedas. Manu declared her to be unfit for freedom and this idea continued till the modern ages. The middle ages textured with invasions and conquests worsened the position of women .Gradually in the modern ages, impact of education, western ideals, growing consciousness and a liberated outlook have granted a new, broader status to the women of India and they now face the choice of opting between eastern traditionalism and western modernism. However, despite all turbulence and evolution, the immortal ideals of Indian womanhood continue to inspire generations in similar fashion. This is so because "their ideals, their visions and their outlooks, manifesting the perennial culture and the ever throbbing heart of India, are at the bottom one and the same" (Chaudhury 609).So an ideal Indian woman is the one who retains her virtue and adheres to traditional norms of femininity while managing and maintaining any relation in society. Throughout the ages this concept has remained unchanged.

The status of the prostitute in India has also changed considerably with the passage of time and though an undeniable existence in every Indian society, they have always remained a behind the scene presence. Their prostitute role is

sustained through their interaction with others or through a fantasy world which they create for themselves. In ancient India, prostitution flourished favorably though there are no overt references to this trade in the early Vedic literature but the Brahmanic literature of the later Vedic period refers to it and also provides indication that this trade flourished in the early period as well. The *Rigveda* which is the most ancient literary work of India mentions about prostitution (Banerji 178).Due to stringent moral codes and marriage laws of the later Vedic period, girls who were deprived of a respectable position in society either by fate or by choice or by compulsion resorted to practice as prostitutes. Moreover, there was also this practice of giving away girls as gifts in religious and secular events as well. These girls often had to take up prostitution as a means of survival. Scholars refer to the legends in the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* as taking place before the commencement of the Christian era which could be as early as between c.1000 and 700 B.C. (Thapar 31.) During that period too, the presence of courtesans to mark social celebrations was considered necessary and there are several instances when these women were called upon to be present in their best attire and entertain the men.

The epic *Mahabharata* describes events that took place between c 1000 and 700 B.C and the chief focus of the epic- the battle of *Kurukshetra* is traditionally ascribed to around 3102 B.C but excavations and supporting evidences suggest that the approximate date of the battle is about 900 B.C.(Thapar 28).In this text, there are several references to the practice of inviting public women to come out and entertain the assembled men on various occasions.Apart from these two epics, other literatures like *Atharvaveda, the Brahmanas, the Sutras,, Kamasutra, Arthashastra* and the *Jatakas* also contain references to prostitution (Banerji 178-98). The KamaSutra is a remarkable work describing the art of love with great lucidity.The courtesans mentioned in these texts often belonged to different categories depending on their economic and social status and hence a profusion of synonyms were used to refer to them. They were often adept in various arts and could be regarded as accomplished women, who could read, write, sing and dance,

recite and compose poetry, play different forms of musical instruments and were proficient in various other arts and sciences. Like the hetaera of Greece or the geishas of Japan, the courtesans were also an integral part of Indian social life and they were not looked down upon. History mentions the Nanda dynasty that was founded by Mahapadma who was born of the union between a courtesan and a barber.They were regarded to be of low origin and the dynasty ended up after a short period in 321 B.C but this fact also bears testimony that courtesans and prostitutes were a part of social life. In the early centuries, women were generally relegated to the house hold. The *Manu Samhita* authorizes thus:

> The sacrament of marriage is to a female what initiation with the sacred thread is to a male. Serving the husband is for the wife what residence in the preceptor's house is to the man and the household duty is to the woman, what offering sacrifices is to the man (MS II.67 qtd in Banerji 222).

Consequently women from the households had fewer chances to accomplish themselves in any thing other then serving their husbands and so the educated and cultured men often sought the company of the prostitutes who by their youth, beauty, and accomplishments offered the men something which their wives did not. The courtesans or *ganikas* as they were known did not confine themselves solely to the entertainment of men .Often they engaged themselves in other functions for the state and participated in victory celebrations, worked as political spies, performed as temple dancers, gave musical and dance performances and sometimes even carried out the duties of a maid servant. They could command considerable fee and the wealthier among them made generous contributions to social and religious works. Another class of prostitute flourished in the middle age as temple dancers and they were regarded as servants of God(*Devadasi)* who attended on the God's person and danced and sang before Him and like servants of an earthly king were also at the disposal of the courtiers whom the king

favoured.These temples were a centre of social and economic life for the people during the medieaval period and these were maintained as any large scale institution of the modern times.Romila Thapar mentions that the temple at Tanjore which was possibly the richest during those times had a substantial income acquired through donations, contributions and revenue.In addition to the many hundreds of priests, attendants, musicians and other support staff, about 400 women associated with entertainment also lived off the temple.These women were called *devadasis* and they were commonly found in most temples during the Chola period,In course of time their status denigrated from a venerated group of temple dancers to a shamefully exploited class of prostitutes (Thapar 211). In ancient India, literature and treatises on erotica occupied an important position and these were placed on equal footing with the sciences of *Dharma* and *Artha* which the princes had to acquire as a part of their education. The *Kama Sutra* which is a compilation of works describes customs of the 4th century B.C reviewed during 8th century AD. It is a "partial and systematic study of one of the essential aspects of existence" and is a parallel treatise like the *Artha Shastras* and the *Dharma Shastras* in the sphere of love, eroticism and the pleasure. (Danielou 4-5)The book deals in minute details the daily lives of these public women. This is ample proof that from the earliest times, the prostitutes occupied a central position in Indian society.

A fair picture of the courtesans of the ancient period and of the erotic environment in which they worked can be found in many literary works. Literary output during the period 200 B.C to A.D 300 depicts tales of courtesans and public women. *Shilappadigaram* and *Manimegalai* in Tamil are two such poetic works that deal with courtesans. (Kosambi 124). *Vaishikatantra,* as the title denotes contains advice regarding the technique of a prostitute. It is the oldest work in Malayalam literature relevant in this context and is attributed to a period earlier than 11th century.*Ambopadesham* by Venmani Mahan Namboothirippad (1844-1893) also contains references to prostitution. *Kuttanimata* written in the 8th -9th century A.D is a text on courtesans written by Damodaragupta(Sharma:1198-99))

Samaymatrika by Kshemendra also deals with the subject of advice given to courtesans on the tricks of ensnaring men.*Shringarmanjari* is a work entirely devoted to the stories of courtesans written by king Bhoja of Malwa.Jain writers have also described the skills and behaviour of courtesans in works like *Kuvalayamala* (779 A.D) and *Nammayasundarikaha* (1130 A.D).Earlier plays like *Mrichhakatika* have a courtesan for a heroine. The *Natyashashtra* too devotes a full chapter (XXV) on courtesans. Special monologue plays called the *bhanas* were written and these dealt with subjects like courtesans, gambling and the erotics. Sanskrit literature which flourished under court patronage required the poets to study technical sciences including the erotica. Courtesans and prostitutes are freely mentioned in these literary works and these elements of eroticism are more or less integrated into the main body of the work without disturbing the narrative (Desai 1204-05).In the later ages, during the rule of various kings of different dynasties these women continued to occupy a recognized position in the social economy. The princes of the Indian states encouraged prostitution and favoured keeping numerous women and concubines in their harems. Among the lower ranks of people females were not always regarded highly and very often they were kidnapped or coerced to join the flesh trade.

Alberuni (1035 CE)'s remarks on prostitution are interesting. He observes:

> In reality the matter is not as people think, but it is rather this that the Hindus are not very severe in punishing whoredom.The fault however lies with the kings, not with the nation. But for this, no Brahman or a priest would suffer in their idol temples the women who sing dance and play. The kings make them an attraction for their cities, a bait of pleasure for their subjects, for no other but financial reasons. By the revenues which they derive from the business both as fines and taxes, they want to recover the expenses which the treasury has to spend on the army (qtd in Panjrath and Ralhan 66).

The Mauryan administration which boasted of a powerful espionage system followed the recommendations in Kautilya's *Arthashashtra* and engaged spies who worked as prostitutes. (Kosambi 84).During the reign of the Chalukyas of Badami (6^{th} centuryAD-8^{th} century AD) a courtesan named Vinopati is said to have granted a golden seat, a silver umbrella and land of 800 measures to the temple of Mahakuta. She even aspired to call the king Vijayditya her sweetheart (Pranay Vallabha) and suffered no scruples in being a courtesan. During the Chola period too, the institution of *devadasis* flourished well and rock inscriptions record the rich endowments made by the courtesans for various public beneficence. Kings too took initiative in establishing dancing girls in their renowned temples. Prostitution was well organized in the Vijaynagar kingdoms as well and these girls were meant for the pleasure of the army. The revenue collected from this trade was again used to pay wages to the policemen.The public women of Vijaynagar were a subject of discussion in the book. *Jehan Numa* or the *World of Mirror* written by the famous Turkish geographer Katib Chelebi Mustafa Khalifa. He notes that "in the city there are not lacking courtesans so wealthy that a single of them from her own wealth pays for several thousand of soldiers and dispatches them from war" (Panjrath and Ralhan 67-71).

During the Mughal period, prostitution was a recognized institution and these women were sought for their dancing and singing skills to provide the best form of entertainment to the kings and princes. Prior to Aurangzeb, the trade was encouraged for the revenue it added to the state exchequer. But to reduce immorality and degradation among people that may be induced by the prostitutes, certain steps were taken to restrict their influence. So they were confined to spaces outside the city and keepers were appointed to keep a tab on the movement of people visiting them. Later Mughal rulers too indulged in and patronized the prostitutes. Generally no royal or aristocratic feast and festival was considered complete and successful without the presence of dancing and singing girls. Some public women with the power of their beauty and wealth exercized great control

over the king and this itself amply reflect the degeneration of these kings. Prior to the regime of Aurangazeb, prostitution flourished free and well and even Aurangaeb though an orthodox fanatic was not much successful in banning this trade. Despite many regulations enforced by Akbar and Aurangazeb prostitution was encouraged by the rich and the poor alike. Although their primary requirement was to gratify the male sexual need, yet by assigning them the task of cultivating the arts they were made a part of the wider society. Very often, the prostitutes were positioned in definite areas of the city where men could go and seek their pleasure. These 'red light areas' which they later came to be known as were secluded from the domestic and homely precincts of society.Social ostracism on one hand and professional solidarity on the other hand, encouraged such exclusion and bonding. After the arrival of the British in India, the status allotted to the prostitutes underwent a change and they came to be treated as commercial sex workers. Moral and legal boundaries excluded them from the rest of the society and they became social pariahs. Society frowned upon such women and regarded them unfit for traditional and homely 'womanly' duties. In literatures too, seldom do we discover inroads into a prostitute's mind or records of the anguishes of a woman fallen from virtue. They are always marginalized and though their experiences resonate the experiences of woman in general in being objects of domination and exploitation, these women are always the 'other' and the society has to be cleaned of them. Whenever a woman tried to assert herself and gave precedence to her thoughts, feelings and natural desires she is regarded as a shameless strut and any palpable mark of deviance from sanctioned codes of conduct would label her a fallen woman. Inspired by such notions, the literatures of various periods too, seldom allowed a fallen woman to rejoin the 'respectable' society and lead a normal life. They are generally presented as objects from which one derives pleasure.

The twentieth century in India is characterized by the effects and aftermath of the two world wars and a subsequent freedom from colonial rule towards the middle of the century. As India continued to fight colonization, it tried to construct for itself a glorious tradition of indigenous culture to counter the detrimental

effects of colonial and racial denigration.The nineteenth century saw the struggle for upliftment of the position of women which began as an off shoot of the fight against colonialism, the spirit of nationalism and the enlightenment of English education (Ghadially15). Following the country's independence in 1947, Indian women were granted constitutional equality, but they remained confined to an unyielding canon of patriarchal governance because the identity of an Indian woman and her status too, are dependent on the entire family, class, caste and community. So she invariably remains under a state of oppression. Sudhir Kakar points out that in the Indian context, a young girl grows up with ideal of womanhood, incorporated by Sita, ingrained into her. Sita epitomizes the good woman whose "chastity, purity, gentle tenderness and singular faithfulness" cannot ever be destroyed or even disturbed by her husband's "rejections, slights or thoughtlessness". A good wife unfailingly became the good woman.(Kakar 55-6) India was thrust into modern conditions of living and thinking, lifestyles and sensibilities changed, but the ideals of womanhood remained the same. Inequality of women and subordination of wives still remained the same and patriarchy continued to be an oppressive milieu.In such a context the fallen women are the social outcasts.

In the post independence era, moral laxity raised its head due to the effects of modern thought. Added to this are the struggles for survival. Social and economic inequality among the masses grew, resulting in disparate sensibilities. Everywhere in India and even in non industrialized Assam, pangs of hunger and abject poverty forced many a woman to embrace a life of shame to support themselves and their families.The advent of the industrial era triggered off an explosive growth of population and this further led to a growing economic stringency among the lower and middle class people. World wide this has become one of the crucial factors that has augmented the number of prostitutes because it is a dependable source to supplement the starvation wages of many underpaid female workers. In the very conservative Indian society it has become the most remunerative occupation for many women for whom it is the only alternative to

starvation. Assam has remained more or less demographically unperturbed by the effects of industrialization and subsequent modernization but there has been a notable change in the values and beliefs of men.In the pre British Assamese society slavery was a recognized institutionand slaves were sold and purchased freely. Depending on their caste the prices differed.While a Koch boy cost Rs 25 and a Kalita boy Rs. 550, a low caste girl was sold for just Rs. 3. According to F.Bucchanon Hamilton the girls were purchased mainly by the prostitutes (Bose 43). The national movement awakened a consciousness for emancipation from exploitation but the position of women remained the same. Polygamy was prevalent, women were still regarded subordinate to men and a mention of women's education stirred up a hornet's nest. But, with the passage of time, there was a considerable change in the traditional attitude and C.S. Mullan observes:

> No longer are they content with the duties of wives and mothers: they too must be educated like their brothers and husbands; they too must have their society and organizations (qtd in Sabhapandit 163).

The Assamese society of the post war period was distinctively different from the rest of India. Assam was slow in industrial development and lagged behind economically and educationally as well. As in other parts of India, the commercial interests of the British were responsible to a certain extent for the formation of a discerning middle class. However the middle class in Assam was more or less "a compound product of colonial bureaucracy, English education and tea industry" (Saikia 163). At the same time it had a narrower base as compared to Bengal and Punjab (ibid).While these states revealed a complex social structure due to the rise of an urban culture, growth of commercialization, advent of capitalism and spread of western ideas and education. Assam did not witness a rapid or large scale transformation of its middle class. This was largely due to lack of educational facilities, economic backwardness and predominantly agrarian, rural culture. In the nineteenth century the role of woman in Assamese society was a

debatable one and common men generally disfavoured the idea of women's education. Marriage was the well settled goal and a virtuous housewife was highly eulogized. Careers by women were unthought-of. It was rather expected that they hone their culinary skills and 'queen it over the kitchen' (Saikia 179).The social setup of Assam too remained far from urbanized till the mid twentieth century. "Till the second world war the hold of the rural culture over the towns was much more powerful and there was no change in the primitive nature of the economy" (C.S Mullan qtd. in Sabhapandit 10).

In spite of being a backward state economically and educationally Assam was remarkably advanced in matters of women's freedom. In the Assamese society, barring aside the families of the high class Brahmins, women generally lived an unrestricted life. There was no Purdah system and women took part in productive activities equally with their men. Restrictions on work and movement were not heard of and unlike in other parts of India dowry was non existent. Child marriage or early marriage was not common except in the Brahmin community. However, widow remarriage and monogamy was not common and though the widows seldom were remarried, men did not stop from having a second wife either at the death of his first wife or even during her presence as well. Men of landed means and other influential personages did not hesitate to bring home a second or a third wife even (Sabhapandit 16).Though the Assamese women enjoyed considerable freedom in comparison to many women of India who were subjected to oppressions like Purdah, Child marriage, Sati or the system of Dowry, it is also necessary to remember that they were members of a patriarchal society where the growth of their sensibilities and their responses as an individual were never encouraged. They were meant to please the male members of their families and remain under their tutelage. This domination sometimes led to degradation as well.

Assamese novelists of the post war period were influenced by ideals of democracy, socialism and individualism. They portrayed the realities of life, the privations and miseries, the choices and consequences that dictated the terms of existence for the lower and middle class Assamese people. We have a glimpse of

the mental and moral decay that stemmed in as a result of economic and social inequalities to make the society an amalgamated mass of wretchedness. At the same time we realize that the effect of changes, economic or social has no bearing on the structure of patriarchy that patterned a woman's life in Assamese society.

In this thesis I have tried to compare the situations that lead a woman to transgression in any society. In the process of selecting Assamese and Indian English texts my intention has been to observe whether there is any basic difference in the values that indicate a woman's fallen status as it is reflected in the novels written in two languages portraying multiple societies. The post war period that is considered for analysis encompasses novels that were written between the late fifties to the beginning of the 21st century. The early part of this period saw the emergence of a nascent nation absorbing the euphoria of independence while surviving the violent aftermath of partition. A sense of nationalism, the liberation movement, and the subsequent changes moulded the social forces at work in the society. This also coloured the thoughts and individualities of people and typified the social institutions, political ideologies and economic structures of the country. Social values, emotions and aspirations of people acquired a distinctive colour. Towards the end of the period, however, a social class that was coloured by all the complexities of modern life— expanding social awareness, irregular patterns of living that are stimulated by the breakdown of age old beliefs and normative codes, and a frantic pursuit of meanings and values of life while struggling for survival in the rat race—gradually came into existence.

Literature reflects its times and society determines the manner and content of literature. The relevance of fallenness as a fictional theme in modern Indian novels is worth mentioning because not only is it loaded with moral and ideological implications, but at the same time it also has a bearing on the role and status of women in society. Adultery and prostitution can be said to be deviant expressions of a woman's sexuality and these transgressive acts categorize women as fallen. Writers approach this social malady from divergent angles but the underlying commentary is the focus on the structures of morality and virtue. While

most of the novels emphasized the transgression of the woman and the problems that arise thereafter, some even portrayed woman as a potential for social disruption. In contrast, however, the later novels mostly tried to depict the constraints that the institution of marriage imposes on a woman's aspirations.

I have tried my best to select texts that have been a centre of debate and have caught the literary fancy of readers and critics alike at the times when they were written. I have attempted to trace a pattern that reveals itself in these texts , highlighting their similarities and differences and the conscious turns and twists that the writers introduce in their writings in order to delineate the impetus of certain actions and their consequences. Rather than examining the texts as individual structures of stylized grace and rhetoric, I have tried to approach them in relation to the social situation that has been depicted therein and thereby evolved an understanding of the responses –individual and social- towards the distinctive makeup of feminine propriety.

This thesis argues that the writers belonging to different socio-cultural milieu have articulated and shaped their images of the fallen woman against the background of their own particular societies in their specific historical periods. All of them deal with issues related to the `fallen woman', but their writing exhibits important differences of approach to those themes which reflect differences between the social circumstances in which the authors were writing. I have selected such novels where there are depictions of the fallen women and also a journey into the 'immoral' frontiers of their minds to record the workings of a mind that induces transgression.

In this study I propose to:

(a) explore the theme of fallenness in the following novels written in English 1. *Nectar in a Sieve* (1955) and 2.*Two Virgins* (1973) by Kamala Markandaya 3. *Train to Pakistan* (1956) by Khushwant Singh 4.*The Guide* (1968)by R.K Narayan 5.*The God of Small Things*(1997)by Arundhati Roy 6.*Ladies Coupe* (2001)and 7.*Mistress*(2005) by Anita Nair 8.*Difficult Daughter* (1998) by Manju Kapoor

(b) analyze the following novels written in Assamese to assess the portrayal of the fallen woman.

1. *Subala* (1963) by Homen Bargohain 2. *Dawar aru Nai* (1955and.3.*Aboidha* by Jogesh Das (1970) 4. *Jiyajurir Ghat* (1960) 5.Bonjui (1958) and 6. *Aghori Aatmar Kahini* (1969) (trans. The Tale of A Nomadic Soul) by Sayed Abdul Malik 7*Iparor Ghar, Siparor Ghar* (1978) by Nirupama Bargohain 8.*Dotaal Hatir Une Khowa* Howdah (1988) (trans. *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*) by Mamoni Raisom(Indira) Goswami 9. *Antoreep* (1986) (trans.*The Hour before Dawn*) by Bhabendranath Saikia.

(c) undertake an in depth study, in the light of contemporary theories, of the attitude of these authors to such issues as the concept of morality and woman and particularly of their treatment of the transgressing and fallen woman as an 'other' and an outcast.

I have encompassed the period from the second half of the twentieth century till the present day and have dealt with novels produced during this period. Following a method that is largely eclectic, with its focus on socio-cultural and feminist criticism, I have attempted an in depth analysis of some of the selected texts of the authors that are mentioned above. An appraisal has been made of their approaches to the issues of sex, gender, body and woman's rights by utilizing contemporary theories of feminism and socio-cultural ideologies, and also theories of fictional representation. The study naturally entails an investigation into the social contexts of the works taken up for in depth study. A comparative study of novels written in English and Assamese has involved the use of supportive critical works, documents, journals and other literary books and magazines.

I would justify my selection of Indian novels written in English and in the Assamese language on the grounds that linguistic diversities do not camouflage the similarities in socio cultural responses. Moreover, "rooted inextricably in their

social, historical and cultural contexts, Indian writers therefore continue to be, first and foremost, Indian, whatever language they write in"(Satchidanandan 24).The vast body of Indian literature contains a variety of literary productions penned in an array of languages that lend an intrinsic beauty and flavor to the mass. The unity of being Indian in the first place has kept a coherent and tangible bond over the diversities in customs and traditions, manners and morals, speech and rhythm, tones and codes of the various literary structures and imparted a distinctive flavour to the literary harvest. Moreover, certain issues like a woman's position in society, her status as a home maker or her defiance of normative codes cut across regional or linguistic concerns and they provoke identical responses from concerned writers who are aware of the socio-cultural implications. From the ancient times there has been an intermingling of languages in various Indian literatures and in recent times too there are writers writing in languages more than one. A literary production of a certain region has not remained confined in readership to that particular region only. It has often influenced and coloured the general literary productions as well. Despite linguistic differences Indian literatures as a whole converge on a point of oneness— that of being Indian— and they pledge to the fact that India is a country abundantly rich in a multitude of cultures, customs, manners and traditions and yet distinctively one in spirit. In the same way, regional writers in India also share a common world of concepts, beliefs, rituals and attitudes with the writer writing in the English language. Conversely, Indian writers writing in English also draw in from their native experiences and colour their fabric with a lot borrowed from their local regions and languages (A possible example is Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*). While dealing with the works by writers writing in the Assamese language I have felt that like their counterparts writing in English they have also used their indigenous narrative technique to provide a deep insight into the aspects that govern and direct the course of a woman's life in post colonial India. The novelists who chose to write of contemporary life, and were also influenced by prevailing patterns of morality, created the unchaste woman in a variety of guises. Sometimes she is a prostitute and called a whore; sometimes an adulteress or a

mistress or sometimes a seduced and fallen innocent. Her story and the manner of her portrayal always reveal sexual attitudes of the society. All the Assamese novels that are discussed here do not have an English translation. Wherever a translated version was not available, I have tried to give my own translation of the text.

An analysis of some available research material that embodies certain concepts and convictions on the subject of fallen woman reveals that most of them consider prostitutes to be the foremost in the category, and regard prostitution to be a social problem. During the nineteenth century in the works of Henry Mayhew,Charles Booth and others, prostitution was viewed as a social problem rather than as a fact of urban life. It has become a feminist issue in the writings of Josephine Butler who attacked the long established double standards of sexuality. In the twentieth century also, different writers have tackled the problem of prostitution, very often portraying the ways in which prostitutes are treated as objects to be preyed upon and the ways they are represented in society as sexual objects that enjoy pain and humiliation. Fallen woman are social pariahs who exist only to be quickly dismissed from the pages of literature. An overview of some such explorations on the fallen woman is presented below.

Sheila Jeffreys in her extensive investigation "The Idea of Prostitution" (1997) theorizes sexuality in general and traces the development and varieties of feminist thinking on the idea of prostitution. She dwells on the myth that prostitution is just another form of work and that it is based on the exercise of a woman's choice. She counters it by arguing that it is in reality a violation of a woman's human rights. In the project entitled *After the Fall: Fallen Women and their Reintegration in Victorian Society,* Laura Gardner explores those work in which the fallen woman are reintegrated into society thereby transforming these narratives of seduction into narratives of reassimilation and employment. It considers the history of a marginalized group that remains a subject of debate even to this day. *Anna Christie and the Fallen Woman Genre* by Sheila Hickey Garvey is an essay that discusses Eugene O'Neill's play *Anna Christie* as a characteristic cinematic and dramatic work in the fallen woman genre. The play is analyzed

using several feminist theories like Radical Feminism, Materialist or Marxist Feminism and Cultural Feminism and besides these, cinematic and dramatic theories as well. The observations suggest that a feminist production of any of O'Neill's plays would be a fitting tribute to the revolutionary playwright. (Wilkins 1995).

Kathleen Barry's *The Prostitution of Sexuality*(1996) is another social investigation which contains extensive documentation on the sex trade and trafficking in woman and calls for a bill of rights for woman throughout the world. *Dangerous Outcast*(1998) by Sumanta Bannerjee is an exhaustive social document which restructures the history of prostitution in pre colonial Calcutta and examines it in the light of the the socio economic set up of the colonizers. According to Bannerjee, prostitution had a peripheral existence in colonial India but revamped itself and occupied a center stage after the British reformulated their policies to suit their own needs.

The thesis elaborates its argument in six chapters which includes the introduction and a conclusion as well. The introductory chapter looks into the concept of fallenness that has existed through the ages. It views the institution of prostitution as it was found in India in the bygone periods and takes a look at its present state. Besides a literature review it also gives an overview of the contents in the chapters that follow.

The second chapter titled 'Patriarchy and the Idea of Fallenness' is an appraisal of patriarchal ideologies in determining a woman's position in society.The concepts of morality and deviance are social constructs and social views on them also differ considerably at different periods of time. For the Indian woman the idea of liberation is quite different from her western counterpart. The family ideals always gain precedence and individual desires and longings are understated.Sexuality thus remain rigidly contoured by the cultural ethos of any society.The woman under any circumstance always remain a vulnerable possession in society and the men exert their power in all spheres—emotional and physical and material.It is this overpowering patriarchal authority that often constructs a

woman's fall and makes the securities and pleasures of the wifely domain unavailable to her.She is then made out to be an exception to all culturally constructed myths of femininity. Considering the cultural affinities that mould a people's psyche I have supposed that the basic patriarchal presumptions do not differ spatially and hence have taken up for analysis two Assamese novels *Subala* and *Aghori Aatmar Kahini* and four Indian English novels namely *Train to Pakistan, Two Virgins, Ladies Coupe* and *The Guide* for discussion in this chapter.All of these novels describe the intricacies of an oppressive patriarchy and asks pertinent questions on gender relations and sexual responses between men and women while the female body remain a site of struggle for sexual supremacy.

In the third chapter 'The Prostitute in Literature' I have tried to understand the concept of prostitution as a social construct that again mirrors patriarchal views of sexuality and sees the practitioner as a social deviant. The prostitute who is supposed to corrupt the social concepts of morality, family life and social purity is always under the discerning gaze of the public for attracting immoral attention. That prostitution is a social evil and permits promiscuity cannot be precluded but at the same time it is necessary to reconsider the economic benefits reaped by its practitioners. If it can be regarded as a form of work, the prostitutes will be absolved of much ignominy without disregarding their aptitude for conscious decision making. However, in the Indian society, prostitution is a tool for male domination on women and though at times a woman's foray into this world may be a conscious decision, it becomes an oppressive institution that robs her of her esteem and worth.The Assamese novels that I have taken up for discussion in this chapter are *Subala, Dawor aru Nai,Bonjui and Jiyajurir Ghat* and the Indian English novels discussed here are *Train to Pakistan* and *Nectar in a Sieve*. All these novels present the prostitute as a victim of circumstances that direct her choice of profession. They are not taken up as subjects of literature in order to tackle a moral problem in society. Rather, the writers try to reveal characters and situations and the prostitute's character emerges as a go between to heighten the moral dilemmas of the protagonist or to engage in socio-psychological

complexities for themselves.They are rarely presented as palpable, human figures capable of feelings and emotions. By and large they are subjects of contemptible and saucy entertainment.This chapter reinspects from the point of view of a reader the myopic attitudes of the authors who pose as members of a strictly discerning society.

The fourth chapter 'Transgressing Woman' offers an analysis of the transgressing characters in Assamese novels like *Antoreep,Bonjui,Aboidha and Dotaal Hatir Une khowa Howdah* and in Indian English novels like *The Guide, The God of Small Things* and *Difficult Daughters.* These characters lead conflicting lives with traditional values and their transgression stems from a desire for self gratification coupled with the will to negate any humiliation of social confrontation. They are deviant in the sense that they opt to overstep their boundaries limited by patriarchy. Each of the novels that I have discussed in this chapter takes up the life of an Indian woman and reconstructs her identity in ways not too familiar. The novelists present them as a deviation from the traditionally imbibed concepts of femininity and at the same time question their attempts to explore these normative gender codes.No doubt their actions reflect their yearnings for independence and self assertion but at the same time they do not remain simple, one-dimensional, subversive acts of transgression. Rather, they involve a great deal of soul searching and complex emotional shades.The relationship between a woman's experiences , her role as a daughter, wife or a mother and her own views that clash with those of the society –all contribute towards the literary construction of the woman as a transgressing character. The characters are revealed through situations and the contexts that they are placed in. It is very often the context that determines their propensity towards transgression.It also determines the relationships and events that scar her and locate her culturally as a fallen woman.

The fifth chapter "Renegotiating the Fallen Woman in Narratives by Woman" deals with the voices of women writers who narrate the same reality with varied perspectives. By being the 'other' in a man's world, all woman's experiences, however different they may be remain interconnected. Ignoring

morality too we can be certain of a patriarchal context that groups women into the chaste and unchaste. A fallen woman is judged by virtue of her actions which do not conform to norms.In this chapter I have tried to look at those texts written by woman writers where a transgressing character is presented as living a life of contradiction and negation. Their feelings, their claims and obsessions are all dealt with ,undoubtedly within the same tradition of patriarchy but with a view that questions and undermines male suppositions. In all the novels that I have taken up— *Nectar in a Sieve, The God of Small Things, Mistress, Dotaal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah, Iparor Ghar Siparor Ghar*—the novelists draws the reader's attention to the fate of the transgressing women not with an intention of condemning their fundamental disorders but with an attempt to expose and challenge the oppression contained within respectable social and sexual practices.

The last chapter summarizes all the findings of the preceding chapters. I have tried to show that fallenness is a social construct and the literary representation of fallen women is also an attempt to subvert the stereotypical image of Indian womanhood. The writers whether male or female deliberately encase their writings in the patterns of patriarchy and link virtue and morality to the fundamental assumptions of cultural and social propriety. We are drawn into the assertions that marginalize the fallen because the writers are able to create in their literature a fervently sincere projection of a conflict that readily undermines the woman. They present the working of a society where sexuality does not remain a mere libidinal upsurge. Instead it is extends itself to the social life and wraps within itself a complex of desires, attitudes, roles and norms.An individual's sexuality is actually defined by personal and societal dimensions and this is a critically determining factor in relegating a woman to the ranks of the fallen.

The above consideration makes it is quite logical to state that this study is likely to be seen as a significant reading from socio-literary and socio-cultural points of view. As far as my knowledge goes, any study of this nature has not been undertaken so far – particularly one that exclusively considers the construction of the fallen woman in the works of Indian writers writing in English and in

Assamese. Its involvement with socio literary aspects in the light of contemporary feminist studies, imparts it an interdisciplinary relevance as well.

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CHAPTER TWO

PATRIARCHY AND THE IDEA OF FALLENNESS

Patriarchy is a *legacy* that is being handed down to us without our ever being asked about it (Johnson 206).

I

The roles assigned to men and women in almost all societies permit wide divergence validating the assertion that patriarchy is the dominant code in ascertaining the woman's position. In a patriarchy, women are relegated to a marginalized position and they share a common experience which arises from their existence in an oppressed and exploitative environment. Women are always considered inferior to men in almost every society and are not granted equal power and position. Decisions are taken by men almost ignoring the woman's perspective. They often debate on the virtues and vices of women and categorize them as chaste or unchaste because purity of a woman is the signifier of community and societal honour. That the destiny of a woman is predetermined in patriarchy is not as surprising as the fact that her sexuality is always the determiner of the restrictions and repressions that are to be imposed on her. Her sexuality also opens up avenues for unexplored pleasure and fantasy for man. Every society deals with issues related to a woman's sexuality in some way or the other and in India this system dates back to a bygone period when the scriptures and the

dharmashastras were replete with strictures and normative codes dictating the behaviour and conduct of a woman.

The concepts of morality, purity and deviance etc. are social constructs and social views on them differ considerably at various periods of time. What has been considered a stigmatized behaviour at some point of time has gradually come to be accepted as normal at some other point of time. It then becomes the cultural determinant of the society. According to Charles O. Jackson deviance and normality are not polar opposites but are part of a continuum and a shifting one at that .He also argues that people do not inherit their characteristic traits but society rather confers it upon them and pronounces them good or bad, moral or immoral (Jackson xii).Considering this point of view, it is very natural to infer that in a patriarchy women obviously are the bearers of social honour and a slight deviance from the accepted codes of conduct would label them as "fallen". Society then responds by humiliating them, ostracizing them or even by denouncing them but very rarely by accepting them. Sexual deviance is a constant presence in society but unfortunately it is only women who are singled out for condemnation. Male control of a woman's sexuality is a key factor of her oppression and in sexual relations the power of patriarchy is at its dominating peak.

Society expects woman to be feminine—mild and gentle, chaste and pure, obedient and dutiful, private and confined. On the other hand, men are seen as virile, dominant, decisive and controlling.They are everything that we perceive in the public sphere, while women belong to the private sphere. So it is obvious that female sexuality also remains under control of the masculine agency. Women are for men wives and mistresses as and when they desire them to be. While they are permitted to divide their pleasures between the woman at home and the woman outside, the other woman is always castigated as impure and fallen. As male prerogative always decides the domain of the woman, what is normal for man is deemed taboo for woman.This rationale applies to all women in general but for the purpose of my thesis I take into account only the Indian women as portrayed by Indian writers writing in Assamese and in English.

Madhu Kishwar is of the opinion that for the Indian woman, the idea of sexual liberation is far different from what women in the West conceive it to be. For them individual rights take precedence over familial or social interests whereas for the vast majority of Indian women and men as well, family interests and social considerations take precedence over individual concerns (Kishwar 211-212).Cultural values in India always place the family at a venerable distance from individual desires and longings. So we often find the perspective of self denial a highly eulogized ideal. This reinstates the idea that despite being accepted as a psychological and physiological drive, sexuality too is rigidly contoured by the cultural ethos of a society and this is the reason why Indian women in general grow up towards becoming a socially moulded entity commanding respect and honour in their communities. Very often, Indian women who belong to a liberated tradition also consider self restraint to be an integral part of their identity and do not indulge in any demonstration of their feminine desires. A woman does not express herself sexually and hence the woman who flaunts her sexuality goes against the grain and affirms her fallen status. Considering the part played by culture in moulding the psyche of people irrespective of their linguistic affiliations it can be supposed that there is no vital difference among the women of India though they belong to different geographical spaces. Indian culture being one Indian writer too does not differ discordantly in their presentation of female roles, temperaments and identities. Right from the colonial period and much before that as well it is the men who have always taken up the cause of women because they are considered weak or backward to assert themselves. With a low degree of awareness about society and the world around her the Indian woman has herself been quite conservative in her outlook. Additionally women also face the problem of preserving and expressing their identity in a predominantly male world. The novels that I deal with in this chapter examine the position of a woman in a patriarchal society accepting the fact that male and female roles are markedly different. Let us also not forget that societies regulate sexuality and in any male dominated society, marriage is one instrument of control towards achieving that end. In a patriarchy, a female

who fails to manifest the feminine attributes in proper measure is in danger of losing her identity. She is stigmatized and acquires the epithet of a 'fallen woman' because she deviates from her natural sphere of the family, her obedience and submission to her husband and her adherence to certain sexual norms which are appropriate for a woman only. I have divided this chapter into two sections. In the next section I take up two Assamese novels and trace the patterns of patriarchal ideologies that dominate the concept of womanhood and determine the status of woman in society. The section followed by it will be an investigation of the same concerns in the works of novelists writing in English.

II

Subala: Victim or Agent

Subala(1965) is a novel written by Homen Bargohain ,an Assamese novelist of the post war period. A prolific writer, he started writing early and continues to influence societal ideals with his powerful critical observations. He has written poems, short stories, novels and a host of articles which reveal his journalistic panache as well. His short stories and novels are remarkable for their strong realism and naturalistic outlook and they depict a shift from the regular confines of subject and characterization in contemporary Assamese literature. Judging by its contents this novel is perhaps a trendsetter in its outrageously bold depiction of the life of a prostitute. Western literature contains numerous references to the lives of prostitutes and present them as leading characters in novels. But this is very rare in Indian literature and we do not have many literary pieces dealing singularly with the life of a prostitute. In Assamese literature a short story written by Krishna Bhuyan that was published in the Assamese literary

magazine *Abahon* is perhaps the first narrative to look disparagingly at the repressive and hostile attitude of society towards the prostitute. *Beshya* –a poem by Amulya Baruah published in another literary magazine *Jayanti* is the first poem in modern Assamese literature that portrays the soulful vicissitude of a prostitute's life (Barua 149). Since then, there has been scant mention of the prostitute till Homen Bargohain presented this stark narrative of despair and agony in the first person and portrayed how Subala the whore, comes to attain her present station. The writer candidly says that he was influenced greatly by his experiences as a young college goer when walking along the railway tracks in Guwahati, he comes across a group of scantily clad prostitutes—all of them famished and desperate. His tender conscience was deeply troubled by this degradation of human values and integrity and it was rather difficult for him to obliterate the effect it had on him (Bargohain 3).

Subala is an intense rendering of the ruthless hold poverty has on the lives of hapless Subala and her family. They are a poor, helpless lot desperately seeking for sustenance. After a series of events that eventually decide the course of Subala's life, she ends up in a brothel where she appeased customers with her youth and beauty. She initially worked with revulsion but gradually her voluntary involvement lessened her disgust into a compliant contentment and at the end of the novel the writer depicts Subala's fear of rejection—a fear that leads her to count her secure days. An intense terror of survival grips her and we realize that it is this same terror that had decided her destiny for her. This is the persistent truth that every prostitute faces. A noted novelist Indira Goswami reveals her experiences during her stay in Brindavan, the sacred place that the Hindus associate with Lord Krishna. While she was there during 1969, she had witnessed the destitute widows who were also known as the Radheshyamis face the same fear of being rendered homeless at their old age. They spent sleepless nights wandering about the possible fate they would face after their deaths. It made them shudder at the thought that their corpses might be left for the birds and beasts to feast on. Like Subala, they are also miserable victims of circumstances over which

they had no control whatsoever. Many of the widows were women who were thrown out of their homes and they did not want their bodies to be defiled by some low caste sweeper or even thrown into the river after their deaths. They made provisions to keep some money aside to be used for this purpose. Some radheshyamis even deposited money with the *pandas* (priests) who were asked to perform the rites for them but very often they usurped the money and threw the corpse into the river (Goswami 2000). This is a tragic fate that awaits all destitute women bereft of a home and a family. Subala, as a prostitute was no exception either.

Subala and her mother are both victims of patriarchal injustice. Their poverty makes them vulnerable to exploitation. After the death of Subala's father, their condition is utterly miserable. Unable to bear the hunger stricken faces of her two young daughters, Subala's mother goes to the village headman to borrow some money in exchange for her gold ring. To her utter dismay, the moneylender pronounces the ring to be an imitation. But he is willing to lend her the money--more than what she has asked for—because she still has something to trade. It is her youth.

> I have told you earlier. I won't lend money without any surety.You still have something with you; if you give me that I will lend you money,more than ten rupees even (S 35).

Her fervent pleas for compassion, her begging him to pity her ailing, hungry daughters only irritate him. He retorts:

> I have not kept you waiting. On the contrary, you have come to me and waylaid me as I was going out. Don't think of fooling me with your tears. Why are you so distressed, thinking of your daughters' lives? You can give birth to

> more daughters if you wish. Quick! Answer me, do you need money or not? (S 35).

His lewd remarks shock her. He could well have been her father— a man who must have lived some three scores of years. She is utterly helpless. Without any place to go and without any other source of help she ponders over her decision to remain virtuous. It is not that she had not looked for some work but her frail health, starvation and pregnancy did not permit her to work anymore .She tried begging for a few days but one day as she entered a household hoping for some kind of help, the lady of the household taunted her with many jeering words. In those circumstances, with her sick daughters by her side, morality seems to be a refined indulgence. "Is there any selfish sinner as me", (S 37) she asks herself and now her sin is her incapacity to feed her children. So she capitulates, changes her mind and early next morning rushes off to the headman's house and brings home a hundred rupees.

Subala's mother sells her body to feed her starving, ailing daughters. She is emotionally and economically compelled by desperate situations to make this choice. Her life reflects the complicated interrelationship between her ideals and her psychic processes, and her social and individual identities. We can be assured that subjected to economic forces Subala's mother chooses to deviate from convention which perhaps, she would not have breached otherwise. But at the same time a prostitute's entry into this trade is also motivated by a host of other factors , most of which are degrading for her existence.Subala herself goes through a harrowing range of experiences that makes her quite vulnerable to exploitation. In *Feminism and Prostitution* Maggie O'Neill claims that,

> Different life circumstances, different experiences, getting involved in exploitative relations with a man...association with other workers ..., coupled with desperate financial

> circumstances and a will to change the situation by any means can facilitate an entry into sex work (O'Neill 76).

This is a condition that is apparent in Subala's life. She becomes a professional prostitute after being coerced into what she considers to be a life of shame. Her entry to this trade is also impelled by desperate circumstances she faces in life. She runs away from home to escape a conniving mother who would not hesitate to sell her as she had earlier sold her elder daughter for a thousand rupees. Her attractive physical attributes make her a vulnerable bait for the village hoodlum and she flees from being seduced by him. Unfortunately, however, her only acquaintance, an old woman whom she meets by chance and whom she implicitly trusts turns out to be her tormentor and this old lady introduces Subala to the world of flesh and desire. This rapacious world accommodates her to perform an accommodating function. While female sexuality is subject to more diverse forms of control than male sexuality, it is assumed that there is a constant demand for female sexual services by men, and this has to be provided by legitimate means like marriage or illegitimate means like prostitution. So situations and surroundings conspire and manipulate Subala's choice of her destiny and she becomes a prostitute. She is an independent woman because she is not ruled by the dictates of patriarchy that figures a stereotyped existence for a woman. She is no longer a daughter and cannot be a wife and hence should be the master of her own fate and existence. Subala however, does not find life coming easy to her. Without any one whom she can call her own, Subala lives an isolated life. Deprived of a respectable existence she accepts whatever her destiny offers her. Ironically, however, her destiny is again controlled by the patriarchal society. So she is forced to be a bed partner to the lewd and the lecherous, to the decent and the pervert, to the young and the old alike. They satisfy their carnal desires on her and in course of time she becomes a potentially pollutant and uncontrolled woman in the public space. Society expresses concern for the moral status of the woman but not about male moral standards. The novelist creates her against a background of poverty and

oppression but at the same time suggests that by opting for a shameful life Subala has closed all doors of attaining any happiness further in life. She can never hope of a home echoing with the laughter of children. Marriage is for her a distant dream. She is a deviant character who cannot conform to the myth of feminine domesticity.Nonetheless, life smiles on her for a short while when Kanti comes to her life. He is a pimp who in spite of being her procurer also nurtured a soft spot towards her and so brings her home from the brothel as his wife. But conflict arises between them when Kanti too brings back the ghost of her former life and starts abusing her mercilessly. He even expects her to please other men and provide him with money. In vain does she try to manage his violence, justify her past and plead for some degree of understanding. She realizes, however, that her domestic partner is nothing but a pimp and their relationship is a continuum of the pimp- prostitute relationship that is marked by degrees of power and control and coercion based upon her value and earning potential as a prostitute. While Subala tries to feel the security of having a relationship with a partner who would support her emotionally and almost sensibly as well, the truth is that there is no emotional bond between them. Kanti regards her as a prostitute and exchange of money is the main feature in his relation with her.

Homen Bargohain regards Subala to be deprived of the bliss of matrimony and in the process underwrites the myth of feminine domesticity throughout the novel. He negates the fact that a marriage where traumatic associations preclude social condemnation is also a means of sustenance for many women. Radical feminists argue that like prostitution, marriage too is a response for gratification of male biological needs but legal and social sanctions define their esteem divergently. We may choose to differ at this point but it is a question that surfaces pointedly. Subala's deviation may be an exception but the physical and sexual oppression that she undergoes cannot be precluded in matrimony either. Prostitution is about being used and Subala is also used by men at various times reinforcing the dialectic of control and subjugation. Her submission symbolizes male mastery and female denigration through sexual domination.

A woman requires a great deal of courage and effort to overcome the moral bindings of society. She is conditioned to be virtuous and good because these are considered normative ideals. One who transgresses boundaries of accepted cultural presuppositions is termed a deviant woman. So it is only under extreme conditions, when she is threatened by pangs of raw hunger and starvation, does she choose to sell herself. Otherwise, moral normatives are far stronger in deciding her choice. Her economic reward is the compensation for loss of esteem in society. She acquires the status of a whore and in return fills her stomach and her dependents' as well. Morality then occupies a secondary position in this bartering of flesh and subsequent sustenance of life. At the same time, her trade is considered functional to society because it accommodates male demand. Subala's susceptibility to male dictates is apparent towards the end of the novel when she gradually attains mid life and is no longer capable of attracting her male customers. They come to her door but retrace their steps noticing her waning appeal. It frightens her but she accepts it because she realizes that for a man, a prostitute is just flesh and nothing else. She clearly remembers the day when Ramu, a boy who grew up in the brothel (his mother was a prostitute), attains adulthood and comes demanding to her doors. For Ramu she is just a woman who can be used to appease his lust and his demand is the result of his absolute biological appetite.

Subala's narrative reinforces Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that a prostitute is a scapegoat and man vents his turpitude upon her and rejects her finally. 'A caste of 'shameless women' allows the 'honest woman' to be treated with the most chivalrous respect...Whether she is put legally under police supervision or works illegally in secret, she is in any case treated as a pariah'(Beauvoir 569). According to Beauvoir, economically, the position of a prostitute corresponds to that of a married woman. Accepting her view may not be our preference but we cannot choose to ignore her when she asserts that a wife who is oppressed in marriage is respected as a human being but a prostitute who is denied the rights of a person 'sums up all the forms of feminine slavery at

once'(ibid). Margaret A. Baldwin insists that prostitution is not like any other form of woman abuse.

> Many women have to endure only pieces of prostitution. Many women are subjected to unwanted sex from men who objectify us,but not typically from two thousand men a year.Many women suffer serial battery from husbands or lovers,but not typically at the hands of relative strangers. Many women receive money from a harassing boss in the form of a paycheck but not typically in a context where the harassment is the job. Each of these transactions shares something in common with prostitution but none of them is prostitution. (Baldwin 296)

A prostitute's fallen status becomes a social construct.In one of her novels *Tez aru Dhulire Dhushorito Pristha,* Indira Goswami recounts her meeting with some prostitutes in Delhi. Her personal experiences with them reveal an entirely different picture of their lives. All of them seemed to be content and happy with their situations and had no regret for anything. They gave birth to children and raised them well.Though bereft of a father's name they went to schools and got education. This is quite contrary to the picture presented in *Subala* by Homen Bargohain. His narrative strikes at the core of our sensibilities and renders the vicissitudes of a prostitute's life with uncanny realism. The prostitutes portrayed in *Subala* are representatives of the vulgar, mercenary environment that was prevalent in the narrow squalid lanes in the interiors of the city of Guwahati. Madan Sarma, a critic is impressed by the fact that *Subala is* an avid expression of the writer's profound compassion towards the abandoned and the downtrodden and his sensitivity about their incapacity to lead a dignified life as a human being.(Sarma 528)The prostitute Subala is presented as an honest ,sensitive woman who values a conscientious life and is yet forced to abandon her reticence and embrace a degrading existence. The writer seems to be intensely aware of the fact that

repressive economic conditions often subject human beings to inhuman conditions of living and Subala is one such representation .Another critic Toseshwar Chetia remarks that the writer was not able to envision a social set up without any gender discrimination and so he failed to visualize any change in Subala's life (Chetia 42). The writer upholds the stronghold of social norms in the Assamese society where feminine roles are defined in terms of duties and responsibilities towards home and society.In his fiction therefore, the prostitute becomes a revealation of the sense of entrapment that one feels in a repressive patriarchy.It is a system from which there is no way out.*Subala* too doesn't dismantle the middle class concerns regarding unequal power structures between the sexes but focuses on the diverse world that exists for women.Her narrative reinstates the fact that their lived experiences in a state of sexual subjugation often outshadows those of their fictional counterparts.

An eminent critic from Assam, Nagen Saikia feels that Homen Bargohain walks solitary in the vast literary arena of 20th century Assam.Very few like him are able to voice the poignant soul stirring realities that men encounter while traversing the expanses of life.He has depicted truth with a fascination that belies his individualism; he speaks of emotions with a deep conviction of realism and projects immense strength while writing about the sordidly gloomy and pathetic.So in *Subala* we hear the echoes the dreadful squalor of modern living and the writer depicts with fervent honesty the incessant anguish of a battered soul.In Saikia's words, Subala is the creation of the economically and emotionally impoverished society which unravels the modern century's predicament—a life sans hope, sans faith (Saikia 1987).

In view of the different observations on the writer and his creation, it is necessary that we know what Bargohain himself thinks about *Subala.* In a candid interview, the writer reveals that while writing *Subala* he had not acquired any distinctive writing form of his own but was solely inspired by Alberto Moravia's writings. He states that the characters in the novel are people whom he had met in the course of his life. He had met them, talked with them and after a close

association depicted the realities of their life. "The incidents in Subala are all true. I have not outlined them as human or inhuman" (Barman 83).

Apara: Fallen by Choice?

Aghori Aatmaar Kahini, (1969) translated as *The Tale of a Nomadic Soul* fetched its writer Sayed Abdul Malik the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award in 1972. The novel deals with the intricacies in the lives of the three characters – Niranjan, Sashanka and Aparajita alias Apara.Though lacking in a meticulously planned episodic and narrative symmetry,the novel reaches consequential heights in portraying the inner turmoil of a set of characters drifting in the crosscurrents of modern ideology and vanishing values. Apara the character around whom the story revolves is identified as a fallen woman in society. Though married to Niranjan, she fails to reconcile to his outlook and he on his part nurses a bitterness against her conduct and her pre marital lapses that she confesses to him. Within the short narrative space of the novel, the writer travels back and forth in time, and we find sequential interruptions that delve into the emotional spaces of the characters at different points of time. A sudden visit by a relative stranger, Sashanka, who turns out to be an acquaintance of earlier days, and subsequent conversations he has with Niranjan and Apara unravel the plot and focuses on the relationships of Apara with various people.The novel is not an account of her relationships or of an unidirectional one but the characters relate their own personal memories that span a breadth of time and simultaneously converges with each other. This records the progression of the narrative. In fragments, Niranjan, Apara and Sashanka narrate the same reality but their perspectives and perceptions differ. It is a well known fact that women are put through different forms of subjugation that eventually shape their 'feminine bodies' meant to service the emotional, sexual and social needs of men.Apara's experiences with three different men also reveal a

similar predicament in her life. During her childhood, Apara loses her eye while playing, due to the carelessness of Sashanka.His father, a wealthy and influential tea planter undertakes her treatment but wielding his influence on her mother makes her his mistress.The repentant Sashanka too sympathetically vows to marry Apara but eventually fails to keep his promise.Knowing about his father's depravity , he leaves home while his elder brother Mriganka seduces Apara, the beautiful and helpless daughter of a poor widow , and makes her his paramour. Apara's penury and Mriganka's wealthy dazzle make things fall into place.She is subsequently deserted by her wealthy lover.Towards the latter part of the novel, we see Apara as a woman of progressive thought and belief, carving out a space for herself as a social leader.She marries Niranjan, an honest and simple man with Marxist leanings but they remain childless. Realizing Niranjan's unhappiness over this, one day Apara reveals her past life, not wanting to keep her husband in the dark about anything concerning her life.She admits that she had been with child and that circumstances had compelled her to terminate that whiff of life.Niranjan is shocked to hear this. Things do not turn favourably for Apara and like Hardy's Tess, she faces criticism from Niranjan.He becomes a picture of woe, dejection and indifference.Though he does not desert her, they start living their individual lives without any conjugal bliss. She reconnects with her one time lover Mriganka and now people's observations on her are suggestive and disparaging. Sashanka stays with them for a week, has long soul searching talks separately with both Apara and Niranjan and both reveal their innermost turmoils before him. On the day when Sashanka was about to leave Apara's house, Niranjan has an accident .When they are informed about it Apara goes through a gamut of emotion that reveals her wavering attachment towards Niranjan. The journey to the hospital with Sashanka, the few words that they both share and Niranjan's critical condition are all indicative of a decisive end which does not preclude the death of Niranjan.

Hiren Gohain, a noted critic describes the novel as a perfect vision of life.He considers the novelist to be profusely endowed with a deep understanding of life in its different hues. His experience as a novelist makes him a cautious

observer and there is just the perfect balance between feeling and imagination that makes the novel an honest narrative (Gohain 706).

Apara's involvement with three different men reveals her wavering like a nomad. Without any coherence she drifts about in life alternately creating shifts of denial and acceptance for herself. Society rejects her throughout. As a girl in her teens, she faces the slander of premarital motherhood which is taken care of by Mriganka.It was he who was primarily and wholly responsible for her first step into degradation and her eventual ruin.She loved Mriganka and loved him dearly.She was naïve and ardent and she accepted Mriganka's gestures of love as genuine and could never imagine his evil designs (TTNS 104). Unable to accept her daughter's scandal, Apara's mother suffered severe health hazards and never recovered from the trauma. Apara's subsequent marriage with Niranjan and her inability to live harmoniously despite her sincere attempts makes her rebellious. She starts living her life on her own terms. Her later revelations before Sashanka are noteworthy:

> A: It may be that by that candid confession I wanted to come even closer to his heart and win his confidence in greater measure.It may also be that by exposing that unclean episode of my life, I wanted to enjoy the thrill of a wonderful experience.
>
> S: You have not been able to love Niranjan with all your heart even now?
>
> A:I am helpless,if I have failed to occupy his heart. But, I have surrendered my body to him all the same.
>
> S: He may not be hungry for your body.
>
> A: I can't believe that. The magnetic attraction that had drawn him to me was physical attraction.
>
> S: What followed then?
>
> A: He gradually lost interest in me. We now live together, sleep in the same room but do not share

> the same bed. In fact there is virtually no more
> mental and physical connection. (TTNS 106)

Apara is Niranjan's 'diseased heart'. She is in the words of the feminist critic Aparna Mahanta a 'refined whore'. She drifts from Niranjan and reconnects with her former lover. On the surface of it she is a social worker so people have every reason to talk of her in derogatory terms.She falls from honour before and after her marriage. Marriage did not give her the niche she had craved for. The writer suggests that Apara's barrenness is one of the reasons for Niranjan's morbidity. Apara's social engagements and her frivolous life with Mriganka stand in direct contrast to Niranjan excluding himself from the frivolities in an attempt to end his mental torment. The two discourses together again comment upon the myth of feminine domesticity that the writer is trying to emphasize. The narrative seems to suggest that Apara is wayward because her identity is limited by her failure to become a mother. In asserting Apara's fall the writer indicates that it is inevitable because she was unable to accommodate her desires within a life that had to be lived within boundaries. Breaking free, her controlled, docile body proclaims the emergence of a new woman, and finally breaking the bounds of a limiting marriage she pursues her hearts desire. This independence however fails to make her an integrated identity. In fact, both culture and society, working as they do through dualisms such as nature/culture, body/mind, and passion/reason refuse to see women as whole beings (Gatens i). She tells Sashanka that she loves Mriganka as he was the first choice of her life.When he asks her whether she does not experience guilt for deceiving Niranjan, she candidly says-

> Had I been free from that worry, I would long have gone away and lived with Mriganka freely. I have caused so much distress to him, have sinned against him. But I know his weakness as he does mine. I know very well that your

> friend's life will be totally shattered without me (TTNS 109).

All throughout the novel there is a constant sense of opposition between the various forces at work.There is the opposition between Apara's body and mind, the desire for love and the need for freedom, between personal aspirations and social impositions, between perceptions and actions. Throughout her life, Apara is left with very few options. Her vulnerable youth finds a companion in Mriganka who deserts her after having his pleasure.Realising the difference in their positions she finds no occasion to protest. She finds no other way than to accept Niranjan as her prospects of marriage were not very bright. She accepts Niranjan's callous attitude to her after her confessions before him and believes it to be the result of their childlessness.She does not blame him for it.Later when Sashanka tells her that her mother had an illicit relation with his father she is petrified and wishes that she be burnt to ashes in the veritable fire of wrath emanating from his eyes. This way perhaps she could make atonement for everything that is past.

> She wanted to obliterate her face and flee the place. Her sad reflection at that moment was, 'My mother was a mistress of his father and I am his son's mistress. My mother was a tart and so am I. How scandalous; how degrading; what an unpardonable sin; what am I atoning for? Is it for my poverty, my beauty, my vanity, my ambition or my foolhardiness? I am educated, the holder of a University degree, a social worker, and an artist. What a mockery; I am a fallen woman, a prostitute-an educated prostitute (TTNS 111-12).

Moving around Aparajita's predicament, the narrative reflects how a woman bears the yoke in times of psychic or social crisis.She suffers not merely

because she is a vulnerable possession in society but also because she is the 'other' whom the 'self' subjugates inorder to emphasize its emancipation.In the process of asserting her own integrated selfhood, she is further made out to be an exception to all those myths that are culturally constructed against a woman's existence. Apara frantically tries to find an identity for herself and fails miserably. Like leaves floating in the water she too drifts along the current of life and finds refuge at different shores. The writer focuses more on the personal experiences and problems of Apara rather than on society and its assertions.Syed Abdul Malik's unconventional depiction of Apara and her honest confessions about her relationships with men within and outside marriage threatens the popular definitions of womanhood.Despite this radical portrayal the writer is not insensitive to human failings and he does not want a polarized world based on gender.The humanizing of Syed Abdul Malik is convincing. It is his intention to depict the consequences of an unsavoury life and the cultural façade that exists behind the so called moral stance of society.The critic Amol Rajkhowa is of the opinion that the novelist's desire to depict love as a central entity in his novels leads him to introduce various facets into the lives of his characters and construct their evolution while they battle fear, loneliness and despair in their search for an embodiment of the eternal values of life. Apara's characterization too records a similar progression (Rajkhowa 420).

In an elaborate discussion, a noted feminist writer Aparna Mahanta takes up the characters of Subala and Apara to illuminate aspects on the characterization of women in the writings of male writers. Both the novels were written in the 1960's when feminist ideas did not gain path breaking grounds and women in Assamese society led traditional, conservative lifestyles. The writers were keen to depict the representation of woman who could be accepted and eulogized by society as the eternal feminine. Both Subala and Apara were independent women living their lives according to their own discretion.While Subala drifts along with changing circumstantial occurrences, she is unable to construct for herself a state of harmonious existence and her choices in the face of a hostile environment

reaffirm her fallen status. Apara on the other hand, in a vain search for her identity flounders and comes to be regarded as fallen in society. She loses the respect and trust of her husband, people in society talk about her in derogatory terms and she is a lost wavering soul—an extreme example of alienation in this modern individualistic world.Subala is a tainted woman and this preclude her admission into the respectable sanctums of society. Similarly, for no direct fault of her own, Apara too becomes a tainted character and is made to pay the price for her fault. In a bid to assuage her physical deformity, Apara tries to enhance her aesthetic attributes and expresses herself through the medium of arts. Just as Apara grows aware of her creative capacities, Subala too becomes aware of her capacities as a woman. Their existences, their lives, make these two women an exception from the rule. Mahanta argues that the two writers have presented these two characters as unconventional and hence cursed in society.Through their characterization the writers seem to express their conviction in the traditional roles ascertained for women in society. While Subala frets for a home of her own, Apara is lonely and disturbed for being barren which is one cause for her strained relationship with her husband. Nevertheless, though portrayed as negative characters, Mahanta believes that the writers are also sympathetic towards their creations. Their transgression signifies a protest against the oppressive society which dominate and regulate a woman's existence. Apara and Subala reveal that in their transgression they have chosen to abide by their sensibilities which render them their separate identities and also direct their actions however unacceptable those may seem to the society at large (Mahanta 39).

III

Commodities of Pleasure

The patriarchal authorities that construct the wife and non wife categories and make the securities and pleasures of one domain unavailable to the other also make the prostitutes victim of sexual exploitation. The concept of sex merges with their bodies and personalities. Socially too their positions are in the bottom echelons and a great partition is constructed between the good girls and the bad girls.In a consumer society that is also patriarchal, the buyer necessarily is a male, and the seller transgresses restrictive boundaries and perpetuates the whore stigma. Seldom is it of consequence whether the male who is associated with her fall is a father, a son or a brother to someone. In patriarchy, the men hold emotional, physical and material power over women.and they exercise this power in all spheres— work, love, sexuality or violence. It is this power that empowers men to coerce and enjoy girls who are much younger to them and might even remind them of their daughters. Khushwant Singh has depicted the grim realities of the Indian partition in his incredibly compelling novel *Train to Pakistan* (1956).It records the anguish of a people divided and uprooted and simultaneously portrays the grim struggle for survival that the people undergo. Set in the quaint village of Mano Majra, the novel presents a host of characters who experience a complex mixture of revulsion and trepidation at the sequence of events that render their lives frantic and insecure. Khushwant Singh presents a saga of partition violence in this novel that vividly invokes the gruesome realities of a nation divided_with haste.Perhaps the best known of all partition novels, here the writer recreates a sleepy village Mano Majra by a railway station. When the upsurge of violence and the inter communal bloodshed and rancor spreading from Bengal to the Northwest Frontier at last touches them, the lives of many ordinary men and

women are shattered and their trauma surpasses our imaginations.The characters are borrowed from real life and so we identify with their agony.With infinite compassion and humanity, the writer portrays the momentous event of partition and the gripping truths of the villagers tryst with destiny. The idyllic peaceful camaraderie in the village comes to a halt when a train crawls into the quiet village with a rather unusual cargo of mangled dead bodies. When the incident repeats itself, the village gets transformed into a violent cauldron of bitterness, hatred and conflicting loyalties. Amidst this display of venegeance people had to give up everything they had including their identities. Though the central narrative moves around a plethora of events related to the partition, there are some characters and incidents that reinforce the dialectic of a disparaging power structure. Female sexuality is subjected to discriminatory treatment and exploitative structures of the society reflect their patriarchal underpinnings. We meet the ageing deputy commissioner and magistrate of Mano Majra, Hukum Chand who satisfies his lust with a girl who reminds him of his daughter. The writer portrays him as a man with a corpulent frame who is very conscious of his appearance, more so to camouflage his advancing age. Often simply referred to as "the government" Hukum Chand is a perfectly outlined character. .He is very concerned to hear about the rapes and murders of Hindu women in Pakistan and lauds their attempts to save their honour by drowning themselves in wells.

> Harey Ram, Harey Ram, rejoined Hukum Chand with a sigh....Our Hindu women are like that: so pure that they would rather commit suicide than let strangers touch them. We Hindus never raise our hands to strike women but these Muslims have no respect for the weaker sex (TP 22-23).

It is this same man who enquires about the 'arrangements for the evening' and is also provided with adequate resources to please himself. The girl who is procured for his entertainment is 'only a child and not very pretty, just young and

unexploited'. She stares at Hukum Chand with her large dark eyes and sits looking bored and indifferent. Perhaps she is quite used to the trade and regards him as just another ravisher ready to prey on her. Or she might be yet uninitiated to this bartering of flesh and hence unaware of its consequences as well. Looking at her, Hukum Chand realizes that she is perhaps younger than his own daughter.But he quickly drowns these thoughts in whisky and muses how life is too short for one to have consciences and scruples because conventions and values deserve only 'lip worship' Moreover, she is a prostitute and she looked it. The silver sequins in her black sari and the diamond in her nose ring sparkled and glittered like star as if to allure her prospective customers. She wanted his money and he is paying her for the pleasure that she gives him. So it is a profitable exercise for both of them. His doubts dim and he begins to enjoy her song while with a lecherous grin he puts his arms around her waist.

In a patriarchy girls are brought up with notions of purity and honour ingrained in them. They maintain their good girl status by conforming to the norms that identify a woman's 'proper place' in society. At the same time they also internalize the notion that women are sexual objects meant for a man's pleasure. Male power and control over women's bodies is located within the patriarchal structure of the society and it is a successful way of controlling and dominating any woman. The family is one such patriarchal unit which accommodates the virtue of a wife whose honour is a societal and national treasure. Her sexuality is owned by her husband. On the other hand, the prostitute who sells her sexuality is also a commodity to satiate male lust. Both ways women become sexual objects serving male interest and this perpetuates patriarchal domination. When taken as a wife, their sexuality belongs to one and as a prostitute they are accessible to many. As long as a woman sticks to normative codes of conduct, she is appreciated and accepted but the moment she questions patriarchal norms of feminine sexuality, she acquires the status of a deviant woman . A woman is promiscuous when she chooses not to accept the traditionally sanctioned relationship between man and woman. Selling sex, she further becomes an aggravating symbol of decay and is

expelled from the sanctums of respectability. Society is quick enough to recast her as a deviant woman. So the young girl whom Hukum Chand enjoys is a fallen woman while he remains a respectable impression in society.

Virgins in a Whore house

Kamala Markandaya portrays women who endure immense hardships to serve their families.But when it comes to matters concerning a woman's virtue she is also quite relentless in asserting that chastity is an indelible part of an Indian woman and a signifier of her identity in society. Though western ideas are incorporated by writers in their works, they operate under an Indian context and the distinction between the two value system is dependent on the writer's conception. (Krishnaswamy 212).While Ira in Kamala Markandaya's novel *Nectar in a Sieve* sells herself, the novelist reassures us that it is only to feed her brother. On the other hand, Lalitha in *Two Virgins* (1973) by the same writer is presented as a girl who violates conventional values and seeks a separate identity for herself. But since she dares to defy norms, she has to pay for her *faux pas.* At the same time the writer tries to assert that Lalitha flounders because her mother too was no model of chastity and hence could not wield a good influence on her. Once again the woman is presented to be under the excruciating clutches of a society that refuses to blink an eye to her slightest lapse.*Two Virgins* recounts the tale of a young girl who engages herself in the struggles for surviving in a glitzy, modern world and emerges scarred from the ordeal.It is also the story of the two sisters, Lalitha and Saroja who grow up in a traditional household of a remote village. Moving beyond the entrails of their homely environment they connect with newer surroundings with the growing awareness of their sensibilities.They come across crossroads where they differ in their directions. While Saroja decides to wait and bid her time and not rush into a hasty alliance, Lalitha's foolhardy decision to

become a filmstar gives her a fair share of men and she ends up becoming a woman of the streets.

Shantha Krishnaswamy feels that the two sisters are always made to choose between two opposite worlds-eastern and the western:

> The contrasts between tradition and modernity, between India during and after British rule, between the older and younger members of the family, between the sons and the daughters are all there around the two,in their school, at home,and in their upbringing in general (Krishnaswami 213).

Lalitha and her sister Saroja were sent to a missionary school where they learnt cultured behavior and refined manners.The simple village folk believes that Western education and ideas, the Christian environment at school and the associated liberalism are enough to lead a person wayward. Their aunt often reprimands their father for granting them too much liberty. But, according to Shantha Krishnaswamy, the author does not seem to ascribe Lalitha's going astray to western education alone.Instead she suggests that her heredity and her family environment also contributes to her fall from grace.Krishnaswamy describes Lalitha's mother as a sensuous Indian woman found in the pages of Kama Sutra.For her sex is something natural in human beings though "the world ticks like a cracked machine ,comes up with a dirty wash whatever you put into it, it turns what is natural and magical into something sordid" (Krishnaswami 216). At the same time however, for all her passion and fire Lalitha's mother is deeply anchored to her marriage and there is no possibility that she would survive without her husband. This is yet another way how the novelist reiterates her faith in marriage and eschews the idea of scandalous liaisons.

Lalitha is portrayed as a girl with immense possibilities. Her beauty and vivacity, her natural grace and poise and her feminine desirability would have

made a wondrous life for her. Her capacities and her potentials are however all wasted as she is drained of all fulfillment and happiness by her transgression.For Lalitha, her world is her oyster.She is aware of her beauty and of its compelling attraction on others. She weaves dreams around her life and aspires to be a film star. This is a shocking revealation undoubtedly for a small town, middleclass family and her aunt spares no bones in giving her a piece of her mind.

... a respectable girl from a respectable family...you want to be a nautch girl, a devadasi such as no one in our line has ever descended to being, is that your ambition?"(TV 82)

But Lalitha is dazzled by Mr. Gupta, the film maker. He is from another planet. He has promised to make a film with her and hasn't he already made a documentary on their village and featured Lalitha in so many striking poses? Captivated by his smooth talk the innocent yet ambitious Lalitha and her parents are beguiled into accepting his offer to visit the city. Lalitha is accompanied by her teacher Miss Mendonza who is the epitome of all suavity and refinement. He showers her with gifts when she is in the city and promises to call her back to work in his films. A very busy man, he surely has a hundred things on his mind and so can be excused for his delay in contacting her. It could be any day. He might even come in person to summon her, so Lalitha believed. But when the heart gave up and her eyes are full of tears, she leaves home and goes to meet Mr. Gupta. She risks everything to fulfill the dream of becoming a film star but is no match against the city bred scheming and dangerously skilled men like Mr. Gupta. His charms and her instinctive urges make her vulnerable and when after a few months she returns home, she is no more the same Lalitha who had left the village. "It was not a matter of aging at all but some kind of inner scoring..." (TV 156) Very soon she is past any caring. "She simply lay on the bed and let the tears flow, an endless stream from the wells of her sorrowing womanhood". (TV 170).

Her father grieves that he could not educate his own child; she was innocent and they let her go out into the big, bad world but Lalitha defends Mr. Gupta by saying that it was not his fault alone but hers as well. Lalitha's escapade

sets forth rumors buzzing in the village; it is scandalous for a young girl to leave home unchaperoned for the city is a 'whorehouse' that would devour all innocent virgins. The slightest lapse would encourage the lust of men who would then take advantage of them. So there is the need for decorum, and the need to retain the innocence which is "an indispensable dew and anointment for maidens" their mother lectured. To Saroja it seemed that the city was full of males prowling like hungry wolves, looking out for girls to seduce. She wondered if they would know that Lalitha had already been seduced , "if there was some way men had of telling perhaps from some mark visible only to them that you were, or the way you laid out your body for them"(TV 197) and so perhaps would be an easy prey.

According to Mr Gupta, Lalitha has been seduced because she was "flapping her lashes and issuing invitations to all and sundr". She had flung herself at him and pestered him so much that he yielded to her charms. She is a "woman with the natural desires of a woman" and he only took advantage of that because "he is not made of stone". Lalitha is blamed for her conduct and he is not prepared to share her "sorrows of womanhood'. Saroja remembers how he had told Lalitha that she was a natural soon after they first met and wonders if he could have thought of her to be a natural harlot. He only promises to take care of everything. Everything is taken care of and Lalitha's unwanted baby is gone. There is no place for him in the society and it teaches Lalitha not to cry over 'men or babies' because it is the way the society is organized. Every one planned and organized and went along with the system that rid the men of all responsibilities. Lalitha had behaved in a wanton manner, not becoming of girls of their family and society. She deviated outside the codes and had to pay the penalty for straying too far.There are no escape routes.Saroja puts it clearly: "Women had no boltholes.There was no escape for them, they had to stand where they were and take it"(TV 123).

Finally Lalitha goes off to face the world all by herself. She isolates herself from her family, from her community and from everyone she knows. Her mother curses Mr. Gupta whom she holds responsible for her daughter's condition. Saroja knows it is the city that has snatched her sister away from them. Like the loopy

roads of the city that threatened to devour them, the men too made them lose their sense of direction and destination. She has seen her sister and knew what they want and how it would end because they are for them 'virgins in a whorehouse' (TV 180)The writer presents Saroja as a perfect foil to her sister Lalitha. In her character we get a glimpse of the discovery that the writer makes –she is the quintessential reality of the Indian woman, fresh and naïve but quiet and determined as well. Witnessing the consequences of Lalitha's degradation, she protects herself with an unassuming silence creating for herself a world of loyal human relationship where integrity is the soul of the matter.She wisely remains within the codes and saves herself from a fall and becomes the true virgin.

Lalitha's plight can be compared to Lolita's in Vladimr Navakov's *Lolita* (1955), who is seduced by Humbert.While Humbert attributes her "hopeless' depravity as the evil effects of modern co education, in *Two Virgins*, Aunt Alamelu insists that it is the result of all the indulgences that the parents had heaped on their daughter. Dancing around maypoles and simpering with young men and flaunting themselves in films and such things which have no propriety have eventually led to her fall.The writer Kamala Markandaya's depicts certain scenes where Lalitha experiences her sexuality with fascination and wonder.

> ...when Lalitha came in she did nothing. Stood there dripping, and watched. Her body was wet and golden. Her hair was streaming.Look at me, said Lalitha...Look, said Lalitha and ran her hands down her body, down the length of it, touching its secret places. Her nipples were rubbery, perked up when her fingers passed. She knelt with her knees together beside the rustling hay, parted her knees to reveal the cleft which was wet. Her whole body was wet and shining and slippery.It's lovely, said Lalitha. She was laughing. Her limbs were bold and free, they did not seem to mind what they did. Saroja did not know if she meant her body was

> lovely or felt lovely, or was full of lovely sensations from what she was doing to it (TV 72).

These are marks of her juvenile awakening to her sexuality which if we opt to study Kinsey would appear perfectly normal. In his *The Sexual Behaviour of the Human Female* (1953) Kinsey describes such experiences to be perfectly normal for girls of Lalitha's age. She was coming to terms with her sexuality in the process of developing into a woman,,From Kamala Markandaya's perspective however, these acts of self-awareness and a strange fascination for one's bodily charm and desirability perhaps only reaffirm Lalitha's vulnerable nature and her subsequent fall. She perhaps chooses to dwell on this in order to justify Lalitha's later misadventures with Mr. Gupta. Mr. Gupta who acts upon her both mentally as well as physically, transfers his guilt to Lalitha and makes her out to be a temptress. This negates his waywardness and justifies his exploitation of Lalitha for she is a 'natural' woman who quickly slips into being an experienced seductress. I would insist that it is Kamala Markandaya's conservatism in matters of human sexuality that promts her to stress on Lalitha's vulnerability in matters of sexual awareness.

This is a situation where invariably, any option would reduce the woman to a transgressor of norms and expose her to penalty, censure or deprivation. As stated by Frances B. O'Connor in *The Female Face in Patriarchy: Oppression as Culture,* a good woman according to patriarchal standards must "smile, acquiesce, avoid questioning male authority or pronouncements, be grateful for any minor ministry. In other words, by not occupying any space, by remaining invisible, women participate in their own erasure" (O'Connor 125) .Those like Lalitha who refuse to be erased are marginalized. So in a patriarchy a woman can choose either to be marginalized or erased. Either way they are relegated to the status of an 'other'.

This is a novel of learning. Though Lalitha's experiences and her fate concerns us the most, deeper down is the truth that unfolds for Saroja.The

novelist beautifully captures the complexities in a girls' life as she grows to awareness of the world around her. As she steps out of the transient boundaries of childhood mirth,purity and wonder, she gets caught up in the swirling events around her and when she returns back to the family fold her childhood innocence is gone for ever.Lalitha strays and her learning makes her sister Saroja wise and cautious.The curiosity about the facts of life and her responses to her admirers are initially the same as Lalitha's She is in a dilemma having spurned the advances of Devraj.She longed to runback and fling herself in his arms but she resists the attraction because 'Lalitha seems to shape the stream of her life' For Lalitha as well as Saroja, love and sex are natural emotions and Kamala Markandaya,as a progressive writer, writes about the realities of life.She has depicted the sexual experiences of her female characters and in the process discarded cultural stereotypes "in favour of woman's desire ,instincts and feelings" (Sahoo 126). Writing about the treatment of love and sex in Kamala Markandaya's novels, Sahoo comments that as a writer she stands apart from other female writers writing in English because she was exposed to the western world and was considerably influenced by their ideologies regarding love and sex.At the same time however, as an Indian woman she could not relate those aspects to an Indian context. So in this novel Markandaya portrays the socio-cultural scene of post Independence India where the choice of a modern way of life spells disaster for an unschooled young girl. "*Two Virgins* can be called a novel of education or a 'bildungsroman' where 'Two Virgins' are exposed to the forbidden world for their safe stay in the world, dominated by male sex maniacs..."(Sahoo 104).

Ladies Coupe` (2001) by Anita Nair describes a train journey where six woman meet during a train journey and share intimacies. It is an outspoken criticism of patriarchy, describing the lives of several women living a sheltered, conventional life under the economically and socially controlled sway of their men folk. All important aspects of life were managed by the men and the women had to be content with their maternal instinct which constructed their identity. Most of the

women characters in the novel internalize the idea that a woman has a few sanctioned roles to play in her life- she grows up from a child to a woman in circumstances that may or may not be favourable for her.She leads a domesticated life caring for her family wherein her desires and urges are often suppressed under the veils of feminine propriety. A review in the Punch sums up the novel as a brilliant narrative that entices and uplifts. "These women's life stories give an insight into expectations of married Indian women, the choices they make and the choices made for them" (Punch n.d). The novel is also about a single woman's decision to break free from claustrophobic traditions and multiple identities as daughter, sister, aunt, provider, and live life on her own terms.Akhilandeshwari or Akhila as she is better known passed forty mundane years of her life working as a clerk in the income tax department , being the provider and caretaker of her family.One day she makes a trip to Kanyakumari and while travelling alone in a ladies compartment meets five other women as her companions and together they unravel the narrative before us.The writer Anita Nair herself says that she draws her characters from among the people she meets and she had met someone like Akhila who had a sad look in her eyes. It had set her thinking about her life and though she did not write with any feminist inclination, it was her intention to reveal the inherent strength in a woman which lies dormant otherwise but requires some circumstance or certain decision to force it out.(Punch:n.d) Akhila meets five women who narrate their lives in turns. Janaki an indulgent wife and an indecisive mother,Margaret Shanti ,a chemistry teacher married to a dismally dominant human being,Prabha Devi a perfect daughter and a wife who transforms into a bright society woman, young Sheela, sensitive and soulful and Morikolanthu who was rapaciously robbed of her innocence and maidenhood. The ladies are drawn from diverse social strata and their experiences reveal a unifying bond among them—they have all basked in the deceptively beguiling yet entrapping embrace of patriarchal sunshine.It has effectively left them scorched with a sensation of being robbed of their natural allure and potential.

A girl is expected to fine tune her womanly instincts, her feminine charms and her housekeeping skills in preparation for her marriage. Akhila grew up hearing her mother's sermons about the preferences of a man.

> I don't want you standing in the sun. I don't want you burnt black. You need to look after your complexion. All men want fair-skinned wives even if they are as black as coal themselves (LC 51).

Sheela's grandmother Ammumma often reproached Sheela for her figure which she was sure would not appeal to any man.

> ...You don't eat enough. You are so skinny. No man will want you for a wife. Men don't like bones in bed. Men like curves (LC 68).

Women are expected to follow the sober dictates of good conduct befitting a virtuous wife at every stage of her life. "A good woman is one who safeguards her virtue"(LC 225).Akhila remembers how people in her community spoke brutally of Sarasa Mami's reputation. She was Subramani Iyer's widow.After her husband's death she coped for a while with her three daughters and a blind son praying to the Gods her family had worshipped for generations. But they did not descend from the heavens and make things easy for her. She sold all her little pieces of jewellery and finally there wasn't anything left in the house to sell, and help in any form from anyone was a hopeless dream. When "hunger gnawed at their wilting honour and shook the respectability out of their bones, she sold her eldest daughter Jaya" (LC 80). Sarasa Mami lined her daughter's eyelids "with the density of darkness and wound jasmine buds in her plait" (LC 81) and they never hungered after that night. Neighbours are shocked and they talked indignantly of the slur Sarasa Mami inflicted on her husband's good name, on the Brahmin community and on womanhood. She is 'disgusting' and 'unnatural'. There surely are other ways of earning a livelihood. They talk of her in derogatory terms but

Sarasa Mami is on the defensive. She had tried to do any kind of work to earn a living. She went to each household in the neighbourhood asking for work but they treated her like a beggar and shooed her away after giving her a handful of rice. There was no other way left for her except to sell herself but hers is 'tired flesh' and no man has any use of it. So when she flaunted her daughter's wares, there were quick buyers. Once again morality is pushed to the backstage in this fight for sustenance. The writer Anita Nair seems to suggest that a woman overcomes her moral bindings only when economic deprivations become severely life threatening. But even then, if male desire for physical gratification was not sufficiently strong and demanding, it would not have prompted and facilitated avenues for commercial sexual intimacy. Sex is always a male right and while the 'virtuous' wife provides it within the institution of marriage the 'fallen' woman satisfies all his unfulfilled desires without the pretences of a marital adjustment .Hence though propelled at times by economic want a woman's choice of prostituting her body is not always dependent on it. Society nevertheless, castigates her as fallen. She is often excommunicated for not preserving her virtue and so, once a young girl becomes a woman, she has to safeguard herself from the stripping, lustful gaze of every male.

In *Ladies' Coupe* we also meet Morikolanthu basking in the glorious sunshine of childhood "wearing the fragrance of naiveté with a single minded joy" (LC 224) till womanhood comes to her. Nothing is the same for her any longer. She is to avoid the company of any men, either young or old because they are not to be trusted and everyone says it is unwise to leave cotton and match stick together. These are the lessons she learn from her mother, from Rukmini Akka and from Sujata Akka.Sujata Akka is the mistress in the Chettiar household where Morikolanthu worked as her hand maiden. She is a woman now and words like virtue and modesty should creep through her nerves and enfold her fabric of existence. But despite all caution, the effervescence emanated by a blooming and pretty eighteen year old catches the sly eyes of yet another lurking predator.One day as she walks back home from the Chettiar household through the mango

orchard while the village was engrossed in celebrations of Onam,she is raped by Murugesan, who incidentally is a relative to the Chettiar household.She recounts her tale to her mother and later to Sujatha Akka. Every bit of it; of every scream and shriek, of her fervent pleas and his mad fervour and of how he left her lying in a disheveled heap and stumbled away into the darkness. Her mother doesn't believe her, rather, chooses not to, because Murugesan, her ravisher, is a man whom nobody would dare point a finger at. She calls her daughter a slut because her reputation is in tatters.

"Who will marry you? Your life is over and you'll end up in the gutter like a street dog with its litter...you have nothing left in your life" LC 245).

Sujata Akka's husband too refuses to believe that Marikolanthu is not at fault.

"The girl must have led him on and now that she's pregnant she's making up a story about rape. All nonsense..." (ibid).

Everything is nonsense because a girl is raped and a man has his way. A man who is rich and influential and the girl, a servant. So nothing matters and nothing is done. They cannot even bring up Murugesan's name. The violence he inflicts on her is just another way of proving that woman can be dominated and violated as and when the man chooses to and she will not be able to do anything. While she can be relegated to the status of a whore the man will remain a law abiding respectable man of the society. She becomes an object that he uses and discards and this furthers her humiliation and degradation. Society will treat her as filth whenever they come to know of it.

> Arranging a marriage for her is going to be difficult. No man will be willing to marry a woman who's lost her virginity and even if we keep it a secret, what if he finds out later? He'll forsake her then (LC 246).

Sujata Akka suggests that she should do some training so that if she has a job, that will replace a 'husband's protection' (ibid).

Once again patriarchy exercises its control and admits the limitations of women and their dependence on men to make or mar their lives. Marikolanthu, who entered the Chettiar household as a child and served Sujata Akka for long years, now catches the fancy of her husband Sridhar Anna who used her to satisfy his desires.When his wife comes to know she takes things under her control and dismisses Morikolanthu calling her a whore for feeding on her husband's lust. The irony of the situation amuses Morikolanthu. She remembers the times when she was also Sujata Akka's comfort, "raining million raindrops of sensual pleasure that she gathered with the thirst of one who is condemned to a desert of life"(LC 260). The nights were for Sridhar Anna.He drove her to the centre of the earth where "molten lava clutched at her feet as I ... burnt in the crush of his embrace" (LC 261-262). They did not love her but they needed her and once the need was over they discarded her. She is called 'unnatural' and a brazen 'whore' because she turns away from the path society traces for her while it is accepted as very natural for a man to find some place outside home to satisfy his appetite if it is not fed at home.

Mandates of Wifehood

The essential and natural conceptions about a family enclose the instructing role of the man and the supportive and nurturing role of the woman which is the universal adherent to cultural constructs. The guiding laws of marriage sanctions a man the right of becoming the master of the household and also the right to be the father of the child. (Sevenhuijsen 168)While the institution of marriage produces hegemonic discourses and negotiates the parameters of a women's existence a woman consequently negotiates "mandates of wifehood" by being partakers in a

companionate marriage (Puri 136). Generally speaking, woman's bodies and sexualities and their identities are the sites where cultural normatives are mapped out and the notions of social respectability are contested. So, marriage is, in the words of Simone de Beauvoir, the destiny society offers to women where, though necessary to each other, they never exist in a state of reciprocity(Beauvoir 445-46). Marriage confines a woman to a restricted space where individualized desires make her ethics 'impure' This is the dilemma faced by the effervescent Rosie in *The Guide*(1968) for whom loving her husband and remaining loyal to him is 'a duty she owes to her husband and society'(Beauvoir 481). She is married to Marco after her response to an advertisement that wanted good looks and a university degree.

> I had myself photographed clutching the scroll of the university citation in one hand, and sent it to the advertiser...he examined me and my certificate, we went to a registrar and got married (G 85).

Her husband is obsessed with ancient paintings and works of art which fail to attract her even remotely. She confesses to Raju the guide, in an unguarded moment that she would have preferred any kind of a mother in law provided it ensured a real, live husband for her. An intellectual who believes himself to be responsible for the rewriting of history, her husband remains engrossed in his own activities and could only talk of his plans and their significance, remaining quite unconcerned about her likes or interests. He lives with his books and papers and 'flourished in his solitude' (G 120) It is a mismatched marriage—not an equal relationship— where Marco, a rich man of high social standing marries a girl from the community of 'temple dancers'. Rosie's mother, grandmother and before that her mother and as a young girl she too had danced before the deity. They are public women and Rosie doesn't know who her father is. The women of her family are impressed by Marco condescending to marry a girl of their class and giving up dancing if he so desired was worth the sacrifice. So Rosie suppressed her innate

desires and remained cocooned in the cloister her husband created for her. For him dance of any form is a kind of street acrobatics and people watch it as they watch a monkey perform .It is not any form of art and he can never allow Rosie to dance. The writer R.K Narayan paints Marco's character as a blind man, altogether oblivious to the beauties of the world and to the charms of his talented wife. He cannot forget her lineage to the class of public women, an identity which perhaps he wishes to obliterate totally. So he objects to her dancing and almost treats her like a lifeless doll. At this stage Raju enters their life and charms Rosie with his glib talk and with him she starts seeing the world for the first time. After Marco's desertion she eventually starts living with Raju as his concubine. Uplifted by marriage, Rosie chose not to upheld the sanctums of marriage and Narain implies that by destroying this, Rosie constructed for herself the reputation of a fallen woman.He likens her to the cobra—dark, dangerous and deadly.Raju's mother calls her the snake woman and she stands as the destroyer—of her family, of Raju's family and of Raju himself. A stereotyped husband who is content to keep his wife as a possession, Marco succeeds in life once he disassociates himself from her but Raju who is actually blinded by her physical charms meets his end because underlying his affections for Rosie is the sexual parlance which society invariably condemns. Rosie doesn't live up to the standards prescribed by society and she is a penitent transgressor. Her affair leaves her hollow and humiliated without any purpose in life and love. . She is not happy and feels herself to be a 'performing monkey' as Marco used to say earlier. She is tormented by her deceit and becomes ashamed of her unchecked passion. No longer a wife, she is a socially outcast 'fallen woman' and this confronts her failure as a wife, mother and lover.

Ramteke, a critic elaborating his discussion on Narayan's characterization suggests that they do not grow as individuals because they are manipulated by the caprices of fortune .They are heavily burdened with the weight of customs and traditions, and so most of the characters run away only to return home thoroughly chastened accepting defeat in life.Rosie too is one such character. In her attempt to withstand the forces of the traditional society she resembles "life like clay models

in a show case moving along a predetermined mechanical track" (Ramteke 96). RK Narain does not propagate any novel idea or philosophy. Being born and brought up in Madras, he was not influenced by western ideas and was thoroughly rooted to Indian culture and way of life. As Ramteke says, he largely subscribes to Hindu ideals enshrined in the ancient Hindu scriptures. So he depicts a situation where a wife who defies convention often ends up in the throes of misery and repentance.Many critics are of the opinion that though a brilliant writer , Narayan's strength lies in recording the 'human oddities and eccentricities' rather than in handling the tragic dilemmas of his characters(Ramteke :xxi). So Rosie and Marco are detached projections and nowhere do we find any revelation of the reasons behind Marco's hesitancy and indifferent disposition towards Rosie and we are not aware of the turbulence if any that Rosie undergoes in living a life as Raju's concubine .While discussing the conflicting readings of the novel, NB Routh suggests that RK Naryan presents Rosie and Marco as a satire on the westernization of life. So it is not surprising that they do not live up to the traditional concepts of Indian values. Keeping Rosie as a mistress Raju too goes against Indian tradition.Routhe further elaborates the concept of otherness in post colonial writings and quotes Ujjwal Jana who considers Rosie and Raju's mother to be pathetic victims of male hegemony.

> One of the pre-occupations of the post-colonalism is the dialectics of protest of the marginalized. Ujjwal Jana in his article "Mapping Out Gendered Space : A Study in Narayan's*The Guide"* says : "The two figures Rosie and Raju's mother are no doubt ostracized in their respective homes and are pathetic victims of male hegemony, but they represent two different ideological positions". (p.98). Because of her family background, Rosie has been marginalized. In spite of higher education and good looks, it is not possible for her to get a suitable match. Though Marco

> pretends to be a liberal minded westernized intellectual and marries Rosie, the marriage is a failure (Routh 26).

The study presented here is founded upon the desire to understand sexual and social inequalities heaped on women under hegemonic assertions of virtue, honour and social respectability. Under similar circumstances, a man escapes the ignominies that a woman faces. A woman is a commodity of desire for men and her sexuality determines her identity. It is necessary to understand that any attempt to castigate prostitutes must be unfailingly associated with the realization that it is a profession which we may categorize as sex work and it is carried out in a society characterized by patriarchal ideologies and institutions. Responses to prostitution occur at various levels and most of them castigate the doomed practitioner. Such responses always seek to undermine the perspective of these women who are sometimes sold, sometimes forced and at some other times opt to choose this profession that excludes them from the social processes. Subala of the Assamese novel *Subala* and Haseena of the Indian English novel *Train to Pakistan* are prostitutes and they cater to male fantasies negating their own subjectivities .Their narratives offer a clear picture of domination at the individual and social level. Their stories reveal their fragmented and fractured identities and unfold a deeper and much broader account of the power structures that mark the experiences of women all over. If we accept that the relationship between the sexes is one of domination, then it is also to be acknowledged that male domination stems from the control they exert over female sexuality. Female sexuality has to be controlled for societal honour rests on a woman's virtue. The family epitomizes legitimate relations between the sexes that again glorify female sexuality and subservience to patriarchal dictates. It is at once incapacitating and limiting for a woman. On the other hand, with prostitution and any other such 'immoral' conduct of a woman where she is an independent sexuality, she can be marked as a deviant character. When women are classified into this good and dichotomy, they reinforce their common position as sexual objects that primarily serve male interests. Lolitha of

Two Virgins and Morikolanthu of *Ladies Coupe* grow up in a precarious world where they remain in constant awareness of lurking danger. These are stories of everyday life. They speak and show the meaning of being a young woman in a men's world. The experiences of these fictional characters reveal the realities of the intricate relationships of young girls and women, which by being oppressive and unequal premise a relatively powerless situation for them where they become marginalized as the 'other'.

Male prerogative being the determiner of female virtue in and outside marriage in almost every society the novelists too depicted reality as they saw it. Rosie loses her identity,her space and her voice and starts behaving like a puppet under the antagonizing policing of Marco.In getting to know Raju, she finds a world of hope and humour unveil before her. Should she embrace this colourful, resonating world, as she does in the novel, she would be a transgressor. It is necessary that to help patriarchy reproduce and extend, Rosie should not attempt to overcome the control yielded by her husband. The continuum of dominance has to be maintained by the woman by internalizing male agency. It is necessary to include Ghail Pheterson's views in this context.She believes that the 'whore' stigma is transferable to all women but particularly to those who transgress the rules and norms that control her 'socially' and 'morally'.The experiences of male sexual oppression, the ignominy of experiencing the body as subject/object and feeding on the discourses of 'good' and 'bad' woman are to a large extent experiences of all women in general.The prostitute is only the end stop in the category of deviant woman (qtd in O'Neill 186).So Rosie whom we meet in *The Guide* is dancing girl who is scandalized and slandered for deserting her husband.By transgressing marital strictures she becomes a fallen woman.The reality of oppression for Subala in *Subala* and Morikolanthu in *Ladies Coupe'* is also the same.While Subala becomes a professional after enduring spans of sexual exploitation, Morikolanthu is a sexually innocent and passive victim of men with individual evil designs. Rosie's helplessness as a wife related to the domestic realms is not in any way less than the vulnerability of Haseena the dancing girl of

Train to Pakistan who is compelled to entertain men old enough to be her father.In *Two Virgins*, Ira and Lalitha become objects that men banish from the sphere of social nurturance because they preferred personal transformations that defied structures of gender domination in society.All of them are embedded in a complex and intense mediation that establishes the loss of individuality. Their struggle against the structures of power often end up in privileging the universal tendency of masculine superiority .In re creating and representing stories of dominance and resistance the novelists try to find a space for these marginalized voices who still struggle for participation and inclusion into the socio-cultural dimensions as authentic individuals. This is the truth that comes to us in the form of these novels. The society that these novels mirrored saw changing positions for women and from a subservient, dependent role they are gradually attaining economic liberation and social security in relation to any man. At the same time they are still enveloped in thin sheaths of virtue and modesty which shear unconditionally with the slightest contradiction of normative codes. The narratives resolve fictional dilemmas and contradictions as it would be in a real world allowing aspects of social conditioning to guide and direct the characters' existence.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE PROSTITUTE AND HER PORTRAYAL IN LITERATURE

Poverty is not a virtue...Morality is a luxury which very poor people can rarely afford. (Danielou 5).

I

The phenomenon of prostitution invites variegated responses that range from anger to nonchalance, concern to indifference and shock to acceptance. More often than not, the system of prostituting one's body has been viewed negatively and prostitutes have always been considered vile creatures. They provoke revulsion from all those who discuss them. It is deemed a form of sexual slavery in a world that privileges male sexuality and male domination. The patriarchal authorities that construct the wife non wife categories and make the securities and pleasures of one domain unavailable to the other also make the prostitutes victim of sexual exploitation. The concept of sex merges with their bodies and personalities. They are not only degraded professionally but socially too their positions are in the bottom echelons.

Prostitution and Feminism

Feminist analysis has always regarded prostitution to be a deviant activity carried out under patriarchal oppression, (Barry 1988; Dworkin 1981; Hoigard and

Finstad 1992) and recent trends have considered it to be a necessary socio economic response in a socially appropriated clime of male sexual supremacy (O'Neill 2001).Feminists have always believed that rather than promiscuity it is always inequality and sexism that is at the root of an woman's choice to become a prostitute. Moreover, they are stigmatized and criminalized which is a fate their clients escape. This double standard of sexual promiscuity has led feminists all over the world to adopt a gendered outlook towards this institution of buying and selling sex. Moreover, with increasing popularity of liberated sex in western countries, any critique of prostitution is considered by the feminists to be offensive and repressive (Carpenter 2000). Since male domination is real and objective, so is also the debasing of women in prostitution. Radical feminist thinkers have often castigated the male control of female sexuality as a fundamental characteristic of patriarchal power. The writings of Adrienne Rich, Andrea Dworkin and Catherine McKinnon have always viewed prostitution and pornography as one of the key manifestations of patriarchal power and sexual violence, oppression and injustice are the key markers of this system. Such an analysis of prostitution invariably counters the ways in which sexual and social inequalities serve to structure ideology, patriarchy and gendered relations in a society. For them, exchange of money for physical gratification can never be equivalent because it creates the illusion of using a woman's body as a commodity which furthers physical and mental oppression.

For Laurie Shrage ,prostitution simply perpetuates 'patriarchy ideology' and is the consequence of patriarchal hegemony that forms the foundation of all our social institutions and practices. Certain cultural and moral concepts when naturalized serve to marginalize women and oppress them. Most of the societal norms and values are deeply antagonistic towards the woman who is visualized as an object of pleasure. Society's concept of morality evolves, acquires fluidity but. nevertheless, remains linked to the female sex only and this female sexuality becomes a ground of oppression for the female.Shrage believes that loosening the strands of conservatism, tradition and orthodoxy in the fabric of cultural presuppositions that determine and sustain the position of women in a patriarchal

society, would help to remedy the malady of prostitution (qtd in O'Neill18) In *Prostitution, Power and Freedom* (1998) Julia O'Connell- Davidson focuses on the more dismaying aspect of prostitution by offering a critique of the structures of domination existing within the system. A prostitute's encounter with her clients, the pimps, the managers of the trade and finally also with the environment she belongs to, gives her limited freedom to shape any kind of change, social or otherwise. The connotations for power differ for all of them and due to unequal dimensions of societal existence possibilities of effecting changes in the condition of the prostitute are negated.

Johannes Boutellier talks of two diverging feminist views that examine prostitution. While one sympathizes with the prostitute for being a victim of male sexuality, the other supports her choice as a legitimate form of labour to brace herself (Boutellier 207). For the former, male sexuality is the primary subject of concern whereas the latter places the woman and her needs at the centre stage. Boutellier explains this shift in part to social changes in what is termed 'moral judgment'

> Until the 1960s moral judgments were part of the encompassing political ideologies of a religious, socialist or liberal kind. Lately, these ideologies seem to have lost their importance in defining social problems. This change is often referred to as the individualization of society.....Morality today might more usefully be seen as a mediation between individual experience and state bureaucracy....The prostitution issue is not nearly what it once so much was – an issue of ideologically defined morality – but an issue about the subjective experiences of the persons involved and the bureaucratic necessity of regulation (Boutellier 209).

Prostitution is a difficult word for all feminists. It borders on a multiplicity of issues and contexts that opens up explorations of morality, culture, sexualities,

freedom, slavery and domination, oppression and violence and gender inequality and marginalization. Feminists also differ in their opinions in regarding the prostitute as a free agent or as a victim of circumstances. While it is a practice to harp on the degradations and humiliations a prostitute has to undergo, there are also possibilities of accepting prostitution as a form of voluntary engagement in a commercially viable economic interest.It may be considered the most convenient means of engaging oneslf in the struggle for sustenance and many a woman may have hence chosen to trade themselves. Wendy Chapkis is, however, particularly very critical of this notion .Women as the disadvantaged class seldom has the freedom of choice in any matter. Moreover, if prostitution is to be considered a form of work for the woman which Chapkis called erotic labour,then it has to be free from male command.But it is not so. It becomes an 'arena of struggle' maneuvered by cultural and political practices (Chapkis 57). Chapkis delineates three contradictory positions in feminist groups and labels them as pro- positive sex feminism, anti-sex feminism and sex radical feminism. The pro positive feminists' views on prostitution are noteworthy.Critics like Kathleen Barry, Gloria Steinham, Sheila Jeffreys and Carol Pateman regard it to be a corrupting practice that defiles the concept of love. They also advocate the abolition of the erotic and henceforth freeing women from the sexual objectification of men. For the anti sex feminists there hardly exists any sexual freedom for women because male domination appropriates sex in all circumstances. The prostitute is a sex object and hence can never be a sex worker. Catherine McKinnon, Andrea Dworkin and Karen Davis belong to this camp. McKinnon states that women are whores for men but Chapkis insists that men have the power to make this a fundamental condition of every woman.

> By constantly reiterating that women are whores, and that whores are no more than objects, such feminists blind themselves to the fact that prostitutes, no less than any other worker, and no less than any other woman, engage in acts of negotiation, resistance and subversion that belie their designation as passive objects (Chapkis 20)

For Chapkis, the redeeming ground is offered by the radical feminists like Camille Paglia, Annie Sprinkle and Pat Califia who equate sex with power and locate sexual relations within a privileged structure. They identify sex as a means to accentuate liberty and also destabilize masculine power. Simultaneously, the position of the prostitute is not reduced to passivity "but instead can be understood as a place of agency where the sex worker makes use of the existing social order." (Chapkis 29-30).She tends to become an authoritative power threatening the domains of patriarchy.

Prostitution and Society

The options of looking at prostitution are many and varied. If the prostitute is to be regarded as a dehumanized object of male lust, it is to be agreed that the social behavior of humans has conditioned the male sex to possess desire and lust for the female body and has also naturalized women to accept the overtures of repression in a patriarchy. A prostitute's relation with the society is linked to the image she projects as a desirable female body—an object of indiscriminate lust that is to be preyed upon. The very mention of a prostitute conjures up dominant physical imageries of sensual pleasure, volatile sexual energy and suggests uninhibited desire unwrapped. We are conditioned to adapt our sensibilities towards accepting a deviant woman as a lewd creature that ensnares men with her physical attributes. In patriarchy, women belong to homes and prostitutes to markets. The two domains never meet. While the wife commands respect and recognition for doing everything under societal sanction, the prostitute is ostracized for being deviant—for satisfying the deepest, private desires of man that he craves to seek away from the sanctity of his home. Prostitutes are victims of sexual oppression but wives too are not exempted from such conditions. Wives who grant sexual access to their husbands

under societal sanctions play stereotyped roles whereas prostitutes are stigmatized as whores.

Masculine power which has the capacity to bid and choose endangers a woman's position in the sanctity of a household even. The woman is made to accept with compliance any decision that a man takes. There exists a dual confrontation between man and woman which categorizes and homogenizes all women who face male vice and violence, as oppressed women. Both groups of females perpetuate male supremacy.The wife too becomes a symbol of the oppressed— her sexuality is determined by the society and she is economically dependent on her husband. Compared to her, the prostitute is an independent woman, who defies male defined morality and constructs a social space for herself. Her independent sexuality makes her despicable because society is always wary of any kind of independence in woman and so a prostitute is conveniently marked as an outcaste.

Social relationships between man and woman are based on the assumption that it is a relationship of dominance where the male shall and does dominate the female. The social institutions and the relationships within it only contribute towards maintaining this domination. The primary unit of socialization, which is the family, initiates the concept of domination by stratifying gender roles within its confines. Boys and girls are meant for specific roles. While girls emulate modesty and humility, boys can be brazen and demanding. The female is always conditioned to be chaste and pure and on this assumption, a wife is accepted and a prostitute rejected. The wife signifies glorification of female sexuality which is socially acceptable and desirable whereas the prostitute is the epitome of lust and deviation. Her sexuality is hence subjected to stigmatization. Catherine McKinnon echoes this when she says that sexuality is a pervasive dimension of social life and it is through this that gender and other social divisions like race or class is constructed. "...Woman's sexuality remains constructed under conditions of male supremacy; women remain socially defined as women in relation to men; the definition of women as men's inferiors remains sexual..."(Mckinnon 355) That the concept of prostitution is a social construction can be examined by looking into the status which a prostitute enjoys in

society

Social inequalities on gender relations are further reinforced when we remember that it is always the common prostitute, who is again, invariably, a woman, who is taken up by law for soliciting male attention for immoral causes. A male client goes unregarded. If sexual labour is regarded immoral, male debauchery has to be controlled and, or stigmatized with the same intensity that we use for the prostitute, otherwise this profession is to be regarded as an essential form of work—essential not only for its practitioner but also for the society to preserve the sanctity of family life. Presupposing that prostitution is a social evil that corrupts the social concepts of morality, family life and social purity, it is opposed by the discerning public and subjected to vehement criticism. This rejection foregrounds the aspect of promiscuity and immorality. At the same time, by insisting on male needs and desires, and internalizing the aspect of male domination exercised over female sexuality, prostitution can be considered a necessary means of maintaining social sanctity. It can be supported on functional grounds and the prostitutes offered a rehabilitory prospect.

Prostitution as Work

Considering the economic quotient of prostitution, it is obvious that for a class of women, this certainly is a rewarding form of engagement. Economic compulsions often determine their entry into the system because it becomes an attractive alternative to the starvation wages granted to women in subordinate positions. Prostitution thus becomes a relative concept. It is a social construct as well, grounded in cultural contexts that position man-woman relationships within certain parameters. It is true that many women support themselves and their families by selling themselves. Is it a form of work then? Overcoming the male biased thinking of considering it to be a male vice and a violation of women's dignity, we

need to recognize the economic benefits derived by its practitioners. To treat prostitutes merely as victims of patriarchal domination is to degrade them further by disregarding their aptitude for conscious decision making. A woman's foray into this world may be a conscious decision. But in many ways her right to choice violates her right to dignity. Marxist thinkers argue that a person's labour of any form—mental, physical,or sexual-- is associated with a person and is an inalienable part of his being. In prostitution , the client pays a woman to engage her sexual services for him to meet his desires. She has to surrender her will and become a body object and this makes her vulnerable to subjugation in any form. Her profession becomes a tool for male domination. Their lived experiences as a whore often outshadows their narratives of degradation and humiliation that initiate them into this trade and make them 'choose' to work in the sex industry.

The opinion of Kathleen Barry is noteworthy in this regard:

> Acceptance of prostitution as an inevitable social institution is lodged with the assumption that sex is a male right, whether it is bought, sold, seized in rape or more subtly coerced as in sexual harassmen (Barry 1984, 26).

In prostitution, the prostitute body turns into an object—a commodity traded for money. This makes her so vulnerable—she sells a part of her self, her sensuality, which cannot be separated from her being. It is a torrid business. On one hand, you are a physical form with your body laid out for others to enjoy and on the other, you are a woman who would conscientiously abhor such a deal. To simplify this bitter paradox, the prostitute alienates herself from her self. She professes to be an object meant for gratification of physical desires. This is an excruciating task, where she loses her identity as a woman. In trying to distance herself from her self, she also destroys her humanity and becomes a commodity.Considered thus, prostitution remains an oppressive institution of the society which seeks to deny a woman her esteem and disgrace her. It facilitates inflow of wealth for a section of people by

creating opportunities to trade on the female body. More than for its practitioners, prostitution benefits a host of other intermediaries who profit directly as well as indirectly from the use and abuse of the female body.

This approach draws parallel between the functioning of prostitution as a social deviance and as an economic compulsion by arguing that it is a rational choice made by women under conditions of inequality and discrimination in a society which is also largely governed by male biased norms. At another level, considering morality to be a part of the patriarchal norm that chooses to subjugate women, the issue of stigmatization should be more consciously directed at those who ascribe a different role and social position to women. They approach women with a mercenary motive and conveniently label them promiscuous. Stigmatization of prostitutes deprives them of their self esteem and their basic human dignity and accords them a disadvantageous position in society.It is argued by the liberal feminists that this kind of discrimination deny the prostitutes their basic human right to self determination, liberty and autonomy.Thanh Dam Truong echoes Scott's views which asserts that "a woman has the right to choose prostitution for a livelihood and the fact that she is choosing the worst form of economic slavery could not deprive her of basic human and legal rights" (qtd.in Truong 50).

The question that now arises is whether prostitution be supported as a woman's right over her body or denounced for exploiting her sexually. If it be condemned for being a form of sexual oppression and a pattern of social stratification and demarcation, its economic manifestations also cannot be ignored. As a form of sexual oppression, its economic utility disappears. Though a private expression of the practitioner's sexuality, it is regulated by public norms and many a time initiation to this trade results from coercion. Against this background, it is no more appropriate to consider prostitution as a strategy for survival where the females predominantly utilize their skills to the interest and demand of their male customers regardless of the dishonor that is heaped on them by the very society that is responsible for their entry into this trade. Stigmatizing them for their trade would only serve to alienate them socially and deprive them of their rights. At the same

time they would become vulnerable targets subjected to maltreatment, insult and injury and berated scandalously.

In patriarchy a woman's work in the family is unrecognized as forms of domestic labour and they are stereotyped along sexual identities. Prostitution too is a practice that is taken up by women as a continuation of their economic dependence upon men. It exploits them socially, physically and emotionally at the cost of providing her economic respite. Whether initiated by choice, by circumstance, by pressure or by deception, they cater to the needs and demands of the male who exercise their sexuality in the bodies of these unfortunate women. Ironically though, the men remain invisible from the entire scene—they are neither accused or victimized, nor stigmatized or ostracized. The harm which they perpetuate under their patronage only benefits them unconditionally. In the organization of prostitution, men are the dominating power and they play the directing and controlling role. They organize the industry, they are the procurers and the buyers as well and they are also the ones involved in criminalizing the prostitute. Yet it is remarkable that while the women are painted red the men become faceless.

II

Love has always been portrayed as a timeless medium of happiness and fascination for the human mind. It is an irresistible attraction to submerge oneself and enjoy the mysteries of its spiritual and sensual pleasures. Love has thus always been the subject of discussion and representation in literature. Women are regarded primary objects of physical allure and this precludes the existence of female prostitutes in excess than their male counterparts. Popular imagination has always crafted prostitutes as some aggressive charmers who always have their sly wills fulfilled through physical exhibitionism and sexual indulgence. This being one of the oldest line of work in the world it has also been reflected in literatures of different

social periods but very few novels have actually recognized the variety in their experiences.They are generally considered a homogenized group which reduce their varied histories into standard formulas. Whether passive victims of scheming procurers or eager recruits seeking a life of indulgence and idleness, their experiences are invariably degrading and they drift downwards to the dregs of the trade (Hobson 85). One of the earliest novels dealing with the relationship between poverty and prostitution was Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria,* or the *Wrongs of Women*, written in the eighteenth century to deal with the individual stories of hapless domestic maids seduced and exploited by their masters and eventually kicked out of their situations, pregnant and penniless. The prostitute is presented in literature with a view to depicting a moral problem in society and a socio-psychological one for the characters themselves. Very often they serve as a go between to heighten the moral dilemmas of the protagonist or act as a foil to other female characters. The prostitutes that have been mentioned by the writers selected for this study are all set against a background of poverty, destitution and need. They come from ordinary households and lead ordinary lives. Their position in society is bleak and they eke out a living out of the meagre share meted out to them. The hapless woman invariably found it easier to break away from the degradations of honest living by adopting a promiscuous yet financially rewarding profession.

In this chapter I will discuss a few novels in English and Assamese that deal with the prostitute in rather candid terms.Writers like Kamala Markandaya, and Khushwant Singh have depicted the prostitute in their novels with an awareness of the socio -cultural perspective of the times.*Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya is the narrative of Rukmani's tryst with destiny. While patriarchal assumptions would urge us to look upon the novel as an ideological portrayal of feminine 'nature' and glorification of the invincible optimism of its protagonist Rukmani in the face of successive trials, a concerned reading would reveal her shifts of identity from an individual to a gendered existence in the confines of social conditions mirroring the collective histories of oppressed rural women in India. She is portrayed in the novel as Mother Earth—the positive, sustaining force of life. In

contrast her, daughter Irawaddy is portrayed as a rebellious spirit who would not hesitate to overstep the limiting confines of convention if the need arises. Very soon however, as is the way with society, she is denigrated to the status of a fallen woman for choosing to be promiscuous. In *Train to Pakistan*, Khushwant Singh mirrors the ravaged India of the partition period and brings the character of Haseena a dancing girl to reflect the ambiguities of human nature in catastrophic situations where feelings of power and powerlesness, rage and tenderness and the complex constructions of sexuality surfaces to create and destroy relationships.

It is a known fact that literature reflects its times.The novels that are taken up for discussion here also offer glimpses of the post war society in India—a country nursing the aftermath of a war and further nurturing her long awaited freedom from foreign yoke.The early post war period in India signified a gradual transition from a simple uncoordinated existence towards a more complex setting that reflected in the intricacies of the social structure. This was largely due to the advent of capitalism,that triggered changes in the economy and led on in its tow an inclination towards urbanization. A rise in the percentage of literacy led to the growth of a reading public but the early writers were more romantically inclined and did not care much to present reality. Gradually with changing social conditions, realism overshadowed romanticism, and influenced by their western counterparts, Indian writers too preferred a pragmatic representation of the facts of everyday life. Though women's lives continued to be patterned by patriarchy, yet women oriented themes were preferred choices for most writers with an intention towards bringing about an awareness of the woman question in society.Nonetheless prostitution was a taboo topic and such references were often skirted through with only a mention of the character. They are not subjects of import nor are their situations extraordinary or amazing. They are brought in to echo certain predetermined moral reflection which may sometimes serve as a document of social criticism. Otherwise, they are by and large subjects of contemptible and saucy entertainment in the plot. Generally speaking, the novels that depicted the lives of these women often portrayed them as 'commodities of desire' and provided manifold observations on their fall from

honour.Many of them recorded the economic compulsions that forced a woman's entry into this world of vice.We have Kajoli (*So Many Hungers*) and Irrawaddy (*Nectar in a Sieve*) facing adverse situations in life which force them to consider alternative paths and prospects for survival. There are characters in *A Train to Pakistan* who record their pitiful existence to poverty and destitution. In Assamese Literature, we meet Subala (*Subala*) and Champa (*Jiyajurir Ghat*) who are victims of societal injustice. In many novels of Mamoni Raisom Goswami, there are depictions of fallen women who are forced to trade their sexuality to overcome pangs of hunger. Though it is very often their concern for their family members and the hardships they endure that prompt them to seek the favours of wealthy men in exchange of physical gratification we also meet Gauri and a few other characters in *Dawar Aru Nai* whose reckless sexual exhibitionism and unscrupulous desires induce their choice.Despite variations in the connotation of morality at different periods of time, it invariably remains linked to a woman's conduct. This view aids the gendered attitude developed towards those women who exert themselves in not too socially honourable engagements. Their entities as human beings recede to the background and they are constructed as immoral. In Assamese literature, there has been scattered and scant mention of the prostitute and hence Homen Bargohain's *Subala* can be said to be the first novel of the post war period that deals with the life of a prostitute in desolately truthful terms. Bargohain admits that he was influenced by Alberto Moravia's *The Woman Of Rome* (1947) to write his very first novel on the life of a prostitute . "...Moravia woke me to the fact that a novel can singly be about a prostitute ...Subala may have been influenced by this" (Barman 82).

Prostitutes in Assamese Novels

Subala is an intense tale of distress and destitution that records the heroine Subala's sequential progression to desperate situations that validate her entry into a

most deplorable profession. Born in a destitute family, Subala faces immense trials throughout her adolescence and even faces the cruel destiny of identifying her mother as her oppressor. Though her entry into this profession is not out of choice – rather she is compelled by situations that lead on to the tragic end – the inevitability of the situation dawns on the reader quite early in the novel.Their utter poverty relinquishes her mother's obedience to normative codes of society and she barters her virtue for a hundred rupees. Their wretched existence later decides the fate of her very beautiful elder sister. She is sold by her mother to Arjun Singh, an old Punjabi who is blind in one eye ,for a thousand rupees. She would have sold Subala too had she not run away from home in search of a secure future. Little did she know that fleeing home would land her in danger of a much serious magnitude. Subala remembers how her mother had silenced her when she wanted to know about her sister after she found herself seized forcibly and gagged in the middle of the night by somebody.

> Listen Subala, spoke her mother sternly. I married off your sister to Arjun Singh. Don't ask any further questions or else I will smash your face. Now sleep silently (S 16).

This is resignation in the face of poverty. The overpowering concerns of morality, virtue, compassion and even love wear away quickly when balanced against the intense lust for life and fear of death. If they should live her sister has to be sold and now Subala remains in constant dread that her mother would sell her the next time.Her fears are not groundless. Her mother looks for customers and now Naren presents himself as an excellent prospect. Naren is the wealthiest man in their village and also a ruffian who dares to have everything that he desires, by force and compulsion. People are scared of him and no girl in the village has escaped his lewd remarks and lecherous behaviour. Bargohain's creation of Naren is so real that he springs alive out of the pages. An eminent writer Indira Goswami remarks that the Naren's face and character had haunted her for a long time after she completed

reading the novel.The writer Bargohain had admitted that Naren was a person whom he knew quite well. Subala catches the fancy of Naren. Ironically enough, his father had once taken advantage of their poverty and molested her mother. But her mother doesn't seem concerned to remember that Naren is the son of her molester. His wealth tempts her now and she is ready to sell her second daughter as well. Subala realizes that the confines of her home are no longer secure for her. She tries to convince her mother that to live virtuously is much more important and death is preferable to dishonour. Her rationalizing infuriates her mother and she comes out with the bitter truths of her life.

> ...To live in this world money is indispensableble but man cannot live by eating money. One needs money to buy rice and dal, to buy clothes. I have half a rupee with me and I go around the shops to buy some rice but no body gives me any... Your idea of virtue, morals and right actions is also this useless coin. It doesn't fill hungry stomachs... Just as money may sometimes be of no use, virtue and ethics can also be worthless when people do not value them in the market. I have not read these things in books or heard from somebody. I have learned them from my own experiences in very painful situations...(S 31-32).

Life is utterly cruel to Subala. She puts up stiff resistance and eludes Naren for some time but she knows that she will not succeed further in saving herself from the clutches of this man who is no less than a monster to her. "To escape the certainty of embracing the life of a prostitute she leaves home with a mysterious woman to face an unknown and dark future in a strange world" (S 50).This is the first step that she takes towards becoming a prostitute and her life changes as soon as she leave the precincts of her village.After much harrowing experience, Subala resigns to her fate and becomes a professional prostitute.She spends her days in a

brothel till age catches up with her. Once again fear grips her; earlier it was the terror of becoming an object of vicious lust in a shameful trade and now it is the fear of surviving without her trade.

Subala's trust in the old woman is quite odd because she is not a naïve teenager but one who has experienced the struggles of survival. Rene' Wellek and Austin Warren suggests that a "writer is not only influenced by society; he influences it. Art not merely reproduces life but also shapes it'" (Wellek and Warren 102). Homen Bargohain had met the woman on whom Subala's character is based and she had narrated her life to him.So everything that has been produced in the novel is based on truth (Barman 83). Bargohain must be trying to instill in the readers a realization that when the familiar expanses become tormenting enclaves one doesn't have any other recourse than to seek solace in unfamiliar spaces. Home is the secure haven where hopes are nurtured and fears withdrawn. It is here that the dark nights dawn into a sunny day and we wear an armor of radiant courage to fight the world. But, for Subala, her home could not proffer either strength or sanctuary to face the scheming universe. Maggie O'Neill affirms that children who experienced "destructive interrelationships with adults" led lives marked by violence, sexual and emotional abuse and this often paved the way towards their involvement in the flesh trade (O'Neill 101). At the old woman's home Subala has horrific experiences. That place which she supposes to be her safe recluse is actually a brothel and the lady herself a procuress who was engaged by Naren to trap her. She is made a prostitute, forcibly, and Naren is her first ravisher. Battered and bruised by him, she loses all consciousness of feeling and touch as she is initiated to a hideous world of lust and violence. The writer describes vividly Subala's agony and how after a failed attempt to kill herself she embraces this life of shame. The old woman whom everyone knows as *Burhimai* (old mother) relates to Subala her own tale of misery. To escape her lascivious brother in law she had run off with a man who promised to marry her and after a tragic sequence of events during which she was kept in prison, released and then raped and enjoyed by different men, she became a prostitute . It is the same story, she says:

> A *tuni* came and took a grain, another *tuni* came and took another grain...and then another...and then what happened? Then another *tuni* came and took another grain... And thus I became a prostitute. A prostitute will always remain a prostitute. She cannot be anything else (S 75-76).

Authors often manipulate the character of the prostitute and most often we find them embracing a miserable life that serves as a judgment on their immoral conduct. In Zola's *Nana,* the prostitute Nana too poses a threat to the society and Zola disposes her off without any qualms. Her ghastly death and the small pox that encrusts her beautiful face are apposite to her deeds.

Zola says quite explicitly : "It was as if the virus she had caught in the gutters and from the corpses, that ferment with which she had poisoned a whole people, had now reached up to her face and made it rot." He is of course talking of the pox she has spread; but is he not also castigating the prostitute who, by degrading a male hitherto presumed to be morally and socially superior, defies the hierarchy upon which society rests... (qtd.in Armstrong 130).

Burhimai too talks about a similar fate for the prostitutes. She insists that they have no place to go when they grow old. Either they live off some young prostitute's income or they beg on the streets.

> by and by when her strength fails and she is unable to beg she will be turned out of the house for not paying the rent and then she will lie decaying on the streets or under some tree yelping like a dog festered with worms... swarms of flies, dogs and crows would hover round her body before it ceases to breath and without a drop of water on her parched lips she would leave this world for ever...(S 92).

Kingsley Davis, an American psychologist argues that prostitution

resembles most of the socially sanctioned institutions and relations like marriage and courtship, where sex is involved. He feels that as in marriage or courtship, prostitution too indulges in the exchange of sex for some ulterior, sexual ends. But the reason he puts forth for the difference in status of these social and sexual institutions is that while the former offers the advantage of societal continuity under specific circumstances, the latter do not adhere to any social function or association. At the same time, social functions are compulsively performed only through socially sanctioned institutions. In contrast, however, prostitution involves the use of sex only for pleasure and money and not for any social function. It serves a private end and is a personal association. So in being mercenary and promiscuous, prostitution suffers all the disadvantages from a social institution like marriage.The work of Davis also focuses on the rationality of male sexual drive as an inherent and compulsive trait which cannot be satiated only through legalized social institutions like marriage but has to be supplemented by other channels that include commercial prostitution as well. He suggests that commercial prostitution stands at the lowest extreme of any sexual institutions in society while the family receives the highest estimation. The prostitute loses social esteem because she performs the immoral act of commercializing sex. In *Subala*, the novelist asserts that Subala has gained notoriety on account of her promiscuity as a prostitute. All honourable prospects are doomed for her now and she has to live a life of shame. At the same time there is a basic contradiction of Davis in Subala which we may ascribe to the writer's patriarchal inclinations. Davis insists that prostitution "shares with other sexual institutions a basic feature, namely the employment of sex for an ulterior end in a system of differential advantage but it differs from them in being "mercenary, promiscuous and emotionally indifferent"(Davis 153-54).

In literatures we often find the writers keeping the prostitute away from the closer sanctums of respectable existence and attribute to them an environment of filth, murkiness and desolation. Bargohain's *Subala* is also such a narration where the environment is steeped in squalor. The overtly foul atmosphere in the brothel , the vividness of the gruesome muck that Subala comes across many times (Naren

vomiting on her face, the very dirty toilet that she is forced to use, her miscarriage, the blood spattered body of the new born baby half eaten by dogs) also emphasize the peripheral and pessimistic nature of the prostitute's existence.However,Bargohain also describes a group of prostitutes in *Subala* who seem to be quite satisfied with life save for the hazards of the profession. They are colourful personalities and unlike Subala seem to have no regrets whatsoever. The rough lessons of the sex trade have schooled them to a life of psychic and social adjustment in the face of rejection. From a stubborn insistence on virtue to being a reluctant accomplice in the trade, Subala too gradually develops a nonchalance that resigns herself to her state and she starts viewing her body as an object to fulfill the desires of men. She loses all sense of shame and modesty and starts regarding herself as a commodity that can be traded. She descends to that depth of degradation where she now devises all means to entice and attract prospective customers to her and money flowed in while the years rolled by.

In a world of sensuality, Subala keeps herself devoid of all senses. She lives in two different worlds. One her own—a dark numbing world where she is absolutely alone without any memories of the past, novelty of the present or dreams for the future. The other is the world of endless pretence where money dictates her performance. She regards her profession as a transaction where she indulges with her customer for their respective gains. Her body is a tool of the trade and she detaches her feelings from the realities of her situation. After five long years of remaining a prostitute, where Subala tolerates harassment, insecurity, hypocrisy, violence, hatred, she still nurtures a dream of becoming a wife. Her greatest desire is for a home with a husband and children which would dissipate all her privations and miseries. Her love for Kanti the pimp, and the allure of a home and a family encourage her to dream of the impossible and this prompts her to leave her trade for a while but she fails to remain a wife for long because as *burhimai* tells her "once a prostitute, always a prostitute". Her relationship with Kanti is just an extension of the domineering heterosexual relationship between man and wife. She becomes his property, a property that he doesn't hesitate to trade. He exploits her emotionally and

physically and lives off her money that she had saved earlier. It is a relationship built upon his dominance and power over her 'fallenness' and her submission to maintain his masculine identity. When he recreates her whore status, she abandons her dreams of married bliss and her life completes a full circle as she finds herself once again at the steps of the brothel. The writer is keen to preclude Subala from the precincts of domestic life which he makes out to be her dream. She is a fallen woman who can never be allowed to corrupt the pure and pristine domain of femininity that marks a woman as a wife and a mother. Society is always wary of any kind of independence in woman and hence a prostitute is conveniently marked as an outcaste and denied the sanctums of respectable femininity for being sexually deviant

Bargohain has drawn a tragic picture of degraded humanity in the squalid lanes of this society.This distressing narration evokes sympathy for the wretched and rage for the devious machinations of this sham society but has not succeeded in offering any remedy to the situation.The novel concludes as an ageing Subala closes the doors of her trade and the novelist seems to suggest that this is the absolute truth for all prostitutes.He is unable to envision a hopeful prospect.In a well researched article titled "Pornography" Andrea Dworkin calls our attention to recognize representation of woman in male vision.She asserts that men have created 'the group,the type,the concept, the epithet,the insult,the industry,the trade, the commodity,the reality of woman as whore'(Dworkin 326).

> In the male system, women are sex; sex is the whore.The whore is porne, the lowest whore, the whore who belongs to all male citizens...Having her is having pornography...Using her is using pornography. Wanting her is means wanting pornography. Being her means being pornography (Dworkin 327)

Subala is not a pornographic study of a whore's life nor is it a thriller offering cheap titillation. Forcefully challenging Dworkin's assertion, the narrative is, as Hem Barua has said, a powerfully told story of sex that 'describes the grimness and misery, physical squalor and spiritual emptiness associated with the world of

prostitution with enviable insight and intimacy' (Barua 210).

A similar confused ending is revealed in *Jiyajurir Ghat* (The Banks of Jiya Juri) by Sayed Abdul Malik. It is a simple narrative of hope and faith restored in the face of adversity. The point is made clearly in the incidents that span the life of Saleh who marries an ideal woman –a model of modesty, and a fountain of love, innocence and purity. Sara is an open hearted, simple, romantic girl who after her marriage finds that her husband is quite indifferent to her.She suffers her husband's rejection quietly but deeply. She is perplexed by Saleh's behaviour and unaware of the turmoil her husband undergoes because Saleh is unable to confide in her that a chance encounter with a prostitute has ruined their prospects of happy conjugality.Champa the prostitute is infected with the dreaded syphilis and Saleh contacts it through her. Filled with remorse at having beguiled his pristine wife he plans to kill Champa and usurp her money which would aid his cure.The narrative reveals rather dramatically how the situation changes when he overhears the tragic account of her life and how he finally reveals to his wife the details and consequences of his promiscuity. Marriage is for the novelist a lifelong journey of deep personal commitment: it is glimpsed in Saleh's anguished confessions to his newly married wife, his honesty in owning up his unscrupulous liaisons and the effect of its revelation on Sara.

The characters belong to the lower ranks of society and the writer uses a prostitute to depict promiscuous situations only to reveal characters rather than to pose a moral problem in society. It is assumed that moral delicacy is seldom asserted in their lives. Zola viewed morality in terms of class and he never expected moral refinement to be a discerning matter in the lives of the poor and deprived. But Abdul Malik depicts how poverty fails to steal away integrity and humanity from the precincts of civilized existence among the destitute. Champa is a destitute woman who has to take her life into her own hand and take decisions herself. Economic necessity compels her entry into prostitution but it is the demand for commercial sexual intimacy that keeps her thriving. She belongs to a world that is familiar yet strange, remote yet near. Saleh discovers her house at the outskirts of the town in a

secluded spot and finds her responses quite different from his notions of feminine candour. She is attractive, and is quite kind to him. Quite wary of her tainted reputation, she displays an artificial mode of behaviour which is necessary for her to preserve her station in society and sustain herself. She is brazen and without any sense of shame or modesty because she has already distanced herself from the socio-cultural structures of society. Though it is not clear how she made her inroads into this profession the writer hints that it is sheer want that directs her choice. Women like her are sometimes compelled to sell their bodies to support themselves and their close ones. Champa saves the money she earns to help her brother Bhola get a job which is again a distant prospect. This bartering of her body does not make her rich ; she is a mere wanton solace for those men who cannot find any respite from the crushing forces of poverty—she comforts them but contaminates the very bodies that she heals and infects them with her syphilis. Should we suppose that it is her planned revenge on those who exposed her to a life of slurs? Is she a rebel like Irma in Guy de Maupassaunt's story "Bed no. 29", who avenges her condition by deliberately spreading syphilis among her clients from the Prussian army? Though the writer is more concerned to reveal the misery she faces in her fall, he does present a moralistic view for not sticking to the defining proprietary boundaries. Champa shares her feelings with Phul,her companion in distress-

> this is our life. When you are well, everyone comes to you, all are friends, when you are sick and in need, there's no one to ask for you; nobody will know if you lie dead in your house... The rich do not come to me...Four, five or ten rupees is all that I earn ...Who will give you more than that? And if they come to know of my disease, they do not come again... (Malik 362-363).

Phul is also a survivor in the same trade and she believes that their fate is a retribution for all the sins they have committed over the years. Champa is a transgressor and she suffers for her deviance but more than the threat she poses for society she is destruction for her own self. The writer, however, does not allow the transgressor to perish. He merely suggests the possibility that a woman has to suffer

by overstepping the social hierarchies marked for her. A realization dawns that when man breaks rules, he chastises himself because these are for his own necessity. So they all suffer—Champa and Phul and Saleh. Society may be rotten but there are still examples of shining truths that lifts our spirit. We almost wish that Champa would be able to earn and save some money to help her poor brother Bhola.On the other hand, Bhola does not wish to keep the money for himself and there is something utterly tragic in his determination to lend the money to Saleh so that he can be restored to health. Sara becomes all the more endearing to us when she graciously suggests that her gold necklace be given for Champa's treatment.Champa doubtlessly falters in her life's journey but the writer doesn't castigate her singly. He indicates that Saleh too did not stick to moral standards. By rejecting morality, they create disorder and become antagonizing figures relating a discretionary tale.

In yet another Malik novel, *Bonjui* (Forest Fire) an adulterous affair between Jona and Golap and the prostitute Moina are brought into the plot effectively to assert that the crux of a woman's position in society is her virtue and her allegiance to societal norms. Jona's adulterous liaison with Golap almost destroys her marriage which is saved by the arrival of a baby. Her husband does not dare to question his paternity, for fear of losing the child. People talk of Jona in degrading terms but Premadhar accepts his erring wife because it restores his self esteem that she remains his wife. Jona's affair once again throws light on Malik's views on marriage and sexuality. A woman's place is with her husband and her sexuality is his property. So though Jona commits adultery and leaves home, her husband's name only can shield her from being accused as a prostitute. On the other hand women like Moina are public woman who are traded and enjoyed. Nonetheless, there is always a possibility of redemption. Moina is a 'bad girl' who is compelled by poverty to choose a life of ignominy and she remains perpetually guilty of her imperfect life. Yet, simultaneously interwoven with this account of economic security is the tale of her victimization that makes her a prey to lecherous contrivances. A paradoxical situation arises when the very means of securing material survival becomes a means

that threaten social survival. Malik confronts his own attitude to fallen women and finds himself inhibited by a sense of compassion and empathy towards their hapless condition and hence the straying men too do not escape his censure anymore than the fallen women. Malik realizes that the commoditization of a woman's body and its subsequent valuation no doubt degrade the woman but the profession has served to be a reliable support for most of its practitioners who brave the shameful life under economic compulsions. It is all the more shameful for her and it lowers her self worth when society, most inhumanly, castigates and victimizes her for abusing morality while sparing her clients. This is supreme injustice considering the fact that both had been partakers in a mutually profitable exercise. Malik suggests redeeming situations for the women and so, while Golap experiences intensely agonizing moments of self censure for becoming involved in a disastrous relationship with Jona, the 'shameless prostitute' Moina who stands beside him glows with the warmth of tender love. "She is calm but her weary countenance reveals signs of immense pain and vicissitude. She is not a prostitute this night; she is a sister, a noble woman" (Malik 273).

It is precisely this attitude of Malik that makes him share and also wish his readers to appreciate Saleh's belief in the innate goodness of Champa in the earlier novel *Jiyajurir Ghat* and his conviction that a new dawn awaits them with promises of a beautiful life. Commenting on Malik's humanism, Nagen Saikia writes: "The source of this writer's inspiration is love; this is the foundation of all his writings. Hence there is no hatred and hostility in his works" (Saikia 9).In a similar vein, Lilabati Saikia Bora suggests that Malik's intense concern for the poor and the downtrodden urges him create tender characters like Sara who infuses the grimness with radiant warmth.She accepts Saleh's past waywardness without any reproach, gives him money to treat his disease and even suggests that Champa the prostitute ought to be helped so that she too can get herself cured of the dreadful disease. She harbours no ill feeling towards Champa and doesnot hold her responsible for her own misery.Saikia Bora feels that this may not happen in reality but it is through such characters that the novelist reflects his passionate humanism (Saikia Bora

30).While creating characters like Champa and Moina , Malik remembers the distress and vicissitudes that a woman faces in the narrow confines of society.At a glance these may seem to be individual aberrations but there are profound social reasons that compel such deviations. So his women characters are not flawless; they are erring humans and they reflect the actual grime, squalor and also some hope of life in real (Deka Hazarika 37).

On a quite different plane though, we have the character of Gauri in *Dawar aru Nai* (*No More Clouds*) who is presented as an exploited victim of capitalist excess. It is a personal treatise of the author Jogesh Das on the ravages of the Second World War as was then experienced in Assam. The plot of the novel is woven out of the representations of a war torn society that disintegrates due to the rapacity and selfishness of profiteers and loses the serenity of innocence and peace that was earlier suggestive of middle class families. Amidst the socio economic changes that transformed the psychological contours of people, we find a very potent glimpse into the moral degeneration that resulted from the new found economic and social freedom induced by the war. All moral standards are held for shorter moments because the war brought men and women out from their sheltered family environments and made them seek and snatch at immediate pleasures and profit.The novel describes the turmoil of a simple, honest school teacher Bakhor, who remains steadfast in his principles in the face of material temptation. His wife Kuki, whose father was a rich trader reaping profits in a war torn economy, had married him impressed by his idealism, but leaves him and goes back to her father when she realizes that their life is quite different from the conventional milieu of the nouveau riche . However, realizing her folly later, she repents her defiance and returns to claim her place beside her husband.Closely allied to this narration is the tale of Bhim and Gauri. Gauri is a simple girl from the tea garden who marries Bhim after much passionate love from either side but later succumbs to the lure of sensual enjoyment. She starts to prostitute herself and earns a smooth flow of forbidden riches to gratify her sensual desires. Her descent to the ranks of a loose woman signifies the hazards of material culture that the war wreaked upon people. Gauri's

naiveté and vulnerability makes her a victim of this entrapment and economic exploitation.Gauri sells her youth to the unscrupulous Girin and later to the army men as well, for tangible rewards. They compensate her amply and enjoy her. Sexual parlance dictates her conduct and she defies conventions to desert her husband and chooses to err. She succumbs to temptations and becomes an unconditional object of pleasure for men whose social and economic power defines her terms of existence and makes her their sexual victim.

> Girin is her lover and he loves her.She thinks she loves him as well.It is for that she is able to lead a happy carefree life...She has not forgotten Bhim... But now she hates hm. She can never love the man who rejects the pleasures of a comfortable life.Now she earns three to four scores every month and her father respects her for that.Would it have been possible if she had remained with Bhim (DaN 94-95).

By ascribing to Gauri a sexually victimized role, the writer shows her to be a passive and vulnerable woman. But quite synonymously her character is also posited with too much sexual agency and this conceals the structural nature of her oppression. We do not blame Girin for her fate; we assume that her conduct determines it. Her personal failures camouflage her domination and subordination. Had she acted differently such incidents would have never occurred. The responsibility thus lies wholly on her and the men are absolved of any guilt.

Gauri's violent death proves that femininity transgressed leads to disaster. The writer asserts that whenever woman defies the traditionally sanctioned normative codes of remaining a dutiful daughter, wife and mother, she is relegated to the status of an outcaste. Her fall and her subsequent death affirm the rotten side of the world. She is a creation of this society which being essentially male centric, many more such Gauris will always be needed to appease and satiate male lust. Throughout the ages, feminine purity has always been the marker of morality in any society and so a fallen woman signifies a sleaze in domestic life. Gauri's death is no surprise because society has to be purged of all such slime.

Lilawati Saikia Bora doesn't find Gauri's character to be of any significance in the plot or narrative. She is an illiterate labourer who lured by riches and physical desire,leaves her husband and elopes with a rich contractor only to be raped and killed by some American soldier.She is presented as a foil to Kuki, Bakhor's wife whom the writer presents in the conventional image of a traditional Indian woman.Gauri is vilified so that Kuki can be eulogized.He makes no attempt to delve into their consciousness and give us a glimpse of their emotional instability and turmoil (Saikia Bora:2000: 36-41).

All the aforementioned novels written in Assamese look into the subjectivities of the prostitute with a rather traditional orientation and showcase how predatory enactment of male sexuality reduces female agency to a naught but at the same time how by becoming objects of male desire, they secure their fallen status in society. On the surface level of the narratives, the prostitutes that are depicted here are victims of circumstances that are beyond their control. But on a deeper level lies submerged the threat of masculine desire. The prostitutes are all female bodies whose desirability as a sexual object holds the key to their possible survival under dreadful circumstances. We now look into two novels written in English- *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Train to Pakistan* and examine how they reiterate the relation between burgeoning male desire and the autonomy of choice and action of the prostitute. Are they able to free themselves from the force of male desire or do they always remain objects of undesired love?

III

Echoing Simone de Beauvoir, we might say that marriage is the traditionally offered destiny for woman and to be happy in marriage by being a loving and devoted wife is her duty towards society. A devoted wife cares for her husband, looks after the house and bears him children failing which she is

predictably at a disadvantage. It is precisely this attitude that mirrors Irawaddy's predicament in *Nectar in a Sieve*. When her husband blames her barrenness to be the cause of his impatience with her and leaves her with her parents, the poor girl finds little support in her father who justifies his son in law's decision. "I do not blame him...He is justified, for a man needs children" (NS 50).

Procreation is one of the main aims of marriage, the others being mutual love and avoidance of concupiscence (Aughterson 103-4). After five years of marriage when Ira fails to conceive, her husband has enough reason to desert her and Ira too knows that this is inevitable. She had imagined it for long and now the reality seems easier to accept for she is "a failure, a woman who cannot even bear a child" (NS 50). A woman's position within the system of human sexuality "is defined by her sexual status: virgin, wife, widow or whore: and her function within it as motherhood" (Aughterson 103-4).The novelist Kamala Markandaya portrays Ira as a deviant character whose entry into prostitution is a conscious and willful decision that enables her to earn enough money to support herself and her loved ones without taking recourse to any criminal activity during periods of acute economic distress. It makes her independent and secures a comfortable life for them. They were now able to put behind the times that they had to thrive on grass.

...hunger is a curious thing:at first it is with you all the time.waking and sleeping and in your dreams,and your belly cries out insistently.and there is a gnawing and a pain as if your very vitals were being devoured, and you nust stop at any cost,and you buy a moment's respite even while you knowand fear thesequel.Then the pain is no longer sharp but dull and this too is with you always,so that you think of food many times a day and each time a terrible sickness assails you...(NS 100).

This excruciating clutch makes Irawaddy of the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* choose her destiny, and her parents let her go because there is nothing more that they can do. She was no longer a child, to be cowed down or forced into submission and soon they got used to her 'comings and goings'. She was a wife whose sexuality was spurned for not being able to foster life but ironically enough, in her attempts to

overcome the drags of poverty, she reclaims her sexuality by becoming the controller of her body and life. Kamala Markandaya seemed to offer a tacit justification towards "woman's right to motherhood even without a legal husband"(Chaturvedi 48). Markandaya is intent on showing that the advent of industrialization in the form of a tannery to this peaceful,idyllic village in South India has been immensely responsible for all the degradation that Rukmani and Ira go through.In a discussion on the novel as a classic of the hunger theme, K. Venkata Reddy feels that the novel can be compared to other classics like Premchand's *Godan* and Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*.At the same time, however, it will be relevant to mention Kai Nicholson who points out that " in India the countryside too has been polluted, but not by the encroachment of industry... In the village the pollution comes from within, through starvation"(Nicholson 116). Ira takes to prostitution to feed her brother and in this "struggle between man and overpowering hunger...honour, morality and God do not count" (Mehta 225).Kamala Markandaya's treatment of the theme of hunger in this novel also reminds us of Bhabani Bhattacharyya's *So Many Hungers*. This novel describes the deplorable situation in famine hit Calcutta where mass starvation takes a huge toll of lives. There is a moving scene where a destitute girl sells herself and gets some money to buy bread for her family.It resembles Ira's situation and reflects the poverty stricken, heart breaking existence of the rural peasantry.

Alain Corbin images the prostitute as a putrid body associated with disease, decay and death. While they are a menace to society, as lower class women they are 'bound to the instinctive physical needs of upper class males' (Corbin 213) and serve their fancies and their whims. In *Train to Pakistan* Khushwant Singh mirrors a society where men take up women as objects and commodities and make out that a woman's sexuality is to be possessed. They view women through the eyes of a father, husband, lover or any other man who mirrors societal norms. So it matters less if the young prostitute with Hukum Chand, the aging District Magistrate of Mano Majra, reminds him of his daughter because he quickly drowns himself in strong liquor and overcomes any pangs of remorse that he has. This young girl who is brought in to satisfy him is not a rakish slut who can conveniently be associated

with disease and decay. She is indifferent to his lewdness, probably unaware of its implications and of its consequences on her thereafter. It may also be such that she is making out in her relationship with her customers because that way it is possible to separate the self and the psyche from the body. But Hukum Chand is concerned only of her services to him.She is a commodity he has bought for his pleasure. The social and sexual differences between them serve to reproduce the patriarchal ideologies and strengthen the gender stratification process. Men visit the prostitutes and have oppressive and dominant physical relation with them which is an intentional and purposeful unloading of their own unresolved problems and frustrations. The prostitute hence loses their existence as a human figure capable of feelings and emotions (Chitnis 1991).

Feminists oppose this idea where exchange of money for physical gratification is taken to be equivalents because it furthers the comodification of women's bodies. For the prostitute Haseena, economic need no doubt must have been the bottom line in her choice of profession.She claims herself to be a dancing girl and asserts that they do not go about doing 'other things for money'.At the same time there is little reason to imagine that left alone with him she would have done anything to thwart his 'evil intentions'. She agrees to sing for him and even stay with him another night in exchange for a 'big bundle of notes' (TP 110). Given that our social world is characterized and conditioned by patriarchy,whatever the contexts in which the buying and selling of the female body takes place,it is always the idea of the powerful male being capable of demanding and paying for her services. Money is the medium of exchange in the economic system and in a capitalist system men's access to it is more than that of the woman.It is this lack of access that determines a woman's selection of professions and sex work is one of those.The capacity of the male to demand sexual service from the female in exchange of money strengthens the concept of objectification as well. The woman's acquiescence which we may presume to be her choice may stem from a need for economic and emotional security but results inevitably in social and psychic alienation for the practitioner. In India where there is a clearly defined role for woman and a simultaneous insistence on

their rights and limitations converging as it were on the social customs and institutions, it is convenient for most writers whether male or female , to condemn the prostitute as vile.Women are the sellers or providers of sexual labour and this arrangement in any cultural and social context results in stigma and social condemnation for those that transgress the socially defined boundaries for woman.The prostitute is always the bad girl who threatens male control and domination because those acts that serve women's sexual or economic interests are within the context of masculine hegemony, dangerous, immoral, perverted, irresponsible and indecent. In a similar vein, the image of the prostitute in literature also subjects woman to a division into good and bad or conformists and deviants. Writers appropriate feminine behaviour to specific cultural constructions of domesticity while the prostitute becomes a public woman by transgressing these boundaries.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE TRANSGRESSING WOMAN

...sexuality retains this possibility of play and magic - a space where dreams can be negotiated, if not fully realized (Bhattacharyya 10).

I

The treatment of gender and gender relations has undergone a great deal of changes in recent times and Indian writers , both male as well as female have come to take up gender issues in their writings with much clarity and ease. It has no longer remained a submerged category but more and more writers are taking it up with explicit emphasis on sexual relations whereby they portray their characters departing from stereotyped relationships. This affects both their external and internal existences. While middle class moral standards determine the public values of the society as a whole, the immaculate purity of the female is one condition that regulates the lives and manners of woman. It also succeeds in defining the female once again as a symbol of virtue and docility. Though the process has been gradual, there is now an acceptance and a coming to terms by authors that with changing situations, environment and ideologies, women have also been changing their outlook and concepts of accepting things as they are placed before them. Sexuality has come to be regarded largely as a determining force in ascertaining social structures, man-woman relationships and in the

development and progression of a rational adult. Novelists have been fascinated by this aspect of human personality and have made diverse attempts to depict it without reservations in their novels.

Any literary work that depicts sexual relationships whether within or outside the ambit of societal sanction generally works towards recording a didactic comment on the potential dangers of unrestrained sexuality. In the Indian context too, from time immemorial women have been subjected to a subordinate role and made to undergo domination and ignominy under the oppressive patriarchal patterns of society and those who ventured to transgress these patterns within the Indian family structures are condemned to ostracization. A transgressor of normative codes leads a life of conflict with traditional values. Their identity is constructed on their sensitivity to their human existences and on the deconstruction of the stereotyped aspect of the feminine. Rigid interpretations of the social strictures and an adherence to a sexist prejudice are sometimes overlooked. Novels that portray such transgressing characters rely on the power of literature to create awareness to problems women face across cultures and spaces. Changing times, a rational instinct and a desire for self gratification coupled with the desire to negate any humiliations of social confrontations, induce a woman to defy cultural conformity. In a different voice altogether it becomes an attempt to define and shape the previously marginalized character. Those that chose to transgress are seldom assimilated within the respectable sanctums. The writers who create their protagonists from these deviant women are also a part of the patriarchal society and represent the same critical gaze that ascertains their place in society. Nevertheless, their novels try to voice these marginalized 'others' and by differentiating them, create a space for them. The characters explore and challenge the accepted notions of femininity and morality. They view the world without the tinted polarity of gendered opposition and resist the hitherto successful cultural stereotyping of their age. Their sexuality becomes a liberating force; it empowers them and unleashes a vibrant upsurge of sensibility that accentuates a merging of emotion and decision. Though life seldom consists of the simplicity of a narrative

order, the novelists try to unveil the fate of the transgressors with a prospective interest on the challenges they pile on the societal terrain. Such transgressing characters in Assamese novels (Menoka in *Antareep,* Giribala in *Dotaal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah*, Jona in *Bonjui*,Pahi in *Aboidho*) and in Indian English novels (Ammu in *God of Small Things*, Rosy in *Guide,* and Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*) question the viability of the terms woman and femininity. They destabilize the feminine script and at the same time attempt to question, explore and assess the normative gender codes. While there is undoubtedly a yearning for the attainment of independence and self assertion, these choices are not a simple travesty of conventions. Rather, they involve a great deal of soul searching and complex emotional shades that expose the turmoil of resisting a culturally sanctioned patriarchy.

Generally speaking, adultery on the part of the wife may be regarded as an act of transgression. Of the seven novels that I have chosen to discuss here, four deal with adultery by the wife (*Antareep*, *Bonjui, Aboidha* and *Guide*) two describe transgressing women—a divorcee and a widow (*The God of Small things* and *Dotal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah*) and the last(*Difficult Daughters*) is about a young woman who scandalizes her family by falling in love with a married man and subsequently marrying him. In all of these novels marriage is considered to be some kind of an order and tragedy befalls when that order is broken. Adultery is not a simple occurrence like having your lunch and dinner and talking over tea and coffee. It is a much more serious matter. In all these novels marriage is of prime importance and in the image of a wife is embedded the stereotype of the biological female who is also the obedient daughter or sister, the faithful mate and the responsible loving mother. Marriage confers upon a woman her identity and at the same time maintains the structure of patriarchal control. This centrality of marriage in any society makes adultery a tremendously offensive intrusion into the total mediated pattern of relationship between a man and a woman. It disturbs all mediations that are centered round marriage and that according to Tanner happens

because the person concerned is participating simultaneously in two or more irreconcilable patterns (Tanner 17-18).

Marriage, Desire and Sins

In *The God of Small Things* (1997) Ammu is a divorcee who struggles against the fate laid out for her by convention and transgresses all possible social norms all throughout her life. After finishing her schooling she has little else to do but wait for marriage proposals while helping her mother with her house work. She grows desperate at eighteen and dreams of escaping from Ayemenem. Eventually she is allowed to spend the summer in Calcutta where she meets her husband--a Hindu--and marries him because "she thought that anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenam" (TGST 39). When her twins are just two years old, her husband who worked as an assistant manager of a tea estate in Assam, is driven to an alcoholic stupor and asked to resign his job. The only alternate and seemingly viable option that his English manager places before him is to go away for a while for a holiday or for treatment and for the period of time that he is away, send his 'extremely attractive wife' to his bunglow to be "looked after".Ammu's husband doesn't object to the idea nor does he find it repulsive. After days of continual arguments, drunken violence and post drunken badgerings, Ammu decides that she can take it no more and returns unwelcome to her parents in Ayemenem, leaving her husband in Assam. She comes back to the very place she had fled from only a few years ago, defying community norms; now with two young children, and with no more dreams. No more chances either. There is only Ayemenam now for her. "A front verandah and a back verandah. A hot river and a pickle factory" (TGST 43). Her act provokes disapproval from all quarters.She recognizes the ugly face of sympathy every where and puts up with old relations who commiserate with divorce.

> ...a married daughter has no position in her parent's home. As for a *divorced* daughter...she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a *divorced* daughter from a *love* marriage... As for a *divorced* daughter from a *intercommunity love* marriage... (TGST 45-6).

Mammachi finds herself uncomfortable in being the mother of a wayward girl and she had a grudge against her behaviour, not willing to excuse any of Ammu's offences. Moral lapses which she is ready to condone (or even secretly encourage) when it comes to Chacko, her son, become an unforgivable, impeachable offence when committed by her daughter. All in all she practices double standards that requires Ammu to conform to the same rules her mother has conformed to herself, while men, especially the men of her family are allowed to any kind of behaviour on the grounds of their male needs.Having divorced her husband who repeatedly abused her and her children, a facet of life that her mother knew too well, Ammu's return to her mother's house is nonetheless unwelcome as it damages the reputation of the whole family. Although Mammachi never made a protest against her husband's drinking, during one of Ammu's scarce visits to Ayemenem a short time before she dies, Mammachi "suggested that she visit Rahel as seldom as possible" just on account of her drinking (TGST 161).And while Mammachi actively supports Chacko's many mistresses, the one single affair that Ammu had is unforgivable and the intensity of her rage surprises everybody.It seems that Mammachi does not reflect on any of these discrepancies; rather she accepts and advocates the notion that there are different set of rules for men and women. She perceives Ammu's (lack of) value system a menace to her life.It is too chaotic for her to grasp.

After her extra community marriage, Ammu transgresses societal codes for the second time, when she deliberately drifts towards Velutha. She tries to set aside the morality of 'motherhood and divorcehood' and changes her safe mother-walk to a wilder sort of walk, "She wore flowers in her hair and carried magic secrets in

her eyes" (TGST 44) She feels in her the infinite tenderness of motherhood and the recklessness of a suicide bomber and this eventually leads her to "love by night the man her children loved by day"(ibid).Nothing mattered. She knows that it is all they can ask and have of each other.Velutha's particular Paravan smell that so disgusted her aunt intoxicates her. She feels that the world is his and it is not just that he is the only giver of gifts to her children—the boats, boxes, small windmills—but she can also gift him many things. So she trades her deep dimples, her smooth brown skin, her shining shoulders and her elsewhere looking eyes. All this, while she tries to understand the quality of his beauty holding him close to her while his wild hammering heart calms down.

> They stood there. Skin to skin. Her brownness against his blackness. Her softness against his hardness...She could feel herself through him...The way her body existed where he touched her. The rest of her was smoke. (TGST 334-5).

For fourteen nights Ammu and Velutha stick to the small things. They do not discuss the future because there is no future to discuss. There is also nowhere for them to go.They know that it is all they can ask of each other.

> They laughed at ant bites on each other's bottoms. At clumsy caterpillars sliding off the ends of leaves, at overturned beetles...at the pair of small fish...at a particular devout praying mantis. At the minute spider who lived in a crack in the wall ...The empty thorax of a dead bee... (TGST 338-9).

They chose the frail and the fragile and take delight in the unexpected aftermath of their discoveries. These special magic moments holds a special meaning for them because they understand that it is fragility that accentuates their encounters.And

each night as Ammu promises Velutha a *Naaley* (tomorrow), they are conscious that things can change in a day.

And so they do. They become a "history lesson for future offenders". Velutha being an untouchable dares to see things that he had not seen before. He comes in conflict with history and tradition because he takes no cognizance of social conventions and restrictions and tries to access things that were out of bounds so far. Ammu's troubled eyes bring him close to the secret heart of a touchable woman and make him a transgressor.So he is finally wiped out. He is bitterly butchered in custody and is almost on the verge of death while taking the form of a mangled genie.

"Blood spilled from his skull like a secret. His face was swollen and his head looked like a pumpkin, too large and heavy for the slender stem it grew from" (TGST 319-320).

Ammu and her twins continually involve themselves in nonconformist rebellious behaviour which result as a consequence of "someone small" being "bullied by someone big"(TGST182)..From her childhood Ammu faces repression and injustice from Pappachi who always favoured her brother Chacko and deprived her of a feeling of love and security. Her marriage was her way to escape her ill tempered, calculating father and her long suffering mother. While sending Chacko to Oxford, Pappachi sees college education as an unnecessary expense for girls. So a desperate Ammu chooses to marry even if it means going against her family and their customs.Her transgression occurs on two levels. In the first place it is her extra community marriage and then divorce thereafter that establish her as a dissenter because she subverts the healthy values of society by elevating the low and detestable. Secondly, her illicit affair with Velutha is an example of a severe breach of manner and indiscipline with an element of sexual recklessness which pinnacles the psychological trauma that she experiences in her marriage earlier. Deprived of a healthy married life, she develops a thirst for passionate love that leads her to transgress the Love Laws as to who should be loved and how and how much. Having already transgressed community boundaries by marrying a Hindu,

she compounds the mistake and defying fate, falls in love with Velutha—a Paravan(untouchable).In this novel Ammu's sexuality is a crucial feature. Through the organization of her life from her adolescence and her period of parenthood till her solitary death, it has remained a focus of social control and regulation. At the same time, it has also been a private domain for her restless mind to weave and indulge in dreams, which however remain unfulfilled most of the time. For Ammu her sexuality is a mode for experiencing love and pleasure as well. It is also a means to assess and demonstrate her self -worth when the world regarded her existence to be 'no locusts stand' In view of the patriarchal processes that are reflected throughout the novel the matter of sexual freedom has not been clearly articulated. The point might also be made that beyond a focus on the essential feminine discourse on Ammu we can engage in a debate that might concentrate solely on Ammu's rights. It would be an alternate dimension to include sexuality as a controlling and deciding factor in a woman's identity. Instead of ignoring or marginalizing Ammu as a transgressor, we may connect her sexuality, gender and also her specific rights associated with her sexuality and facilitate a recognition of her individual identity.

This touching and intricate story has received much critical acclaim for reason more than one. Critics acclaim it for its skillfull construction and the novel with its extraordinary fineness and delicacy arrests our attention. Its lyricism and its genuine tragic resonance reverberates long after we keep down the book.An interesting observation is made by M.K Naik who considers Velutha and not Ammu to be the protagonist of the story. According to Naik, it is he who gives the title to the story.He is the God of all small things, the Small being the individual and the Big , a force that is larger than him.The 'Big' things are either society, religion, tradition or destiny that combine or act individually to demolish the 'Small' things.Velutha is destroyed by the workings of all these forces. The novel which is called a 'protest novel' by Naik & Narayan narrates in detail the protagonist Ammu's progression through life.Naik regards Ammu also to be a victim of all the bigger forces.She is so victimized that she comes to believe that

she would be treated as a prostitute. During the final days of her life she has a recurrent dream in which policemen approach her with snickering scissors, wanting to hack off her hair.

> They did that in Kottayam to prostitutes whom they caught in the bazaar—branded them so that everybody would know for what they were. Veshyas...Ammu always noticed them in the market, the woman with vacant eyes and forcibly shaven heads in the land where long, oiled hair was only morally upright (TGST 161).

It is ironical that the very forces of social morality which destroy her for being a transgressor, for loving Velutha, had also destroyed her marriage earlier when she had refused to transgress. She had left her husband because he wished her to please his boss and 'do the needful' (Naik 224-31). Krishna Sarbadhikary, however, charges Arundhati Roy of projecting Ammu's transgression as a "self justifying ,defensive and reactive stances which do not achieve much for them". Ammu's rebellious nonconformist nature leads her to defy the norms of pure womanhood and she falls into another trap. She responds to her bodily cravings and opposes feelings to reason. She needs the male gaze to reaffirm her femininity and becomes an object of condemnation. Her rebellion comes to naught and she is unable to assert her identity in a patriarchal society. Sarbadhikary also critiques Roy for excluding the 'other' from a more inclusive vision.Ammu's individual journey towards her self realization is in no way the collective vision of all oppressed transgressors .It is the depiction of a 'passive victimhood' and hence fails to construct a female subjectivity that can transcend the limitations of their class,caste or gender (Sarbadhikary 144-62).

In one of her interviews Arundhati Roy holds the view that fiction is for her a way of expressing her knowledge of the world:

> Fiction for me has been a way of trying to make sense of the world as I know it. It is located very close to me—the book.It is located in the village I grew up in.If I had to put it very simply,it is about trying to make connections between the smallest of things and the biggest ones and to see how they fit together (qtd in Prasad 81).

Writing at a time when neo colonial Hindutva leaders are bent on chalking out a traditional image of middle class acceptable image of Indian womanhood, Arundhati Roy projects the face of the female subject not as a cultural continuity but rather as a break on that continuity. With the compulsions of time, Indian womanhood has been perceived in literatures in a re imagined and re constructed context. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan however asserts that the problems of 'real' women cannot lie outside the imagined constructs because her subjectivity emerges through these imagined constructs only.

> Culture...is viewed as the product of the beliefs and conceptual models of society and as the destination where the trajectory of its desires takes shape, as well as the everyday practices by which these are structured, is the constitutive realm of the subject (Sunder Rajan 10).

Very often, a writer is dictated by cultural ideologies and certain stereotyped image of the woman is reinforced to enable a woman's representation. In this novel too the writer Arundhati Roy has not been able to contradict the socio cultural implications that underline any gender identity. Agreeing with Krishna Sarbadhikary, that Roy has not succeeded in salvaging the rebellion under gender inequalities I also put forward Meeta Chatterjee's opinion on the funeral of Ammu.

> Ammu did not even have her son at her funeral. The crematorium that she was taken to,cremated the derelicts,the beggars and those

> that died in police custody.All that remained of Ammu was a little clay pot and a receipt. 'Receipt No.Q 498673.'Ammu's unceremonious funeral, the disposal of her mortal remains,very much like that of a dead insect, rehearses the doubleness theme that permeates the novel, without direct comments on the system that permeates such doubleness (Chatterjee 130).

The strictures of patriarchy dictate that a woman should lead a chaste, restricted life within the confines of marriage and preserve moral values. A wife is expected to be faithful and sacrificing towards her husband and family .She upholds tradition and faithfully directs her devotion towards her lord and master. The stability of the family on which society depends, rests on this. When she is widowed, the surveillance that is wielded upon her by her husband is now withdrawn and without any restrictive authority to direct her path she is vulnerable to the danger of transgression. A transgressing widow calls into question the customs and rules of a traditional society which compel her to revolt against them. In an Indian society, a Hindu widow occupies a conflicting position. She leaves behind her days of innocent girlhood, dutiful wifehood and enters a rigid and orthodox phase of normative structure in society that attempts to impose upon her a 'deathlike existence' (Sogani 92). Economic dependency, illiteracy and lack of mobility often compel the widows to undergo humiliation by enduring the repressive measures imposed upon them. One who refuses to accept the social pressures and dares to oppose them in an attempt to secure some personal freedom is often labelled a transgressor. All through her life a woman sees herself in the eyes of their father, husband and other men who mirror societal norm. As long as feminine sexuality is under the reins of male control, a woman is supposed to be protected. The untapped sexual energy of a widow presents a threat to the social system and so a code of behaviour is laid out for them. The widow becomes a symbol of vulnerable human nature and hence, a prey to temptation which necessitates that she should always be controlled. . *Elokesi Besyar Kotha* (Elokesi

the prostitute's tale n.d) is one of the earliest novels on the plight of widows, written in the Assamese language and translated into Bengali. Written by the missionaries the novel depicts the miserable life of widows and claims that they turn to prostitution in order to escape their unbearable state of life. According to them, conversion to Christianity is a far better proposition for them than to tolerate the harsh treatment meted out to them by their families (Das 204).

Dotal Hatir Une Khowa Howda (*The Moth Eaten Howdah Of A Tusker*) by Indira Goswami deals with the socio economic conditions of the Sattras in South Kamrup district of Assam in the post –independence period. The novel is a very successful attempt by Dr. Goswami to reveal the feudal decadence of the area and to highlight the plight of widows in upper class Brahmin households the orthodox Hindu society. We can very well understand the plight of widows in Assam which continued even during the post colonial period when we read the writer's account of the ignominy they are subjected to. Most of the time they accept their condition and suffer in silence for they did not dare to oppose the harsh measures imposed on them. Patriarchy and Brahminism emerge as two unchallenged authority in the society of those times. The writer portrays three widows—Durga, Soru Gosanee and Giribala— in this novel and depicts them as being subjugated by the oppressive social machinery. In the character of Giribala, the writer traces a bold attempt to overcome this injustice and thereby calls into question the norms laid down for widows by Hindu scriptures. On the other hand Durga and Soru Gosanee are incapable of emerging through the fetters that bound them.

> The nature of transgression is to be understood in the context of the code laid down by Indian patriarchy which divided women into two categories, the chaste and the unchaste...Chaste women were required to keep a check on their movements and expected to restrain their thoughts voluntarily and not allow them to stray. They were not to harbour personal ambition, assert their individuality, or

> take any undue interest in *parapurusha* that is, a man other than their own husband (Sogani 94-95).

Going by this account it is not difficult for us to imagine that the few like Giribala who dared to defy the inhuman restrictions imposed on them for being widows came to be identified as a transgressors. Giribala's defiance of authoritarian holds, her desire for love and its gratification are transgressive actions and a widow's transgression highlights the destructive, rigidly held differences in a class structured society where life is particularly restrictive for women. In Goswami's portrayal of the widows one sees a disturbing and contradictory affinity to tradition and a simultaneous alliance with modernity that rejects the 'Brahmanic' traditions.Durga and Soru Gosanee's passivity is foregrounded by Goswami to suggest an indecisive, weak and insecure female subject without the 'protection' of a husband. Significantly, Giribala's resistance and unrelenting attitude,her agency and clandestine passions turns her into a subversive character. Her love for Mark - a Christian, her sensual longings and her defiant streak of character traces the path of her later destruction. She re interprets lessons of feminine compliance and sees only oppression in staying confined under the rigid and repressive orthodoxy. Though a victim, the writer invests Giribala with much agency that seeks to destabilize the stereotyped codes. She attempts to face the external world with a relative freedom that her 'restricted space' and her private sphere as a widow allow her. With a spontaneous understanding of the political patriarchal world of power and control, she articulates a vigorous protest in freeing herself from prejudices and at the same time remain unresponsive and unconcerned about anything happening in her own social surrounding. She directs her overwhelming emotion to wrest for herself some degree of control over the sites of pleasure. It is an attempt to explore the narcissistic contours of pleasure and desire as well. I refrain from further elaboration here because this novel will be taken up for a detailed study in the next chapter on women novelists.

Deviant Wife, Defying Daughter

I have already discussed Rosie's character in RK Narayan's *The Guide* as a victim of patriarchal injustice in an earlier chapter. Now I would attempt to trace the outlines of her transgression which was a result of her defiance of the constricting conditions in her life.Rosie is young and naïve when she marries Marco. She responds to a matrimonial advertisement that looks for "an educated, good looking girl" (TG 84) and gets married after having many discussions in her family about whether it would be good and wise to marry so much above their wealth and class. After all, women in her family are considered public woman-neither civilized nor worthy of any respect. She does not remember of feeling any love for her husband nor does she think that she married him for money. According to her 'it just happened' (TG 84).On a trip to Malgudi with her husband, they meet Raju, who is the local tourist guide. While her husband uses his service to assist him in locating rare monumental architecture, Raju is fascinated by the quiet serene beauty of Rosie and surprised at the discordant note in the relationship between the young couple. Gradually, a turn of events bring Raju and Rosie close to each other and in some unguarded moment she confesses to Raju that her marriage did not give her a 'real, live husband' (TG 85). Rosie realizes that her husband was supremely interested in sculpted figures on walls and stones in caves than in his wife who as a dancer was the living embodiement of those images.She had novel ideas that she wanted to experiment with but her husband would brush them aside saying "I doubt if you can.It's more difficult than you imagine".The man who had insisted on marrying a graduate wife now does not regard her as a partner on equal terms. Instead he expects that she should be like his servant Joseph— reliable and efficient – and take care of his needs without any confusion. "I don't see him, I don't hear him, but he does everything for me at the right time. That's how I want things to be" (TG127).

In this tale of love and deception, of irony and humanism, R.K. Narayan presents "a clash of castes, classes and interests in the persistence of time honoured customs and old values on the one hand and the weakening modern social and moral structure on the other"(Narasimhaiah:2000:132). Rosie is presented as a breaker of rules in a society that always idealizes the docile, and suffering woman. At the same time through the character of Rosie, Narayan also deals with the concept of women's emancipation and the claim that a woman can rise to the occasion and assert her worth amidst societal aversions that are directed at her. Rosie is chosen by her husband after much careful consideration but he is not able to make her happy because her interest in dance is for him a useless indulgence without anything intelligent or creative about it. He does not regard it as art and compares it to street acrobatics.

> An acrobat or a trapeze goes on doing the same thing all his life...your dance is like that. What is there intelligent or creative in it? You repeat your tricks all your life. We watch a monkey perform, not because it is artistic but because it is a monkey that is doing it (TG 148).

It is indeed strange that a man of such erudition could be so unfeeling and insulting towards a form of expression that is a living embodiment of the ancient monuments and sculptures which keeps him so delightfully engrossed. Rosie swallows all humiliation because she still hopes to convert him. We can imagine her dismay, her agony and her vulnerability before a man who is her husband but who has the capacity to fill her with terror. He does not care for the surging of life and effervescence that embodies the existence of his elegant wife. Dead and decaying things fire his imagination rather than the bubbling spirit of life and whatever captivates her attention seems to irritate him. And yet Rosie accepts all his taunts and troubles in the hope that once they are reconciled about her dancing everything else will come to a pass. One kind word from him even makes her think

of giving up her plans. "His tone was now so kind that I felt I need not bother even if I had to abandon my own plans once and for all: if he was going to be so nice, I wanted nothing more..." (TG 148)

Rosie tries hard to impress her husband. She takes interest in his work though she did not understand much of it. He talks with her only about his own activity, showing her the pictures he copied, the notes he made and his plans about publishing his work. After all he is going to be responsible for the rewriting of history. Rosie listens to his talk with enthusiasm believing that an understanding has come between them. But the moment she mentions her passion, he is stung. Observing them, the guide Raju feels that they are a mismatched couple—one is a 'divine creature', so elegant and vibrant while the other is a 'grotesque creature', a monster who fancies ruins and decays more than anything else. No wonder, Rosie dreams of a real man and when Raju praises her art and beauty and offers words of solace she glows in his warmth and tenderness and surrenders to the charms of the man who she feels is giving her a new lease of life. It is a moment's weakness when she dares the forbidden. In a deft yet subtle manner Raju crafts the moment when she acquiesces to transgress boundaries meant for a wife. Laxmi Holmstrom suggests that two things pull against her role as a wife. One is her need for simple pleasures of the senses which her husband did not offer her and the other is her passionate desire to dance, which her husband tried to suppress (Holmstrom 108). We remember how Raju was thrilled when he heard that Rosie belonged to a caste that was viewed as 'public women'. He was already quite drawn to her beauty and charm and subsequent talks with her revealed her sadness and dissatisfaction with her husband. So with his characteristic ingenuity Raju contrived the moment to assuage her of her sorrow.

> I sighed deeply, overcome with the sadness of her life. I placed my hand on her shoulder and gently stroked it. "I am really unhappy to think of you, such a gem lost to the world. In his place I would have made you a queen of the world." She didn't push away my hand. I

> let it travel and felt the softness of her ear and pushed through the locks of her hair (TG 86).

Though Rosie is attracted towards Raju and an affair begins between the two, she is convinced about the righteousness of marriage and attempts to contain her needs within its boundaries. R.K.Narayan tries to show how the instincts of a faithful wife are not dead in her. Quickly realising her mistake, a repentent Rosie tries to mend fences with Marco.

> I realized I had committed an enormous sin..... My mind was greatly troubled. I didn't want anything more in life than to make my peace with him. I did not want to dance. I felt lost... (TG 150).

Though a gifted dancer, at that moment Rosie wanted nothing more than her husband's forgiveness. She sincerely apologizes to him, but in vain. She explains to her husband the nature of her relationship with Raju, repents for it, agrees that it is a blunder on her part and even seeks a compromise. Like a dog she follows him day after day, waiting on his grace but he does not relent. After three weeks of torturous silence between them, Rosy pleads to her husband to forgive her. "I want to be with you. I want you to forget everything. I want you to forgive me..." (TG 151). Instead, her husband tries to forget the fact that he had ever took her as a wife. He calls her a loose woman- someone who would go to bed with anyone who would flatter her antics. His single-minded uncompromising attitude prompts him to abandon her. Her husband leaves her at Malgudi and goes back to Madras alone. She has no place to go and she knew no one except Raju.Then she has no other recourse but to go to Raju and live by dancing.Out of his slender means Raju provided her with all the facilities to practice her dance.He also supplemented these resources with his own personal involvement in her hobby and by sharing her concerns and her enthusiasms. She stays with Raju at his house much to the apprehension of his mother. When Raju's business goes down as a

consequence of his involvement with Rosie and he fails to pay his creditors and faces repercussions from all quarters, his mother puts all the blame on Rosie.She calls her a serpent woman-a she devil and a demon who comes in like a viper and wreaks havoc in the life of Raju.

> The image of the venomous animal and of poison is thus clearly a symbol of moral evil. Devious and deadly, its action mirrored the lethal effect of sin on the soul. The insidious behavior of the venomous animal reflected the malice and snares of the devil. When the idea of the venomous animal is linked to women, the significance is usually sexual, and the metaphor becomes a misogynistic commonplace (Hallissy 90).

The myth of femininity ensures that woman be understood as natural and feminine and as Butler says they become intelligible only when they conform to recognizable gendered standards (Butler 22) Those who transgress patriarchal norms are unfeminine creatures who encounter a hostile cultural response. So Rosie often has to digest judgmental preaching from Raju's mother who can not comprehend Rosie's negative response to her husband. After all husbands come in myriad structures—"good husbands, mad husbands, reasonable husbands, unreasonable husbands, savage ones, slightly deranged ones, moody ones, and so on and so forth" (TG 155) but always it is the wife who wins him over with her doggedness and perseverance. Displaced from her proprietary position in marriage, Rosie like Ammu in *The God of Small Things*, loses the right to hold any reputable position in society. As she said earlier, she is now likened to a public woman and she regains her identity as a dancing girl who is not admitted into respectable families. She is an outcaste and people talk of her as the *saithan* (demon) and at the same time crack nasty jokes at her expense. That such sentiments are expressed predominantly by the male characters unveils conservative, moral mentalities which suppose a woman to follow a prescribed form of behaviour. Rosie had a past

and woman with a past are not to be trusted and their histories are subjects of discussion and reprisal Social codes however mean little to Rosie. She lives her own life innocently unmindful of what society thought of her. An optimistic assessment of Rosie's femininity would establish her as a courageous lady whose strength and determination enable her to counter an otherwise disastrous situation. But the reader is invited to concentrate on her situation from the perspective of her biased neighbours who criticize her candour as unfeminine and call her a monster woman.

C.D Narasimhaiah, however, feels that the novelist has performed an uphill task in making Rosie's relationship with Raju acceptable to the Indian readers. R.K Narayan stands by Rosie despite her transgression and despite the fact that he is functioning within the cultural codes of a traditional Hindu society.The novelist does not react adversely to Rosie and presents her as a distinctly dignified character and as "the very picture of ideal womanhood in spite of her loss of chastity" (Narasimhaiah 2003:121). .Even during the period of her intense relationship with Raju ,Rosie never forgets her husband.Even though she is spurned by her husband she often talks of him and says "After all he is my husband". When Marco's book is published and Rosie reads a review with his photograph in the newspaper, she cuts it and keeps it on her table. She loses all interest in dancing and in Raju as well when she finds him more engrossed in its commercial prospects and decides not to have anything to do with him.The novelist has given a 'serious treatment' of the character of Rosie and this is evident in " the way he takes care to preserve Rosie from inner taint".This is Narayan's way of affirming what has been hailed in the Indian tradition as the Feminine Principle in life—a marvellous innate capacity to recover wholeness" (Narasimhaiah ibid).So despite her transgression, the readers do not condemn Rosie. We remember her husband's last words when she had followed him doggedly day after day seeking his forgiveness. "Don't talk to me.You can go where you will and do what you please" (G 151).Her closeness to Raju becomes

credible in this environment of strange coldness, where he symbolized the warm flow of life.

Her act of transgression is marked clearly in the novel but the novel does not centre on the particular act of transgression. Instead it tries to delineate the character of Raju by mirroring him against her failings with her husband and at the same time her incapability of understanding the reality of Raju's infatuation with her. Raju is overjoyed to learn that they are considered public women. For him she is a divine creature and he seduces her with much guile which she does not comprehend. The impersonal narrative is keener to deal with Raju's circumstantial rise to fortune and his subsequent fall, thereby delving into aspects which have a deeper significance. He is an opportunist –"an ordinary tourist guide with no extraordinary qualities except a certain cunning with which he plays on the gullibility of the village folk"(Srinath 15) and under pretence of holding great affection and admiration for Rosie and her dancing talents uses her to further his own selfish interests. He takes advantage of her trust on him and gambles her money away. In a most incredible way, R.K Narayan succeeds in making Raju come alive in his pages.As readers we are intrigued at his meteorical rise—

> ...from a ragamuffin, a rascal...his affair with a highly educated married Indian woman, married to a scholar...without outraging Indian sentiment and take charge of her life completely...become prosperous and hobnob with judges, civilians and ministers and get into trouble, go to jail, come out, and be acknowledged as swami by everyone,from the gullible villagers to the Government of India (Narasimhaiah 2003:115).

Raju's character is R.K Narayan's most extraordinary creation and his ingenious contribution to Indian fiction and Rosie's adultery is just a component to be negotiated along the sharp turns and twists in Raju's life.

In *Difficult Daughters*(1998) by Manju Kapur, Virmati is a lost character. She resists moral aesthetic traditions of the family and refuses to conform to norms in an attempt to establish her identity as an independent woman. Virmati is asked to accept a typical arranged marriage and her dissent against that destiny brings enduring shame to her family.She falls in love with a married man and after a period of trying phases , she finally marries the man she loves and returns to Amritsar to live with him. However, he refuses to leave his first wife, and the consequences for Virmati are harsh indeed: she ends up being marginalised by her own family and despised by her husband's. Ida, Virmati's daughter narrates the story of her mother's life in an attempt to reconstitute the events that coloured her life in the background of the struggle for independence and the subsequent trauma of partition. Through Ida we hear the author speaking out.Ida and her mother's life stories are interrelated to a certain extent because at a different period of time the daughter goes through the same intense soul-searching as her mother did. "No matter how I might rationalize otherwise, I feel my existence as a single woman reverberate desolately ..." (DD 3).

Virmati struggles to achieve independence from the austere conditioning of her traditional Punjabi family where a girl's destiny conclude in marriage.She joins college and gets herself educated in a "bastion of male learning" but unfortunately for her, she falls in love and goes through some some misadventures resulting from her misplaced passion towards a married man.She spurns the marriage fixed by her family, attempts suicide, bears confinement, aborts the baby and finally gets married to her lover to live a lonely life of repressed anguish. She rejects one patriarchal domain and marries her lover but in her new home she does nothing but compromise.She is forced into becoming an unwanted addition in the household where the professor uses her to inflate his ego and the first wife treats her with disdain.She loses her self confidence and becomes emotionally and intellectually dependent on her husband who established himself as superior to her in every way.Virmati defies societal expectation to assert her individuality and hopes to achieve self- fulfillment. In her attempt to attain individuality, she fails to

create a credible space for herself.She loses her identity, her family and her roots too. She is a failure with her life and we do not find in her any progression as a rational adult.Perhaps it is this inability of Virmati to strike independent roots and grow that makes Ida remark "The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother"(DD 1)

Virmati's mother Kasturi is a woman whose existence is rooted in tradition. Everything that conforms to norms appeals to her aesthetic sense. Any deviation from the so-called path is not acceptable to her. Her entire being is devoted to the cause of upholding the customs of her family and she tries to drill the same thoughts in her daughters, and when her eldest daughter Virmati refuses to follow her footsteps she is outraged. In any Indian society it is generally the women who are affected directly by the social customs and institutions that discriminate them. During Kasturi's adolescence it was never forgotten that marriage is a girl's destiny and so after her graduation her mother ensured her future happiness by enhancing her qualifications impeccably—qualifications that would please her future husband and in-laws. So she excelled in preparing a variety of breads, puris, paranthas and kulchas, sweet sour and spicy, pickles of every seasonal fruit and vegetable, sherbets and sweets and papads and even spun and wove and stitched and embroidered.

> With her needlework, Kasturi held back worries about the behaviour of an unmarried educated, seventeen year old. Her father ...loved watching her. Such gentleness and tranquility, beauty and modesty were sure to be rewarded by a good husband...Kasturi joined the ranks of women who have stitched hours of waiting in to intricate patterns. Her clandestine activity was reading which she protected from comments... by gratifying it at night (DD 58).

Only one glance forges the final link between Kasturi and her future husband and she steps into a new household with six mattresses, hundred and one

utensils, embroidered pillow cases and six set of salwar kameezes.Her meagre trousseau is understandable because a wife is not meant for show. It is well for us to imagine Kasturi's anxiety when her daughter Virmati grows tired of sewing and knitting, and exhibits a restlessness which her mother thinks is disaster for a girl. Virmati is motivated to refuse marriage and continue with her studies, by her cousin Shakuntala, a young lady bold and progressive in thoughts and deeds, but it is the passionate entreaties of her lover that determine her decision.So she dreams of a home with the man she loves blindly ignoring the consequences of becoming a home breaker. Her family, on the other hand, is obsessed with her impending marriage. Being the eldest of the six girls, Virmati's marriage promises endless excitement for her siblings and a sense of complacent achievement for her parents in having secured a decent, eligible boy for their daughter.For Virmati however, "every word they said had so little relation to her inner life that she felt fraudulent even listening to them, passively, immorally silent". (DD 64)When she fails to convince her family, she attempts suicide and after her rescue her mother doesnot hesitate to deal with her with vehemence. She hit her repeatedly cursing her for her ruin and Virmati's flimsy excuse that she did not like the boy only double her agony. "The girl will throw mud on our whole family, make us fall so low we will have no name left.", moans her mother (DD 80) It is utterly unimaginable for Kasturi or for any member of her family to accept Virmati's refusal to marry because society appropriates girls as marriageable goods meant for adorning their husband's house.In case of a woman it is always "the cultural laws that establish and regulate the meaning of sexuality" (Butler 283).When certain kinds of identities fail to conform to the cultural laws as did Virmati's, they appear as impossibilities and failures.Virmati transgresses traditional codes of society by refusing to marry and she further scandalizes her family by falling in love with a married man and eventually by marrying him.In *Difficult Daughters* the novelist Manju Kapoor creates Virmati's mother Kasturi as the brazen voice of patriarchy who exerts authoritarian power over her daughter's entire life. When Virmati desires to break out of her mother's imposed appropriations on her she regards it as

an affront to her sense of morality and aesthetic pleasure.In a way thus Virmati becomes the dissenter against patriarchy and her transgression is so extreme that people even associate her with her father's changed behaviour.

"After what his daughter did he was never the same. All last year, so silent and listless. Everybody could notice. It killed him. Definitely killed him" (DD 220).

Her mother pointedly accuses her for his death. "Because of you he died...Would your Pitaji have gone if he didn't have to live with the disgrace his daughter caused him?" (DD 221).

Virmati struggles to break the chains that bound her to the invincible pillars of patriarchy and becomes a transgressor. It becomes amply clear when we go through Ida's account of her own life.

> I grew up struggling to be the model daughter. Pressure, pressure to perform day and night. My father liked me looking pretty, neat and well dressed...But the right appearance was not enough. I had to do well in schools, learn classical music, take dance lessons so that I could convert my clumsiness into grace, read all the classics of literature...exhibit my accomplishments graciously before his assembled guests...My mother tightened her reins on me as I grew older, she said it was for my own good. ...I am constantly looking for escape routes (DD 258).

Perhaps one of the routes also led Ida to follow her mother's footsteps to transgression.This is a novel that depicts the protagonist oscillating between desire and duty and yet fails to construct a convincing image of the typical transgressor. Virmati alternately rebels and surrenders, unable to stick to any of the facets tenaciously.As a woman in search of an assertiveness that would determine her identity Virmati's experiences are distinct from that of men. While she undergoes pressure and torment, the professor is virtually unscathed .Within a patriarchal culture, refiguring the meaning and concept of womanhood is herculean no doubt

and throughout the novel, Virmati remains a patriarchal construct. The emancipatory propensity of Virmati may be attributed to her education which also gave her an opportunity to control her sexuality. When she conceives as a result of her clandestine affair with the professor ,she decides to terminate it. This is another facet of her propensity to exert her will in controlling her reproductive capacity and asserting her individuality.Though she is shown to be at par with men in many instances,it is a fact that could not be internalized by Virmati herself. She is yet unliberated from the structural norms that have coded and directed her life so meticulously.She was continually relegated to the private sphere and this was also carefully determined by the patriarchal culture. By contravening social ethics and through her efforts to challenge the disabling features of patriarchy she is also able to recreate the myth of the monster woman –a woman who "refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative, who has a story to tell- in short a woman who rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her" (Moi 58).This narrative of individual struggles and failures can be analyzed in the light of a woman's self conscious preoccupation with the her role and identity. Manju Kapur is successful in depicting the confined life of women, and Virmati's efforts to overcome this in a very credible manner.

Analyzing *Difficult Daughters*, Vibha S. Chauhan refers to some generalities that mark the novel's distinctiveness in exposing the nature of individualism in India, particularly during the colonial period.It was more due to the dual influence of the ideals of rationalism and democracy, of western education and enlightenment coupled with a realization of their own subordinate status that created a complex mindset for every educated Indian and Virmati is also no exception to that.

> The individual, in the economic and social sense, had not crystallized as a category, and the individual's identity remained largely inseparable from the collective.This conflict between individual aspiration and the collective code of conduct has been a

> major source of tension in society as well as fiction in India (Chauhan 142).

The paradoxical existence of conflicting social norms and situations never make it possible for an individual to alienate himself from his collective past and create a paradigmatic situation where he is always hard pressed for striking a right balance between tradition and modernity—modernity that to a great extent revealed the freedom of the individual from constricting ideologies—between choices and preferences determined by his fragmented sense of modernity and coloured by the still not receding holds of his traditional past. In a woman like Virmati this dichotomy becomes complex as she has to struggle with her freedom from tradition bound ways of life that western education has helped her to acquire and at the same time negotiate her existence as a woman in a non-modernized traditional , colonial society.It is difficult for her to "transcend the moorings she has imbibed from her native habitat" and at the same time she is prompted to become a different woman. Within the structural dynamics of the novel, the novelist attempts to make her characters break free of the chains that keep them tied to the private realm and when they transcend, they get transformed (Chauhan ibid).

However, Chauhan affirms that Virmati's story remains almost wholly "a story of love, limited to the personal sphere". It is not symbolic of a woman's search for a wider freedom in the public sphere. She never relates her life to the turbulence of the partition or the riots and connects her existence solely to her marriage to the professor and her status as a second wife. The novel is therefore weak in creating a convincing picture of a woman torn between conflicting emotions of love and duty. In her attempt to search for complete personal freedom within her private self, Virmati remains vacillating between the tug of modernity and tradition, between compliance and transgression.Manju Kapoor has no intention to write as a social critic or a reformer and she merely presents life as she sees it.

> No character is portrayed in larger than life image; no attempt has been made to give a role model, none is blessed with an abundance of virtues. Characters, sometimes strong and sometimes weak, are presented as common human beings capable of making mistakes (Devika 245).

Discussing Virmati as a transgressing character Sunita Sinha decides that she fails to impress because she vaccilates between duty and desire,between the private and the public. Virmati's daughter Ida is shown to be leading a freer life than her mother. In fact Ida is the author's voice and through her representation we get a glimpse of the destiny of most Indian woman.Virmati being under continual suppression under the forces of patriarchy, could never give a voice to her feelings. Her daughter Ida reconstructs her life. Though at the centre of the narrative we see a woman who fights but falls and fails, Kapur's novel shows that what happens to Virmati is the representative destiny of Indian women.However Gur Pyari Jandial corrrectly points out that it is a mistake to devalue Virmati's struggle Just because she failed,for what mattered was to have made the attempt, "to break the patriarchal mould , and for Virmati to have tried to do that in the forties was a great achievement"(qtd in Sinha 164).

Breaking the Order

Syed Abdul Malik's *Bonjui* and Jogesh Das' *Aboidha* are both novels of wifely adultery where there is a portrayal of unrestrained boldness by the wife in negating the institution of marriage and all its related conventions. Marriage in the rural Assamese society is a consolidated bond that must be maintained and the sanctity of a conjugal life must be preserved. Observing the position of women in

Assamese society around the post colonial period, it can be said that their lives centered round their hearths and homes. Well being of the family, care of children and maintaining societal regulations seem to be their foremost concern. The essence of marriage is for the woman transference of priorities where her husband and his family become the focus of her life. Once married, these factors exercise authoritarian control over her life but it is also to be remembered that in an Assamese society, the wife too enjoyed equal dignity with her husband and her situation was free from many of the ills like dowry, Sati and female infanticide which were prevalent among various communities in the Indian society. Nevertheless, the traditional status of woman was not wholly satisfactory because as in other male dominated societies, her personal desires and her cravings to be an independent sensibility were almost always ignored. Education was not always considered significantly necessary for them and their duties were confined to the domestic sphere- in pleasing their husbands and cherishing their children (Sabhapandit 161).

Assuming that the position of the two female characters of *Aboidha* and *Bonjui* are no different from the traditional status of women in Assamese society, why do they then enter into adulterous relationships? If we consider the motivations for transgression, it becomes clear that economic gratification is a distant prospect and if we consider the length of the relationships, it is clear that they are not casual flings and one even ends in a marriage. *Aboidha* (Illegitimate) is the tale of an extra marital affair resulting in marriage on the death of the legal husband in an accident. In this novel Pahi's husband Dhaneswar is several years older than her and has already acquired the habit of hard-drinking. This marriage is a favour bestowed upon Pahi to restore her prospects after her disastrous elopement with another person. She is poor but very beautiful and Dhaneswar has no qualms in accepting her.After her earlier misfortune she too concedes to his proposal readily.Years later they remain childless as Dhaneswar is incapable of fathering a child. Pahi accepts the situation with resignation but with the passing of time Dhaneswar's crude behaviour coupled with the occasional violence that he

inflicts on her makes his impotency a cause of distress and chagrin for Pahi and she begins to consider him inferior to herself. In this novel of adultery, the arranged yet flawed and loveless marriage is largely responsible for Pahi's adultery.Later she suffers no misgiving in choosing between love and duty and easily gives in to her husband's friend Rajani. Nevertheless, this does not prove that the lovelessness of the marriage is the sole factor for Pahi's transgression. For example, the writer does not claim that Pahi is an incredibly naïve and scrupulous woman who falls a prey to seduction. Clearly this is not the case. The novel is also at the same time an exploration of the rigours of family life that remains astutely colored by patriarchal overtones.Rajani's sister, Sumola is married to a man who uses her for procreation and to satisfy his passions on the marriage bed. She endures her disappointment, his resentment and yet expands her family with calm acquiescence. Marriage and marital fidelity are synonymous to simple village folk who support the hypothesis of a conventional arranged marriage and stick to it despite personal doubts and disappointments. Why does then Pahi transgress?

For Pahi, her marriage to Dhaneswar is associated with a sense of uneasiness. Having married her on lofty justifications he has reason to regard her with suspicion most of the time and on her part Pahi too never loves him and relieves herself by her gay and coquettish nature. The writer seems to suggest that where marriage is without perfect harmony women seem to have the right to overstep the discretion of remaining a faithful wife. He also concedes that woman should receive some happiness for what she gives .So he creates enough ground to justify her fall.

> She always feels repelled at such times...Dhaneswar is impotent...So she has never been happy with him. As a consequence of her earlier elopement with the young gentleman she earned such repute that she had no other choice but to marry him. Accepting this as her fate she makes an effort to begin her new life .But after discovering his impotency on the first night, her resolve

> breaks down. Since then she has been living a miserable life. She did not wish to scandalize herself further; moreover she dreaded Dhaneswar. However, desires of body and mind induce her to submit herself to Rajani (A 5).

She experiences love and encouraging emotion for the first time with Rajani after her marriage which had almost lulled her into indifference and acceptance.

Judith Armstrong deliberates that male authors are "patently more willing to blame convention, circumstances or parents for an unhappy marriage than to probe any sexual inadequacy on the part of the husband" (Armstrong 80).Going by this, it is indeed rather strange to find in *Aboidha*, a male author pen down the feelings of a woman who vents her frustrations on account of a dissatisfying sexual partnership.As a result of her affair with Rajani, Pahi conceives and gives birth to a baby girl. Dhaneswar surprisingly accepts the situation without any protest. He comes to adore the baby and loves her as his own. He never questions Pahi about her paternity and we never come to know whether Dhaneswar was aware that his friend Rajani has fathered the child. This is an ingenious ploy designed by the novelist to recreate the myth of domesticity and eulogise the bindings of marriage. As a mother Pahi is now shrouded in tender maternal concerns and neither her husband nor her lover is of any significance for her now. However, at times, she observes that her husband has turned into a different person. Pahi is sometimes moved by her husband's affection for the child and admits of her tender feelings towards the same man who earlier seemed to be a carnal brute.She watches how his paternal instincts has made Dhaneswar a concerned father and a caring husband. He implores Pahi never to leave him as he is alone in this world and has no one apart from her and the baby. At such moments, Pahi consoles his heartache with her maternal tenderness. Rajani, on the other hand, fail to understand this change in his beloved. This painful truth that Pahi actually belongs to Dhaneswar, despite her professions of love for him, is quite shocking a reality for him.

It takes only a moment for him to change his opinion on her and regard her as a 'bad' woman.

> Walking back home alone in the dark,Rajani thought himself to be a fool; otherwise he would not have gone to Dhaneswar's house today.Pahi has deceived him. Pahi is actually a bad woman. She is Dhaneswar's and that is the truth.All along he had failed to understand it.He is a fool and so he failed to understand.It is not without reason that people talk of anything shocking. Ordinary folk may not be clever but they are wise.The wise always speak what is right. Not for any reason do people call Pahi a bad woman. He will never be able to face people any more (A 43).

On the whole, Jogesh Das offers a valid ground to justify Pahi's adultery but having done it he loses no time to sanctify the relation by honouring it with marriage. We accept that, restlessness, deprivations and to an extent physical need are the motivations for the adultery that is committed but at the same time consent that such unruliness has to be appropriated. So the deception that is continuing between the spouses is brought to an end by the accidental death of Dhaneswar. Once he is removed from the scene, the writer hastens to unite Pahi with Rajani as soon as the rituals that are performed for the dead are done with. Rajani finds his perilous path in love suddenly becoming smooth and he loses no time in proposing to Pahi which she readily accepts. Though the stifling marriage and the heat of lust are responsible for Pahi's scandalous affair, it is not allowed to remain so. Hence, the child born out of illicit love gets a father in her lawful husband and his death, alternately, direct the trail for her lover to become her lawful husband. All the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle thus fall smoothly into place. The transgressing woman in this novel makes it clear that conventional marriage is rather deflating and loveless. In her married condition she is linked with a man who fails to put up to

her expectations and yet most interestingly, she put up a façade in order to satisfy her economic needs and simultaneously enjoy a secure social position.

The marriage between Pahi and Dhaneswar is important throughout the novel precisely for two reasons. Firstly the marriage secures an honourable position for Pahi as a married woman who otherwise would have had to face a hostile society on account of her pre marital explorations. Secondly, Pahi comes to the fore as an adulteress and a transgressor of societal ethics because she chooses to destroy the sanctity of her marital relationship that was determined by her marriage vows.This fiction of wifely adultery,written by a male author is concerned with problems that arise from an unsatisfactory marriage and furthermore, consider the role played by the wife in averting social disruption.Rajani's sister Sumala is depicted as a representative of the traditional image of Indian woman hood.She accepts her marriage and devotes her life for her family. Lilabati Saikia Bora finds this to be a conscious effort by the novelist in order to insinuate at Pahi's illicit yearnings. "To illumine the finer aspects of a particular character, the writer sometimes creates another as an antithesis in the same novel " (Saikia Bora 37).

Bonjui (Forest Fire) is the tale of Jona, a simple girl from a remote village in Assam who gets married to an honest, hardworking youth Premodhar, but fails to keep up the relationship of trust and affection because she feels the passion for Golap too intensely. Jona's tragedy is manifest in her elopement with Golap, bearing his child and finally returning back to her husband with whom she lives a life of adjustment. Jona attempts to escape her monotonous life with her husband to a seductive dream world with Golap where reasons fade and senses rule.Like a stone thrown into a pond Jona's placid life with Premodhor is disrupted by the appearance of Golap who promises to cure her of her barrenness. She begins to dream of a happiness that can only be real in the company of Golap. They immerse themselves in a world of passion where gradually evolves the notion of selfishness and self love. For Jona the image of her husband recedes as Golap conquers her on a space hitherto unknown to her—that of physical desire. His declaration of love

for her is just the footing towards his intent of seducing her, which he does with immense tactfulness. But, fate has designed not only their bodies but also their souls for each other. So, with implicit trust in the romantic situation between them, Jona succumbs to his appeal and deserts her husband . As with the adulterous wife, the lover who chooses to become involved conscientiously in a disastrous triangle takes it for granted that the desire for flattery and physical gratification is common to their lives and they now have the opportunity to placate their ennui.

Abdul Malik gives a fuller account of Jona and describes her as one whose laughter unwraps like the sky overhead and whose beauty lights up the trail she walks. She is a simple girl of a traditional Assamese village who engaged herself in various domestic duties and also additionally did regular feminine tasks like harvesting and husking of paddy in the fields. In Golap's character, who poses as a quack healer and elicits faith from the simple minded village folk, we find an extension of Raju's (*The Guide*) con man attitude. Having already lodged himself in the trust of the villagers, Golap uses his artful talk and deceptive promises for acquiring his heart's desire— intimacy with the beautiful Jona.He teases her temperance and she yields with discernible ardour. Viewing this passionate intimacy as a threat to the inviolable spaces of marriage the writer excludes her from the text for a while by crafting her elopement with her lover. Now she no longer remains the adulterous wife but can be castigated as a loose slut.As a wife Jona never realizes or feels the enormity of her transgression. Her determination to be happy negates her feelings of guilt that her "fastidiously immoral conscience can muster" (Armstrong 105).In a very frank segment of the novel the writer discloses the depths of passion Jona feels for her lover. Through the well structured façade of righteousness and docility, Jona unveils her mind which divulges the realities of a repressed, fervent soul.

> Jona never has the occasion to feel that she is at fault, that she is betraying Premodhar or that she is slighting moral standards. She understands only that it is her life's desire. Premodhar has never

> given her anything, nor can she ever get anything. He is her husband but Golap is her beloved. She finds a thousand heavens in his arms while his lips hold the warmth of a thousand ages and his body enfolds the exhilarating fervor of youth. She has come to this world for Golap (Bonjui 158).

As soon as her elopement with Golap comes to be known in the village people accuse her of being a home breaker, a depraved woman who has blackened the village and stained the society by her deed. They do not blame Golap because they suppose that he has only been a victim to her manipulations. It is her husband's affection and attachment for her that makes him wish for her return and at the same time extricate her of all guilt because he feels that it is she who has been deceived by Golap's sly maneuvers. Moreover, a married woman is her husband's property and all rights of possession on her belong to him. Marriage is regarded as an indissoluble tie between the husband and wife in traditional Assamese society and a woman who separates from her husband does not have a respectable position in rural societies. (Barooah 33) The act of the wife's adultery is a revolt against the husband's property rights. A traditional Assamese Hindu society is patrilineal in nature with the man in complete control over domestic matters and he shoulders comparatively greater responsibilities than the woman. "In different kinship roles ...a woman has to be under the authority of menfolk and are generally expected to abide by men's decision in various matters" (Barooah 41).A wife owed her allegiance to her husband and her family and her conduct is marked by respect, obedience and affection to them. So it is not unlikely that Premodhar must have felt the breach of trust as a theft of his rightful belonging. He, however, is hesitant to blame Jona solely for her deviance. This is a lethal blow on his esteem and never before had he been so mortified.He broods pensively:

> I am at fault. I am infirm. I have lost my capacity to become a father. Jona needed a child. Maybe in the hope of getting a child—but she has betrayed me greatly. She could betray me thus! How fickle women are! (Bonjui 168)

Edwin Schur's analysis of deviance locates it as an activity or a form of behavior that is specifically determined by time and cultures. A deviant behaviour in one jurisdiction may not be so in another and so such behaviour generally reflects methods of social definition (Schur 1971) So Jona is a deviant woman because her behaviour is so labelled by people. As a consequence of her digression from the rules and sanctions of society and by her indulgence in acts that defy society's efforts at exercising control, Jona develops a deviant self. It may be relevant here to refer to Howard Baker who contends that social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance and by applying these rules to particular people, society label them as outsiders (ibid). Jona however, operates by manipulating the combination of her husband's trust and blindness and her own craftiness.Golap holds an irresistible sway over her and she forsakes her home to be with him. Deceit has been one of the painful characteristics in the relationship between the spouses and Jona reverts to this in her relationship with Golap as well. So, she dreams of a perfect lover once again. Her relationship with Golap had been perfectly happy till she meets Makhan, a friend of Golap, and though not very overtly, she is infatuated with Makhan whose refined sensibilities and tender concern for her draw her to him. The narrative makes it clear that two factors manipulate Jona's transgressive act. Firstly it is Jona's desire for a conquering lover who would woo her with infinite assurance and secondly it is her desire to control her own life in order to craft happiness for herself that leads her up the path of transgression.

According to Annette Lawson, adultery is a secret relationship whose consequences are always public. While undermining the social order it eventually leads to the breakdown of marriage.She elaborates upon Edward Westermack, a

philosopher sociologist of the 1930's who is of the opinion that an adulterous wife commits a more blameworthy act than an adulterous husband and since it is not merely a case of bodily attachment, it is difficult for a man to excuse it.Lawson also states Kinsey who wrote that most societies recognize the necessity for accepting some extramarital coitus as an escape valve for the male, to relieve him from the pressures put on him by society's insistence on stable marital relationships but these same societies, however, less often permit it for the female(Lawson 47).

Jona's search for happiness ends in the wrong place and the writer upholding the promise of a pure relationship brings her back to her husband. An attempt to democratize her private sphere with a bid to extract happiness-emotional and physical, becomes a less effective process as its implications on the stabilizing energy of society is rather disruptive. Democracy here would imply the inclination of individuals to pattern a circumstance where they can develop their relationships and express their capabilities (Giddens 256-57). But as socially displaced figures, Jona as well as Pahi becomes a threat to the organization of society by way of the indeterminacy of origin of their passions or by their attitude to the ties that hold society together. According to Kaviraj, transgression dramatizes the conflict between two inevitabilities-the inevitability of rules imposed and the inevitable inclination to break them.It ensues a conflict between the desires of human beings and the desires of society as a whole (qtd. in Sogani 93). The transgressing heroines, therefore, play a crucial role in contravening the institution of marriage and destabilizing family life. So, rather than prolonging the impression of a transgressing wife, they are reintegrated into the "all subsuming, all organizing, all containing contract" (Tanner 6). Within the requisite unities of marriage, the unfaithful wife is a self cancelling figure and she should not exist. The theme of transgression in these novels brings into focus the nature of human weakness, the dividing line between sin and morality, and the consequences of an instinctive defiance.

Karabi Deka Hazarika in her critical review of women characters in Abdul Malik's novels is disappointed that instead of dwelling on the mental and

emotional conflicts that a woman face, the novelist is eager to depict the physical tribulations that she undergoes.In an attempt to unveil the dark hidden facets of desire and longing that often enwraps their being ,Malik has only succeeded in depicting a picture of unrestrained sexuality that suggests clandestine relationships, secret longings and unfullfilled sexual desires.The critic wonders at the writers fascination towards this facet of a woman's personality obiliterating the eulogized ideals of tenderness, love and maternal instincts (Deka Hazarika 38)In all the novels of this writer that I have selected for this study, the writer seems to be concerned with the deepest urges that often lie dormant in a woman's subconscious.Jona's character in *Bonjui* is a tangible truth in this direction. Quoting Deka Hazarika I would reiterate that they are creations of this society.

> We do not feel their souls at first.Gradually circumstances and situations make us realize this eternal truth.We bury the natural expressions of a person's instinctive urges under the veils of social conventions.More so for that woman.What is acceptable in a man is taboo for a woman.Malik exposes this forbidden truth in a manner that takes us by surprise.Soon,however, the eternal woman surfaces—not a delicate flower of imagination but a woman anointed with the dust of actuality , a real woman who is this society's creation (Deka Hazarika 39).

I find it relevant to mention here the novel *Abhiyatri* (1992) by Nirupama Bargohain. It depicts the life of Chandraprabha Saikiani ,a pioneer in the field of women's liberation movement in Assam.The novel explores the social position of women in the pre independence era in Assamese society and certain anecdotes from the life of Chandraprabha reflects the patriarchal attitudes that women faced. In pre independent Assam, Chandraprabha was the only woman who rode a bicycle just like the men of her time. Society criticized her mercilessly and called her a transgressor.

> No woman does this kind of a thing. Chandra is able to because she is a woman discarded by her husband. Had she a husband, she would not have been so shameless. Would not he have broken her legs ... (Devi 288).

This gives us a fairly transparent picture of the times and the social situation in Assam where a woman who rides a bicycle can be considered a transgressor. With time however orientations changed and women were slowly assimilated into the male stream and with a growing feminist awareness, women characters in novels were depicted with a progressive stance. Even so, transgressors were seldom sympathized and to a large extent the social position of a woman determined the nature and enormity of the transgressive act.The modern novelists have come a long way from the times when women's freedom was satirically defined by writers as " a woman abandoning her husband and children,refusing a husband,going alone to take to the air in public gardens, meeting educated friends(male),running a household without males,chasing away mother –in-law and father-in law from the house or refusing them food, making husbands perform cooking and other household chores,release of women from all bindings or allowing them to ride on elephants,ascending elephants by putting feet on the backs of men"(Mahanta 24).Writers tried to recreate a domestic ideology for women and draw on time hallowed custom and usage prescribed by ancient scriptures. The novels that are discussed above portrayed a society that insisted on a radical conformity to feminine virtues and reflected on the predicament of women who refuse acquiescence to moral normatives and are shorn of the societal markers of a husband and a home.

Radical Reorientation

> She had given her husband four children, had bared her body and soul to him...why did he want to remarry? Today,what made him

> dress in new silk kurta,become a bridegroom once again,and leave on elephant back to take another woman as his wife (THBD 10).

This is precisely the reason why Menoka the proud and determined protagonist in Bhabendranath Saikia's Assamese novel *Antoreep* translated into English as *The Hour Before Dawn*(2009) decides to transgress marital codes on her own terms. *Antoreep* is a novel that attempts to reflect the conditions of contemporary social life where the constricting circumstances of a woman's life are treated as normative codes of a particular social situation and the choice of an appropriate husband obviously remedies the situation. The importance of recognizing the sufferings of women in a complex patriarchal society is the realization that lies at the core of the novel. Menoka is the woman in the narrative who after eleven years of marriage finds herself replaced by a younger woman who now appeals more to her husband. So he decides to mould her destiny in ways that she thinks proper and chooses the father of her fifth child .She does not find any freedom or assurance of self in her transgression and her life becomes a façade behind which her true self hides.Nevertheless it is a reality that she hurls at her husband –when the power balance between husband and wife topples, life falls into the abyss of marital hell and it is then that a woman can choose her destiny which may even go against the grain of social convention. When her husband of eleven years and the father of her four children fails her,and makes his new wife the mother of his child, Menoka too chooses her 'own man' and says defiantly "for every Sita, there has to be a Ram..."(THBD 133). She challenges her husband to question the paternity of her fifth child in front of everyone in the house.

> I am your wife ;you had four children,now you have five. Soon there will be six. Everyone will know we are living in harmony, that you still treat me as your wife...Otherwise people will think you have abandoned me...Go tell everybody.If you dare admit that you haven't come anywhere near me, go tell the world..If you speak up,

> the world will look at me with scorn, they will make a pariah of me.I do not fear such consequences,what do you have to fear?(THBD 131).

In this novel the act of transgression is not described; rather we are led into the transgression through a series of events that prepare us for it. Menoka the first wife of Mohikanta is driven less by passion and desire and more by a ready inclination towards self assertion through retaliation without any feeling of guilt or remorse.It is true of all adult sexuality that it tends to accept marriage as a defensive armour against the darker side of sexuality.It is an ideal to be striven for as it ennobles the mind and leads it away from all possible conflict. If a marriage works harmoniously, all other patterns—the social, familial and transcendental—move harmoniously together. At the same time if something disturbs "the mediations that centre on marriage" then the person or persons involved may experience anxiety and unhappiness for being part of two irreconcilable patterns .A wife contains in her all the identities of an obedient daughter, faithful wife, loving mother and a trusting mate. It is marriage that reconciles all these identities and when it starts to flounder, there is an intense divide between the patterns and one chooses to extricate oneself from at least some of those identities (Tanner 1979). Menoka too tries to extricate herself from the role of a devoted wife and companion because she is devastated that her husband of eleven years sets out for a second marriage. She is hurt that the man never did give her any indication when for all these years she had wholeheartedly accepted him, his home and his neighbourhood as her own. Never did she fail in her duties as a wife, a mother, a daughter-in-law or a neighbour.Fresh out of school when she entered this house, she has in course of time given her husband four children, and has evolved gracefully so that to her in-laws she is the goddess of wealth and to her neighbours, almost divine. She remembers everything "every step they had taken towards her, every step she had taken towards them...she remembered every little thing" (THBD 5). And then he goes and gets himself a second wife because it is similar to

buying a new cow. He has wealth enough to "rear a cowshed full of people" (THBD 14). After eleven years of marriage and four children, Menoka's strength and power is gone, her flesh is withering and they need another woman to look after his ailing parents. Moreover, according to him, his marriage is no big deal and there's no reason to worry.

> There will be one extra woman in the house. So what? Last month I bought the new cow...Did the cowshed sink to hell?Isn't she now happy licking and being licked by the other cows? She'll calve in July –August...who stands to gain? Me or the household? And whose household is this? Yours...Don't care about anybody. I too won't. Who should I care about...I'll throw everyone into the rice mill and grind them to pulp (THBD 14).

This is Mohikanto— arrogant and impulsive— unmindful of the anguish that Menoka goes through. And so Menoka is driven less by desire and love for Modon and more by malice and reprisal towards Mohikanto, towards transgression. She makes calculated moves with a calmness that belies her turbulence within. The novelist give us the idea that Menoka is indignant at Mohikanto's behaviour and being familiar with all his weak points, she can well teach him a lesson. She vows never to allow his power- his masculinity to return to him. And it is at this moment that she contemplates her own moment of deviation. "The thought made her indignant and, at the same time, pained and exhausted her. If only she hadn't needed to contemplate such drastic steps at her age" (THBD 46) Menoka is unable to get over her hostility towards her faithless husband and is often overwhelmed by her anguish. Though she keeps herself engaged in meeting every demand of the household and fulfilling every other duty she withholds herself from those that are related to Mohikanto and their relationship. She is the wronged wife and in her bitterness she enjoys a subtle feeling of superiority over Mohikanto and his second wife Kiron. Evelyn Miller Berger feels that as the

rejected wife becomes engrossed in fulfilling everyday demands in her daily life, her anguish lessens but never gets over She considers the wronged wife's urge to retaliate to be a close cousin to her hostility (Berger 25-6). Menoka too chooses to retaliate and pay back Mohikanto in the same coin because she cannot forget the betrayal of her trust and cannot withstand his arrogance that ease him of his conscience.Her outrage is her daring mantle and she adopts an aggressive stand towards her husband. She has to live and she finds reason for living in destroying her husband's arrogance.She is disillusioned in life later but not regarding her relationship with her husband.Her defiance may not be always a plausible therapy for all wronged women . The novelist has created her as a representative of woman in pre independent Assam and portrayed her as avenging her husband's waywardness. She faces tremendous conflicts and undergoes an enormous amount of soul searching. . "Bitter occurrences in life has hardened Menoka and transformed her from a tender ,sensitive, loving woman to a daring, aggressive and defiant character who grows and evolves during the course of the novel" (Saikia Bora 561).

Menoka's act of transgression where she chooses Modon to be the father of her fifth child demonstrate that women are not always passive 'victims' of male desire but they may also actively seek out spaces and circumstances in which they feel comfortable in expressing their own sexuality. Menoka initiates and controls this clandestine affair between her and Modon. She decided the days and the time when she wanted Modon.It was a union that was regulated to her own will and convenience and it gave her considerable freedom in determining the nature and condition of their sexual encounter.Her modesty,grace and dignity with people around her and_the lack of any visible sign of transgression secures for her a faultless public reputation and social respect. This image negated any expectation or suspicion of sexual transgression behind the scene.Her eldest son Indra grows up to be a sensible yet diffident young man, unsure of his relationship with his mother or with the woman who loves him. All along he was aware of his mother's humiliation and her transgression and yet was not able to question her. He was not

able to face his father's arrogant wrath either. His reticent behaviour makes Menoka review her life with a mixed sense of apprehension and it makes her realize that nobody remains the same always. Anybody can make a mistake and can fail us when they are most needed. She accepts life as it comes to her.Never does Menoka try to convince herself that what has happened cannot be true. She accepts her husband's betrayal, accepts her co wife in the house, remains a devoted mother to her children and yet negates their controlling influence over her life. This is also indicative of her reluctance to explicitly disobey or disrespect her husband in public but at the same time negotiate her husband's betrayal from within the regulations of marriage. She kept her transgression invisible to the public eye and her invisible resistance involved exercising a personal agency in pursuing her intense desire to avenge the insult on her. Though she feels shattered inside, she never reveals it to anybody except to Modon , a petty thief, who had planned to rob Mohikanto of all his riches and belongings because "...if a man can act like this because of his money power alone,then why not take that away from him" (THBD 58).

Menoka chooses Modon to be her man—her own man ; someone who would help her rear her four children.This is the first time that she bares her heart to him .

> I am extremely stubborn Modon.But I have never deliberately done anything wrong nor hurt anybody. I gave nobody any reason to dislike me. Yet...if so much have to happen only because my body is no longer new,' she paused, then I have to show them that those eleven years haven't taken their toll on me alone! I'll show them who's new and who's old. And how!...I cannot let go off you... Now just do as I say... (THBD 104-5).

The writer refuses to condemn Menoka for her deviation from morality. He does not allow her to struggle amidst her sad destiny and so makes her chose

willfully. She acts with conviction and rises above the situation and circumstance that threaten to overwhelm her. She remains steadfast in her desire for revenge and night after night leaves her bed to step into the backyard where Modon waited for her.As a young girl, she used to listen to tales of Sita and Savitri and Damayanti from her father and for eleven long years she stepped along the path shown by her father.She did not flounder when Mohikanto forced alcohol down her throat or when heavily intoxicated, he almost threw up all over her.But now things have taken a turn and "molten by the fires around her, she had emerged hard and steely—as though tempered"(THBD 127).

I consider it worthwhile to refer to a very interesting observation made by Aparna Mahanta regarding Menoka's position in this patriarchal society where a woman invariably remains a property that man can use, store, reuse and then discard.Menoka is Mohikanto's property just like his rice mill which fortifies him with enough money to make him one of the wealthiest man in the village. "The mill provides him wealth and Menoka gives him his brood. Quite unknown to him anyone can loot his property-just as Bhojohori robs his money in the rice mill and Modon steals his right over Menoka's body" (Mahanta 45-6).

Bhabendranath Saikia is not intent upon inciting societal changes and so his novel does not suggest that what Menoka does is the best way for revenge. But it is his need to appease Menoka's desire for self esteem and her thirst for avenging her insult that he makes her choose adultery as a frontal assault on the person of Mohikanto.In the rice mill, amid the grating clamor of the pounding machine, Menoka hurls at her husband the acid truth – he is not the father of her fifth child. It is defiance of a woman humiliated and scorned. She rejects all tenets of conventional modesty and virtuosity and challenges her husband to question her virtuosity in public. She admits her deviance and allows her husband to nestle in its aftermath. She works out her planned 'guilt' meticulously and pays off her own affront. She steadfastly negates Mohikanto's attempts to antagonize her. In response to his extremely crude outburst, Menoka finds new strength and spirit.

> You had elephants, you had drums and music, so you could fetch a woman and make her the mother of your child right before my eyes. I have nothing. I have done whatever I could with my limited resources. It's the same thing. Now tolerate the situation as best as you can ...why should I suffer alone... Will I go to heaven then...For what sin of mine have I burnt in these fires of hell...you fetched home this young woman and started sleeping with her without a care...After all this, should I still be a Sita or a Sabitri? Should I fill my parting with the dust of your feet in the hope of salvation? (THBD 132).

By bestowing upon his heroine innate strength and fortitude, the writer makes her suffer but at the same time makes her work to reclaim her lost respect. She refuses to bow down before Mohikanto and in her transgression remains equal to his 'normative' deviance in patriarchy. Here we witness the transformation of a middleclass, respectable woman into an adulteress who by her act chooses to wreck vengeance rather than succumb in despair to those factors that sought to demoralize her. She perceives herself to be the victim of injustice, of prejudice and of society and subsequently becomes a violator of those patriarchal codes of honour and respectability Menoka constructs for herself a less privileged form of sexuality which does not remain the sexuality of dominance and submission. To put it in another way, Menoka's transgression treats sexuality not as a social construct of male power defined by men and forced on women. The author pointedly differs from many feminists in this regard and he suggests that a woman's sexuality can also be an inborn force inherent in her that can be negotiated at will without being coded into socially and sexually appropriated roles and behaviours. Menoka suffered while she was with her husband, and also suffered after she broke all ties with him. She desperately wanted her husband to accept her fifth child which was not his. Until that was done she had no peace of mind. Just as she gathered to her bosom the three girls that her husband had from

her cowife, she wanted that he too should accept her fifth child Dhruva as his own. She admits to Indra her eldest son.

> Let Dhruva go live there...I can't make a man of him with my love alone...I would have eventually sent him there anyway. I could never rest in peace until I did that.Everything should be equal—be it peace of mind or suffering (THBD 332).

All the while Menoka remains steadfast in her conviction and towards the end of the novel she confronts her son who was all along aware of his mother's defiant act.

> If you saw anything, you saw right... Keep your thoughts to yourself. Don't try to explain right or wrong, good or bad to me. What I have thought, what I have done is right. I have said this before and I repeat myself now. If you think your mother has done something wrong, break all ties with her. I'd rather let go of you, than my principles. You can't even make me budge even so much'—she touched the tip of her forefinger with her thumb—'never mind what storm you stir up... (THBD 282-83).

Critics differ in their theorizing about the writer's vision of Menoka's transgressive defiance. Gobinda Prasad Sarma maintains that Menoka's volition is rather unusual and outrageous for any woman , even in this educated and enlightened society of the 21st century when women are considered to be at par with men in almost every aspect.The novelist however is successful in delineating Menoka's distress and her oppression with immense insight and compassion, that readers do not feel antagonistic towards her stance and demeanor at any point of time (Sarma 86). Aparna Mahanta feels that Menoka has resorted to a novel form of protest because in a patriarchy a woman has no alternative but to hold on to the

path directed to her. Menoka valued herself as a good wife and mother.So when Mohikanto rejected her after using her for eleven years and brought home a fresh indulgence, she scorched in the fumes of ignominy and decided to make use of her 'receding youth' to procreate another child whom her husband would not father.She lets a petty thief steal her virtue not to appease the cravings of her thirty year old body but to avenge the fumes of disregard suffered by her. (Mahanta 45-6).

From the above discussion of transgressing women, we are led to the consideration that all the novelists, whether male or female, tend to retain their ideals of love and marriage. When transgression occurs, they blame it upon the infelicity of the marriage .A lasting relationship between a male and a female is the basic fabric of any social structure and whenever two individuals are drawn toward each other on the basis of love or lust or even a combination of both, towards a relationship outside the sanctioned societal arrangements, the institution of marriage is threatened. The transgressing characters in all these novels are conditioned by patriarchy and they could not question the double standards of sexual morality. Though they tried to assert a woman's entitlement to a degree of personal independence and also sexual pleasure, the novelist showed such transgressing characters as penitent and in pain. The nobler the soul is, the deeper is the suffering. It confirms our suspicion that transgressors are not all depraved and degraded woman. They are utterly human and often victims of sham marriages in a tyrannical patriarchy that rob the lustre out of their lives. Though ironical, it is the power of the world around them makes their transgression possible. They present an alternative to the feminine script. Their transgression leads them to experience entirely different situations in life but they display tremendous grit and endure suffering while acknowledging their difference from traditional models of femininity.

In the above analysis all the characters that I have discussed as transgressing characters indulge in behavior that moves beyond acceptable limits and violates the hegemonic sexual identity. Their action then borders on sin and

constitutes a visible offence. A woman's defiance of norms cannot always be supposed to be dependent on their explicit intention to resist. We can argue that some of the characters like Pahi and Menoka challenge gender norms and sexual ideals through a woman's embodied practices which they sometimes choose not to disclose in public. Many a time it is problematic to classify any woman's actions– whether normative or transgressive--within a simplified demarcation of acceptance and resistance. It can attain much deeper significance and unveil complex reasoning and working of the psyche.

*****8**********

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CHAPTER FIVE

RENEGOTIATING THE FALLEN WOMAN IN NARRATIVES BY WOMEN

If writing is a transgression punishable by death, being written about, by however loving a father, can also prove fatal (Jacobus 30).

Voices and Silences

Is there a necessity to take up an entire chapter with specific concerns about the woman writer? If gender is a cultural construct and women are shaped by civilization, are not men justified in distancing and controlling all forms of female expression from the boundaries of writing space—a space that signifies an expression of identity for the culturally reinforced masculine superiority? It is precisely this notion of masculine superiority that establishes male experience as concrete and ideal while a woman's subjectivity and experience are rendered insignificant. To quote Nancy Hartsock the male experience "leads to a world conceived as and (in fact) inhabited by, a number of fundamentally hostile others whom one comes to know by means of opposition...and yet with whom one must construct a social relation to survive"(Hartsock 158)).Female experience on the other hand inverts that of the male and exposes masculinity as partial and perverse because it reverses the proper valuation of human activity (Hartsock 139).While listening to the voices of men the silences of women are ignored and hence we fail to realize that in the different voices of women lie the varied perspectives and perceptions of an experience that narrates the same reality as that of a male writer.

While the realities are the same, the articulation and the voices are different (Jain xii).Governed by social constructs, a female writer often internalizes the male gaze in her writings as well and her writings are very often coloured by a typical patriarchal prerogative. Jasbir Jain insists that the first need is to "shake off this hold, to find a voice which can free itself of this gaze, to find a space or create one outside this framing"(ibid).The experiences of women, however diverse from each other are interconnected for there is a common determinant of being the other in a man's world. This colours and connects the diverse experiences of women. It would be relevant here to mention Teresa de Lauretis' redefinition of experience.

> By experience I do not mean the mere registering of sensory data, or a purely mental (psychological) relation to objects and events, or the acquisition of skills and competences by accumulation or repeated exposure. I use the term not in the individualistic idiosyncratic sense of something belonging to one and exclusively her own even though others might have similar experiences; but rather in the general sense of a process by which for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. Through this process one places oneself or is placed in social reality...The process is continuous, its achievement unending or daily renewed. For each person, therefore, subjectivity is an ongoing construction, not a fixed point of departure or arrival from which than one interacts with the world. On the contrary, it is the effect of that interaction which I call experience, and thus it is produced not by external ideas, values, or material causes, but by one's personal, subjective, engagement in the practices, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning and affect) to the events of the world. (qtd. in Gunew 238-9)

It is an accepted notion that women writers deal with gender issues and generally choose to depict reformative and didactic tales of women's struggle

against repressive orthodoxies. They also "share specific gender concerns in terms of how social and cultural factors appear from a female point of view" (Katrak 232). However, it has to be argued that women's writings are not necessarily feminist and may sometimes depict lesser feminist concerns than some of their male counterparts. But they have a distinctive touch and flavor because their experiences and orientations are always different from those of men and hence they offer a divergent vision. Writing has always been the male prerogative with its focus on the public and the political. While women are relegated to the private domain, expressing their feelings in public has also been considered to negate the aura of feminism. So writing was never a woman's situation and when they did take up the pen, they created a language and style that was largely regulated by the dominant discourse of patriarchy. They could not create a literature of their own and mostly wrote about their lives perceiving themselves as "insignificant creatures enmeshed in the trivial details of domesticity" (Mukherjee 125).An intricate system of patriarchal control where women are segregated as the 'other' insists upon feminine virtue and discriminates her socially.

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Anita Desai mentions about the brave attempt made by Nagaratnamma, who is often described as "a patron of the arts, a learned woman,a musician and a distinguished courtesan" to reprint the Telegu classic *Radhika Santwanam(Appeasing Radhika)* by the eighteenth century poet Muddupalani. She was a celebrated courtesan of the Thanjavur court (1739-1763) and enjoyed a respectable status by virtue of her learning, beauty and accomplishments..But surprisingly her book *Radhika Santwanam,* which described the desires and longings of Radha, was not accepted in the literary circle. Critics and social reformers objected to the contents of the book and when Nagaratnamma prepared a new version of the original manuscript, they denounced Muddupalani as "an adulteress". According to them, being born into a family of prostitutes, she did not have the modesty natural to a woman and hence could write about things that should never be heard by any woman, let alone be written by her. Though Nagaratnamma defended the writer and her works insisting that many great men wrote even more "crudely" about sex, the British administrators did not agree with her and in 1910, she was charged with producing an obscene book. Despite pleas made by some scholars and lawyers that such an action would prove disastrous for the preservation of Telegu culture, Nagaratnamma lost the case and only in 1947, was the ban lifted and a new edition brought out in 1952. According to Tharu and Lalitha, who have included this work in their anthology *Women Writing in India Vol: 1* the book helps us to "revaluate writers who were reasonably well known but had been dismissed or misunderstood; gives us a sense of the themes and literary modes women drew on and made use of it; and help us to capture that which is at stake in the practices of self or agency or narrative that emerge at the contested margins of patriarchy,empire and nation"(Desai 109-13).

Amidst such a social scenario in the nineteenth century colonial India, there

were demands for upliftment of women's condition and such initiatives were taken by the men. With schools being set up for girls, access to women's education improved and there was a growth in reading and writing which furthered the cause of women's literature. After English became the medium of Indian higher education in 1835, English spread as a literary language among the reading public and writers like Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, etc. started writing in English. By the 1930's the social revolution that focused on equality for women also saw the harnessing of progressive literary development among the Indian women. Apart from English novels, fictions also started developing in regional languages and a great deal of work tried to deal with and find solutions to problems of women in a patriarchal society. But nevertheless, critics do not have much of a positive response towards the writings by women. Though women's writings are the expressions of those women who by being part of an inexorable system of oppression are also themselves victims of patriarchal injustice at some point, yet female authors have never been taken seriously and very often been criticized for being "romantic feminists" (Pandey qtd. in Sogani 176). In the nineteenth century Assamese society self expression in the form of writing was almost unthinkable because social taboos against woman's education were in itself overwhelming for most women(Mahanta 153).With the publication of *Sudharma'r Upakhyan* (The Tale of Sudharma)(1884) and *HitShadhika*(Moral Essays)(1892)by Padmavati Devi Phukanani Assamese woman writing entered a new phase. Devi Phukanani's literary output was meager and continued under the financial and moral patronage of her male acquaintances but her determination at the face of various odds including her widowhood and limited means for sustenance, inspired a few others like Bishnupriya Devi, Swarnalata Devi and Padmavati Devi to pen down their ideas. It should, however, be noted that the early writings by women were directed and tutelaged by conventional dictates and hence their focus was also on the conduct of woman and her position in society. '*Samajot Tirotar Sthan*'(Women's place in society), '*Arhi Tirota*'(Ideal Woman), '*Niti Katha*'(Moral Tales), are some of the titles that were then penned by these woman writers and are significant of

the dominant trend in constructing a moral paradigm for women in particular. Hence a fallen woman in the writings of Assamese woman writers is a rare occurrence. English writing by Indian women however, reflected an awakened consciousness because the woman writer of the post –independence era has exposed herself to the stresses and strains which the new Indian woman is subjected to. In this process she is deconstructing the stereotypes of the Devi and Mother India. While myth, legend, history and culture tend to perpetuate ideology and silence the other by subjugation under the dominant discourse, a progressive feminist politics depends upon perceiving "gender and indeed reality as social constructs that can be dismantled and reconstructed in new and perhaps more egalitarian ways" (Finke 3) .

Authoring the Fallen

How did these reconstructions work in the sphere of femininity and feminine sexuality? While chaste wives and virtuous maidens are the dominant constructs in the realm of feminine ideals, the edifice of a woman fallen from honour has inflected the coding of female chastity and feminine virtue. It is with this consideration that I have chosen to deal in this chapter only such novels where a woman author has depicted some woman fallen from the parameters of patriarchal standards. How does a woman judge another woman's fall? Does she vindicate her or alternately adjust herself as the bearer of patriarchal ideologies?The image of the middle class woman with distinctive traits of feminine pliancy and Indianness is generally the one recurrent type of character in the Indian novels.This face of the female subject is generally eulogized and accepted.How does then a woman who transgresses cultural constructs of the idealized feminine, find a place in literature by women?

A woman who transgresses societal sanctions by indulging in unapproved

relationships and creates a separate identity for herself is named a fallen woman Society judges her on the basis of her actions which do not conform to rules. Even if we ignore expectations about moral behavior by assuming that transgressions that serve the interest of the wrong doer only are clearly immoral, we can be sure of an underlying current of patriarchy that dictates society's responses towards a fallen woman because the nature of transgression in woman is to be understood in the context of Indian patriarchal code that classifies woman into the chaste and unchaste. The role of women in Indian societies has become increasingly diverse with more and more women taking up responsibilities that were earlier within the purview of male dominion. But at the same time they also continue to be the victims of crimes that are perpetrated mostly by men. This has also led to their strong representation in traditional women related work areas like prostitution and the like. With women's movements taking up the cudgel and expanding opportunities being ensured, women's assertiveness is gradually becoming a noteworthy feature and this has at the same time opened new doors and has also escalated conflict between women and society at large. Women who veil their femininity and step out of their traditional stereotyped role of nurturer to adopt legitimate or illegitimate roles, violate traditional notions of patriarchy which assume femininity to be subjected to two trends, namely that of conformity and transgression. Those women who partake and observe the notions of traditional subjugation are respected and upheld in society because they sustain the myth of femininity and hence normal ,while those that oppose these chimerical beliefs are considered fallen and hence are incomprehensible .

Sexual identity of an individual has always been of a problematic nature and has given rise to a wide range of debates that raise issues about identity of the self, about who and what we are, how we should live and love, etc. The meaning and direction of sexual values has also become the fulcrum of widespread deliberations. A woman is identified by her role in family life – supportive but subordinate counterparts of men. "The institution of marriage and the role of women within and outside marriage" is one of the major preoccupations of the

novelists writing in the nineteenth and early twentieth century while they try to "redefine the nature of gender and family relationships in Indian society"(Sogani 92). A woman's sexuality is determined by the various roles that she involves herself in from her childhood and as Myra Macdonald explains it is imperative that women recognize the part they play in "keeping mythologies and ideologies alive" (Macdonald 11) The idea of femininity limits a woman to a code of normative behavior and one who transgresses becomes a socially displaced individual and causes considerable anxiety among the so called respectable class. She is then marginalized and the stigma makes it impossible for her to re-enter the society that has cast her off. When the stakes are so high and when her conduct keeps her isolated and defiled in society why does a woman transgress and acquire the status of a fallen woman? Is she a victim of circumstances that render her vulnerable or is it a compulsive necessity that makes her reckless? Why does she opt for a life that is lived constantly on the margins of contradiction and negation? Can we suppose that their transgression is more of a personal predicament for them and that they are not under any ethical or moral compulsion from society?

In this discussion I have grouped all transgressing woman as fallen because all of them live beyond their transgression and lose their respectability on account of it. While for some, their fallenness is a matter of choice; they defy restricting boundaries so that they may breathe freely, others are victims of circumstances that render them helpless. Following Finke's suggestion that social constructs can be reconstructed, I shall look at these texts written by women writers as part of the same tradition of patriarchy but with a different view point that questions and undermines male suppositions.The women writers here look at their marginalized characters and in their personal voices examine their plight and simultaneously tell the stories of their own personal lives and of the lives of their silenced subjects. The fallen women that are portrayed in these novels are not socially damned creatures. Irawaddy in *Nectar in a Sieve*, Ammu in *The God of Small Things*,Radha in *Mistress,*Giribala in *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, and Poteswari in *Iparor Ghar, Siparor Ghar* are all subjected to pressures of various

kinds and yet try to live their lives with self respect. When they transgress they defy societal norms in the hope of better prospects for themselves. While fallen women in men's writings appear to be pathetic creatures wanting the servile acquiescence of femininity, in women's writings they acquire an independent identity that draws the reader's attention to their predicament, not with a sense of satisfaction but with relief at their assertion of personal freedom, even if it necessitates overstepping the subjugating discourses of morality. Women writers thus try to reconstruct the idea of fallenness which is predominantly a social and cultural construct designed to serve socio-political and personal ends. Can women adapt themselves to traditionally male dominated modes of writing and analysis for the articulation of female oppression and desire? Or should we rather reject tools that may simply reinscribe our marginality and deny the specificity of our experience, —reverting, perhaps, to the traditionally feminine in order to revalidate its forms (formlessness?) and preoccupations; rediscovering subjectivity, the language of feeling, ourselves?

Earth and Fire

In *Nectar in a Sieve* (1955) Kamala Markandaya portrays the predicament of a woman named Rukmani who has to struggle for a square meal all throughout her life.Married at a young age to Nathan, a humble farmer, she braves enough fortitudes and yet remains a devoted partner to her husband till his death. Life treats her to vicissitudes of various kinds-the death of her son, the hapless fate of her dear daughter,her subsequent tragic fall to disgrace and the shattering of her own dreams many a time.She goes through considerable anguish when she learns that her husband has also been unfaithful to her and has fathered the two sons of Kunti- a woman whom people in the village regard as a trollop.The narrative compels awe at the seeming insignificance of human lives before the tumultuous

ravages of fate.Many a time Nathan and Rukmani are led to the brinks of starvation due to the ravages caused by drought or excessive and unreasonable rains.Unable to endure starvation their daughter who was earlier discarded by her husband for being barren,chooses to prostitute herself. The tannery that rears its head in the village and lays the foundation of an industrial society with intense exploitation devours the simple innocence of the village folk and transforms their lives into a complicated maze. Rukmani also loses her sons to the tannery.Inclemencies of nature worsen their fate and give a deadly blow to their life and happiness. . Finally when their land is taken away from them, they are forced to leave their village and are compelled to break stones in the quarry which cause them considerable pain and anguish. This touching and tragic tale of this strong woman is what Kamala Markandaya chooses to depict with intense realism and the fate of Irrawaddy is an adjunct in the story to focus on her mother's innate strength. Irrawaddy , the only daughter of Rukmani and Nathan is married early but is discarded by her husband because she is unable to give him a child. Supposed to be barren, she is returned to her parents' home. The village that she had left as a bride has changed enormously. The sylvan ambience of the village is suddenly corrupted by the slow inroads of modernity shaped in the form of a tannery. Attitudes and lives have changed and gradually these changes cause irreparable damage to the lives of the villagers. Ira is a woman who cannot even bear a child and as her husband says, since she could not bear in her first blooming, there is little chance for her to conceive later. So she is discarded. She faces dire situation in the village. Along with her parents and her neighbours and most of the villagers, she braves hunger and misery. The whole village is gripped by an overwhelming fear. It is this fear that compels people to take desperate steps. Irawaddy's mother Rukmani realizes that the hapless people are forever manipulated by these unseen forces and they never set to rest or allow the people to relax.

> Fear constant companion of the peasant. Hunger, ever at hand to jog his elbow should he relax. Despair, ready to engulf him should he

> falter. Fear; fear of the dark future; fear of the sharpness of hunger; fear of the blackness of death (NS 79).

Irawaddy too, tormented by hunger and despair chooses to sell herself to feed her dear ones and Rukmani remains a silent witness to her daughter's shameless act.

> I saw her go out in the dusk, sari tightly wrapped about her. Saw her walk to the town, along the narrow lane which ran past the tannery.....where men with bold eyes lounged smoking or drinking.....she moved jauntily, stepping with outrageous fastidiousness amid the litter of the street.....Jauntily, a half smile on her lips answering the jeers and calls that were thrown at her, eyes darting quickly round searching, then retreating behind half drawn lids (NS 98).

As a consequence of her fall Ira becomes pregnant and gives birth to a boy.—a fatherless child begotten in the streets in some moment of lust. Her future is uncertain. She is not like Kunthi whose married status in society could cover up the illegitimate paternity of her children. She is an unacceptable stigma in society. Deserted by her husband for being barren,Ira is now defiant in breaking rules. It is also her intense love for her little brother that makes her so determined. "Tonight and tomorrow and every night, so long as there is need. I will not hunger anymore" (NS 99).

There is a strange tacit understanding between Rukmani and her daughter. The mother realizes the sense of utter helplessness that Ira feels.She is reminded of her own sense of futility when she went through a temporary phase of barrenness.

"And all this I had gone through—the torment, the anxiety. Now the whole dreadful story was repeating itself, and it was my daughter this time" (NS 50).

Perhaps it is this shared agony that makes Rukmani accept her daughter's deviance. Deprived of a normal married life and turned out by her husband because

of her supposed barrenness, Ira seems to lose all purpose in life. Moreover, hunger and poverty are excruciating clutches upon them. So she chooses to willfully disregard morality and Rukmani understands that her daughter is no longer a child to be cowed into submission. Irawaddy's misfortunes in life pave the way for her fall. As a girl, she was initiated into a restrained life with full awareness of her duties within societal strictures. In her character we find a slow and gradual deviation from the stereotype of the virtuous woman to a redefinition of virtue in one's own terms. Her fall is also indicative of the writer's resentment against a society that permits infidelity in man but brandishes a woman for her digression. Irawaddy buys food for her brother but Nathan would not touch a morsel of what she has bought. Rukmani urges him to take some and she herself is grateful enough for the food, after the roots and leavings they had existed on but Nathan is firm in his stand. This is accepted though, because Ira is his daughter and her degradation to the status of a prostitute is shocking for him.However,the novelist reminds us that it is not less shocking for Rukmani to learn that her husband Nathan is the father of Kunthi's sons. Yet she regards him to be an upright man of strong spirit.

A woman grows up with the notions of chastity, virtue, humility, modesty and such other desirable feminine qualities. Violating these, she transgresses thresholds meant for woman. A prostitute is generally supposed to be outspoken, brazen, immodest and shrewd. Her sexuality is acclimatized to allow certain definite relations to govern her existence and her being. She comes to consider herself as an extremely sought after commodity of desire that is to be graded against the skills she offers, for transactions that are economically advantageous for her. Kunthi is one such woman with fire in her and skills as well. Kunthi's husband is a quiet, dull man and the men of the village have ordinary wives compared to Kunthi .So it is not difficult to assume that she must have ensnared a few of them. Nathan, the husband of Rukmani, definitely is one among them. He confesses this to Rukmani when there is no other way out.On a particular phase of hunger and hardship that gripped the village, Kunthi extorts Nathan to give her the

rice which Rukmani had saved for the hard times. Rukmani's thrift had prompted her to bury some rice under the soil which only Nathan had known of and when Rukmani finds the grain missing, she knows that it is Nathan who must have given it to someone.When she asks him about it he confesses that he has given it to Kunthi because she had threatened to expose him before his wife.He had known Kunthi intimately and after all those years of marriage Nathan now tells his wife that not once but twice he had been close to Kunthi and he is the father of her sons. Rukmani is shocked and bewildered. Kunthi undoubtedly has fire in her body but he is her husband. She is the other but he is her own. They had conveniently called Kunthi a trollop because she was different from other women and wayward. But how does she explain her husbands' conduct?

> Disbelief first; disillusionment; anger, reproach, pain. To find out, after so many years, in such a cruel way. Kali's words: she has fire in her body, men burn before her and after. My husband was one of those men. He had known her not once but twice; he had gone back to give her a second son. 'And between how many times,' I thought, bleak of spirit, 'while her husband in his impotence and I in my innocence did nothing (NS 86).

Nathan pleads his innocence. He is not to be blamed ....he was too young and she was a skillful woman and he did not see the evil for the beauty.Once again the man escapes chastisement while the woman marked. It is surprising therefore to hear Nathan defend his daughter saying "My daughter is no wanton, Not only men but women look at her, for she is beautiful" (NS 30). Certainly, Ira is no wanton, "a child still, despite the ripeness of her thirteen years" (NS 28) but Kunthi is and Nathan, who has fathered her two sons is "an upright man" (NS 100). "Rukmani is a daughter of the earth and Kunthi , her neighbor is a perfect foil to her and has 'no earth' in her breeding"(NS 46).Kunthi is glad that the village is no longer a clump of huts but a small town and she loses herself in the maze of

opportunities that the tannery offers. The writer Kamala Markandaya seems to suggest that the tannery is responsible for Kunthi's fall. The women of the village calls Kunthi a trollop—always anxious that there should be a supply of men—while she made frequent, unnecessary journeys to the town, where, with her good looks and provocative body, she was capable of arresting attention and more, from the men.Jyotsna Sahoo while discussing aspects of sex and violence in Kamala Markandaya's novels, suggests that for Kunti sex is a commodity that she barters to get food.She uses every opportunity to make money on her own using her beautiful body which was her only asset. In some tacit way the novelist tries to support Kunthi's stance , relegating her to the ranks of the fallen.

Ira's mother Rukmani knew that her daughter was meant to have children but never expected that the father would be any one of a dozen men. Her home that had seen many a birth felt joy and hope and some anxiety at every initiation of a new life. But with Ira it is not the same. She is a fallen woman and how can a chance encounter as she had be compared to the ritualistic union of bodies joined by wedlock? A man and his wife share between them passion and ecstasy of love which leaves them contented with a secure fulfillment of desire. The surging experience is not for a moment, it is for them to share always. Their union is blessed and rich in tenderness but a street girl like Irawaddy only meets casual acquaintances who take her with a snap of his finger and does not care for her predicament even carelessly. He pays her for his willingness, has his pleasure and then merges into the throng. She is relegated and is just one of the many that he perhaps had desired and forgotten. So, Ira's disgraceful confinement only fills her mother with apprehension and embarrassment.

> ...there was no past or future, only now, the present, as I received the child and held him while the fears that were nameless descended on me and shrieked their message and were more nameless I held him, this child begotten in the streets of an unknown man in a moment of easy desire, while the brightness of the future broke and

fell about me like so many pieces of coloured glass' (NS 117).

In contrast, Ira's longing to attain motherhood is so intense that she had cared for her mother's last born as if he were her own and did not hesitate to trade herself in order to bring home some money to feed him. It is this love for children that swamped any other feeling that might have risen. The once compliant and modest girl is now a prostitute— strong and defiant— quite defensive in her choice because it gives her a new life. Though she did not necessarily choose to be a mother, she chose to give birth and is little concerned about the fate of the child who is without a father. She showers him with love and is content that he is her child. Her motherhood creates a social space for her which earlier her fallen sexuality had eroded. Once her child is born, we do not see her as a prostitute again and later when her parents move out of the village in search of sustenance, Ira chooses to stay on with her son because people there are 'used to' them (NS137). Her fall to degradation is not just a moral issue. It is the furtherance of a much complex, multifaceted social problem that juxtaposes the unequal power structures and the social constructions of gender, sexuality and class that creates a situation involving the derogation of womanhood and the exploitation of the vulnerable.

Kamala Markandaya is heralded in English literature as a writer who has fictionalized the sociology of India with an intention to "awaken the polite society to the real problems of the country"(Nicholson1972).Critics feel that it is her concern for the "vagaries and varieties"(Iyengar1973) of the Indian social scenario, that makes her refer to the patterns of value orientation in the social system.The main focus in *Nectar in a Sieve* is on hunger—the deep excruciating clutches of hunger and of its terrible impact on the lives of people. It also describes the effect of industrialization which occurs in the form of the tannery, on the simple, uncomplicated lives of the villagers. Irawaddy is presented in the narrative in order to focus on the inherent strength of Rukmani.The latter is presented as an eternal mother figure, all encompassing, abounding in love and compassion. It is through her eyes that we see Ira. Ira is a victim of the socio economic forces which, the

novelist realizes, are responsible for various social ills. "Poverty can result in a mad rush towards the city and disintegration of the family and generate social evils like prostitution..." (Pathak 71-2).It is not the writer's intention to castigate Ira. Instead she presents a convincing social context leaning against which ,her characters act or react.So Rukmani accepts Ira's deviation and embraces her illegitimate baby with warmth and tenderness.The writer indicates that in the wake of industrialization and the wrath of nature and destiny,miseries enveloped the family of Rukmani and Nathan.As Mahashweta Chaturvedi puts it, Kamala Markandaya has projected Ira's prostitution as a duty that she takes up when unbearable conditions in life force her to become a victim of circumstances (Chaturvedi 48).

History— Her Own

Nirupama Bargohain's *Iparar Ghar, Siparar Ghar*(1979) requires the reader's identification with a sexualized heroine marked as transgressive and persecuted by society.The narrative progresses from innocence to experience as Poteswari a ravishingly beautiful but simple girl from a remote village in Assam falls prey to the lures of Pujan, a goodlooking young man who comes to their village from Rajsthan and seduces her with promises of love and marriage. She elopes with him ignorant of the fact that her seducer is a married man who has left behind his wife and child back at home.Her implicit trust in him leads her to spend a few days with him in a hotel till he takes her to his parents. Little did she realize his deceit and the period that followed his desertion was one of mortification, embarrassment and struggle that preceded her meeting with Sobin ,who becomes her husband in the course of time. Her irresistible allure tempts many a male mind and consequently, misadventures of an unbecoming kind leave her stranded in the hotel without anywhere to go. The person responsible for her condition leaves her

to head for his home where he is sure to have the love and forgiveness of his mother and his wife. Moreover, his little daughter would further lighten the load of reproach, if there is to be any. Pujan flees to the secure confines of his home, but, for Poteswari, the prospect of returning to her home and village is closed for ever. A "girl like her"is now meant for the brothels in the town. "Such circumstances would invariably result in the girl turning to prostitution but the novelist introduces Sobin's character at this point" (Kalita 640). Sobin, who works as a waiter in the same hotel and is captivated by the beautiful Poteswari is almost gratified when Pujan disappears abandoning her in the hotel. She pleads to Sobin to find some situation for her. She is prepared to work without any monetary return, in exchange for a meal and a shelter. For Sobin, who is already besotted by her beauty, this is a god send opportunity to have Poteswari for himself, considering the fact that his looks would appropriately rank him with a demon. The novelist portrays a most pitiable man in Sobin because he is depicted as a victim of the social system into which he is born. Rajen Kalita feels Sobin's character to be a successful analysis of the male psyche (ibid). Though tutored meticulously to judge a woman on her virtues and lapses, he discards all feelings of guilt and remorse to marry a fallen woman.This action which is rather impulsive, decides the later turn of events in Poteswari's life.Sobin too is unable to repress his anger and jealousy and starts abusing her later.

Sobin rescues her from that situation, takes her initially to a charity home for destitute women and finally keeps her with him as his wife. That she has lost her chastity did not matter much for him then. Sobin takes her to his one room 'home' in the hotel owner's backyard where he slept for the night. Poteswari starts working as a maid in the owner's household and gradually becomes an indispensable hand. Nevertheless, the mistress of the house did not fall short of accusing her of being a 'loose woman' because with her fiery beauty and guardian less existence, it is only appropriate that she finds herself stranded in some infamously notorious situation. She closely guarded Poteswari and kept a strict watch on her growing sons. Little did she realize that she is behaving like the one

eyed doe that remained quite oblivious to the dangers of the sea while being gripped by the fearful forest. She disregarded the fact that her husband too, who was nearing sixty and who fathered her many children, can also be a potential threat to Poteswari, and ruin their domestic bliss. This middle-aged man proposes to Sobin that he should let him enjoy Pateswari because she is already a tainted woman whom he has only brought home and offered shelter. Since it is at his mercy that Sobin is continuing his work and managing a roof over his head, he has equal rights on Pateswari because she is not Sobin's wedded wife. While Sobin would enjoy her always, he would be content with in betweens. He even threatens Sobin with dire consequences if he fails to obey him.

Sobin is traumatized but he is unable to find any way out of the perilous situation. He is neither able to counter his master nor is he able to put up any resistance against societal injustice and so, Pateswari, the already fallen woman, unable to get any support from her husband obliges the hotel owner. Sobin gives vent to his frustration and anger by inflicting blows and kicks on her and by calling her a whore. When the situation remains the same for a long time, and becomes untolerable, Pateswari suggests a plan and accordingly Sobin goes to his owner and talks about leaving the job.He says that Poteswari has threatened to desert him and end her life but not before disclosing everything to her mistress. The ploy works and the owner relents.He tries to pacify his worker.

> ...Don't you know me Sobin? Would I ever throw you behind the bars? That was just a saying ... Dont blame me. This dull business has parched me physically and mentally. I have just crossed forty- I too need some entertainment. You've seen my wife—bereft of any charm. Rearing a horde of children, she has no time for me—what do I do? And you've brought a stunning woman— moreover she has a tainted past—I had just tested her—Why is she talking of begging or killing herself now when she had consented earlier ...Forget whatever has happened...I will not eye your woman

> anymore. But be careful, your mistress must not know anything. Even if she knows what can she do; is she going to penalize me? She is reigning on my income, but you will be the one who will suffer. Remember that (IGHG 44).

The man's attitude exposes and generalizes masculine rationale for infidelity and pleasure outside marriage while the wife has given up the prime of her life in raising and caring for the family. Poteswari escapes sexual intimidation but for the rest of his life Sobin continues doubting that she might have welcomed the advances of his owner because he was better looking and moreover, as his owner had said, she had a tainted past. He often inflicted violent injuries on her to calm his rage.The novelist exhibits a fine sense of introspection into the quintessential master servant relationship between Sobin and his master. It is the same between Sobin and Poteswari too. She bears in silence all humiliation heaped upon her and takes care of all his needs.When he falls ill she tends to him devotedly but fails to save him. After his death she brings up her children single handedly with immense fortitude till she is haggard of drudgery and misfortune. Though she has never seen herself in a mirror, people say that Poteswari no longer has her earlier looks. So, one day she steals a look at herself in the mirror at the bedroom of the house where she is working as a domestic help.. What does she see? A corpse seems to stare at her from behind the mirror and she could not recognize that glaring skeleton. She remembers the time when she had gazed at the mirror in her mistress's room at Guwahati where Sobin had worked. A huge transformation has now come over her. This paragraph towards the end of the novel is a cynical outburst of the repressed anguish that Poteswari has endured all through her life. It silences our conscience which for a moment even had accepted the inglorious vindication of her tormenting life as an inevitable thrust of providence.

> The woman in the mirror is herself? Is it truly she? ...The bones in

> her neck jutting out, her body like an weathered plank of wood—dark and dry, her face dreary and worn-out by the ravages of toil and fear and hunger ...Suddenly the saddened face in the mirror became pitiless and cynical and a cruel, malicious smile surfaced. Finally a deadly enemy is now vanquished...her glorious beauty—for which Sobin could never forgive her despite his love – which had for all these years trudged by her as her shadow, indicted her and made her a victim of all humiliation and indignity, is at last no more. She will no more bear any agony for her beauty. Now she can go about in a men's world without a care...This is why the doctor no longer talks to her with interest—doesn't press any other part of her body on pretext of examining her stomach...this is the reason for everything...why Nilakantha's son Rajat doesn't trouble her anymore with his lewd glances (IGHG 81).

In this novel, Bargohain attacks the pervasive double standards of society that punishes women for sexual transgression and allows men to continue their sexual activities unabated. She brings in various incidents in the novel, of sexual aberrations committed by women who transgress and fall as a result of unregulated and manipulative masculine sexual tyranny. While men indulge in their voluptuousness, too great a stress is laid on the reputation and chastity for women. Ironically enough, Poteswari's transgression and her fall are not as dangerous as her lover's wavering commitment and her husband's propensity to social injunctions. Each of the embedded narrative in this novel focuses on women's stories, intensifying the problem of feminine desire while developing the dominant theme of the novel.Various issues relating to women's objectification, oppression and attempts at autonomy are presented in an episodic fashion and remain unresolved. These isues are subsumed by the greater focus Poteswari's oppression and like dissonant chords they remain on the periphery of the text. In Bargohain's work, the metaphors of fallenness associated with a woman are regularly attached

to a man's promiscuity and she stresses that such infirmity spreads through relationships that are both appropriated and licentious as well.In a traditionally conservative Assamese society, woman like Poteswari always has a 'history' at their back and they live an oppressed life on account of this 'history' but the men responsible for creating their histories remain blemish free.Anjali, a character in the novel thunders in rage when her friend mentions about Poteswari's history—her tainted past.

> History, History But the histories are of the women only. Not of the men. Like Poteswari, the beautiful Rekhadi from the city also has a history. But the men who scandalized them and damaged their repute never had a history. Their peaceful lives were never destroyed by any history (IGHG 23) .

Hiren Gohain remarks that Poteswari's life is a long drawn sigh.She suffers till the end and is not able to voice any protest against her oppressors(Gohain 466).This is true but at the same time we cannot ignore that the novelist who is a feminist in her own way, never lets Poteswari break down and succumb . Her resolute spirit fights back, even after being seduced and raped and mocked and ostracized as a dangerously loose woman.She continues to assert her unbroken spirit and races against the ravages inflicted on her by time and situations. She remains isolated and her narrative resonates with the voice of a woman tried and tested by society but who eventually remains a virtuous soul.In his discussion on Nirupama Bargohain's novels, Rajen Kalita expresses the opinion that the novelist consciously tries to depict issues of female emancipation in all her novels. Class disparities and economic imbalances too feature noticeably but the deprivations and oppressions of the destitute woman are reflected with stark honesty and insight (Kalita 636). He is impressed by the fact that Poteswari is created with so much precision and empathy that it seems the novelist is well acquainted with her.Poteswari is a fallen woman, fallen because she digressed from conventionality

and eloped with her lover.The novelist brings in the character of Rekhadi who is also a tainted woman because she was raped by her husband's friend.It has coloured her with a history- an indelible history.The illiterate Sobin who comes to hate Poteswari for being seduced by his owner, for being a woman with a tainted "past' is in no way more detestable than Rekhadi's educated husband who regards his wife's rape as a sinful digression on her part and discards her. The illiterate Poteswari and the cultured educated Rekhadi are two points of female consciousness that merge in the scales of male sexual supremacy. (Kalita 642-43).The novelist being a woman is capable of a compassionate view that goes beyond a feminist outlook.

The Core of Pain

In *Mistress* (2005), the writer Anita Nair depicts a passionate relationship between a travel writer Christopher Stewart and Radha . Chris comes to Kerala to meet Koman, a famed Kathakali dancer and there he meets Radha, Koman's niece and they delve into a passionate affair disregarding the existence of Radha's husband Shyam. The narrative opens up with a prologue and ends with an epilogue, and, in between, the main body is broken up into three books.There are three sections in each book, making up nine in total, each titled with the *navarasas* as found in Bharata's *Natyashastra*. Each character speaks in the first person—long soliloquies, or dramatic monologues, reminiscent of long narrative sequences from a kathakali performance and the author describes the navarasas, at the beginning of the sections, producing a ' choric effect'. The novel treats two parallel themes. The first deals with the life and choices that Koman makes in his life and the other deals with the floundering marriage of Radha and Shyam with the inclusion of the affair between Radha and Chris.

We are led into Radha's response towards Chris at the outset of the novel

when the writer reveals her to be visibly attracted towards this man. His strength of body, length of fingers, softness of mouth, disorderly curls and brutish two day stubble seem quite irresistible to her. On the other hand, she is embarrassed at the way her husband trivializes Chris.He disregards Chris' magnificent Cello-a musical instrument- by comparing it with the cellos they use to keep food warm. "He wasn't just a sham, he was an uncouth boor, this husband of mine"(M 9).We realize immediately that Radha lives by some different rule and transgression would come easily to her.The relationship between Radha and Shyam is already dangerously fragile even before the arrival of Chris on the scene. Radha's character emanates an unstabilized energy that would easily threaten their marital arrangement by the uncertainty of the direction in which she might focus or by her response to the attitudes and ties that hold society together. Prior to her marriage with Shyam, Radha had been hopelessly involved with a married man that left her drained and surviving the debacle, she gets married to Shyam. She matches Shyam's rhetorical dominance and rejects his attempts at marital reparation. Her uncle sees marks of dissatisfaction on her face and observes how they pale away with the arrival of Chris. Her face is radiant as her eyes throw him sidelong glances and Chris with only his eyes and his smile and with arms that do not touch her, gathers her in his arms. With Shyam however, her life has become a ritual and routine called marriage without any highs and lows. She is Shyam's cherished possession; never his equal but his mistress—someone to engage him in feminine wiles. He prefers a glossy wife and tries to exaggerate compliments on her to ensure marital bliss. Though he had loved her always, for him she is reduced to a feminized body /object and he revels in possessing her but his fastidious nature and his habit of regulating his universe and hers as well into a perfect order, irritate her immeasurably. At the same time, however, Shyam is always worried that Radha might leave him someday lured by the flattery and charm of some sweet talking boy.He had married Radha on compensatory grounds when her father came to him to sort out the mess that she had caused after her misadventure with a married man.Radha felt nothing but a 'habitual annoyance' for him but agrees to the

marriage. She fears that without a marriage she might slip back once again to her married lover and to escape her conscience she consents to a marriage that finally turns into "a kernel of dissatisfaction, corroding and sucking the marrow out" of her life (M 114).Shyam takes pride in his possession- his 'Syamantaka gem'- and feels that with her by his side he is the sun wearing a garland of light. But their relationship is always ephemeral as he is unable to reach into the substance of her being. With irreconcilable differences between them, their marriage is dead and Shyam means nothing to her. Chris, on the other hand, opens her up like a flower. Together they play the lover's game and she feels that a "layer of his time seeps into me and a chunk of my time rests in him." "They toss back and forth in memories while their tongues, saliva, reminiscences and past collide ,clash and then collude into a quiet calm so that the time we were strangers cease to exist" (M 211).They are content with each other and with their stolen moments. Chris enters her grey world and refracts it into shades of many hues gifting her a prism that catches light and throws spectrum of colours. But, along with the colours, comes fear. Her earlier grey world was a shroud for her that kept away all her fears but now the bright colourful world she has comes with a price-the price of her guilt and Shyam's anger.

> Fear makes one do things one would never do otherwise.Fear lets you compromise.fear will even let you seduce your husband so that he imagined your transgressions, your betrayal and that you are still his (M 253).

In this account of Radha's betrayal of marital faith and her transgression into adultery, we find that marriage is once again the central subject –an archetypal for resolving all problems and opposition and for bringing concord out of discord. Whenever the pattern of harmony comes apart and marriage loses its absolutions, it disintegrates and adultery seeps in to make itself a crucial subject (Tanner 1979).The writer argues that marriage is a social and cultural arrangement on

which society relies but with the disintegration of marriage irreconcilable patterns spring up and a person is initiated into the process of negating certain identities that social and cultural mediations confer on them.So,while Radha's marriage flounders, she seeks solace in Chris and Radha as the lover of Chris ceases to be Shyam's wife. Eventually however, with deception sets in feelings of guilt and loneliness. Radha fears outrage and anger from her husband and avoids all possible attempts of confrontation. The only attempt that the writer makes to assuage her sense of guilt is to condemn Shyam for his failure to ensure the respectability of Radha in a satisfactory marital arrangement. The writer projects Shyam in a despicable light because his life with Radha scarcely reflects any feeling of love and family warmth. Radha is constantly threatened by a wrecking sense of impending disaster with Shyam and yet she does nothing except keeping his house. Her occasional angry outbursts are subdued by his indifference and gradually, their conjugal relationship is reduced into a silent toleration of each other. After the revelation of the affair between Chris and Radha, they cannot communicate openly at first because only confession, contrition and forgiveness can loosen the taut lines of their relationship now.

The narrative between Shyam and Radha raise crucial questions as to how strictures of femininity is imposed on a woman.Though an educated and cultured girl she experiences a stifling reality as a daughter, and wife. Uncertain of her needs and desires she gropes after an illusion and in the process experiences a gamut of emotion within her. At the end of the novel, Radha goes through her past—her marriage with Shyam and her affair with Chris—and feels a calm settling over her.

> All the passion I burnt with, the contempt I felt for my life, all the sorrows I knew for chances wasted, the anger I felt at being trapped at an existence so stifling, the fear of what lay ahead, the disgust I felt for myself, the yearning, the deceiving, the worrying, the aching...the whirling, twisting chaos has settled into the quietness

that floods me (M 397).

For Radha her affair is an act of defiance against her husband and his desire to isolate her in a protected world. But once the passion is spent she realizes that she cannot make a life with Chris either. She is pained that adultery has dragged her to murky places and there is no trace of emotion in their clandestine affair. All of it is lust—defying and daring everything—and always accompanied by a beating heart and a lying tongue. She tries to diminish her guilt by thinking that her love is not murky or rank; it grew amidst music and words in a perfumed garden with thousand buds, but nonetheless, she realizes that it is this love that has robbed Shyam of his strength and manliness. It has left him broken and humiliated and though she has no love left for him, she cannot bear to see Shyam in such a state. She longs for his protection once again and the hurt she has caused him eats into her. It is a supreme moment of realization and understanding for her when she admits that 'she cannot live with one or the other' (M 398). The writer asserts the independence of Radha and her capacity to survive without either the nurturance of Shyam or the idolizing of Chris. She is a woman with an entity that requires neither compassion nor adulation. All this while she had forgotten the skills for survival but now she emerges radiantly strong and confident of her abilities to confront the world all by herself.

> I cannot continue to play wife merely because it frees me of worries...I have played wife all this while, despising him. For this I know remorse. I went to him broken, and expected him to heal me. When he couldn't, I began to despise him and I knew sorrow (M 426).

As for Chris- she casts him as a memory, –"something to look back upon with a curious bitter sweet sense of loss"(Ibid).

In an interview with Sneha Subramanian Kanta, the novelist asserts that she

doesnot particularly try to depict gender issues in her writings but is concerned about the contemporary Indian woman who now has an option to choose how she wants to live her life.At the same time, an Indian woman is never isolated fromrelationships and this makes her fear that if she is to swerve from the accepted path, she would be ostracized by society. This puts her desires on a back burner while men tend to move on with giant strides. In her works she merely holds up the mirror to the society we live in. There is no intention of starting a social revolution .She asserts, however, that like women all over, they too dream of freedom and security of dignity and laughter, of love and sex...It's only that priorities are different for everyone. (Kanta n.d) In her novels Anita Nair presents this picture of an Indian woman-a woman replete with dreams and desires who despite being enmeshed in layers of tradition has a core of steel.

The novelist suggests that neither male companionship nor seduction is the key to Radha's search for self gratification. Instead, she invigorates herself with the awareness of the identity growing within her which fills "every step and hour of hers" with wonder and love. As she feels, it is now her talisman. Impending motherhood fills her with a warmth of living which her earlier involvements had deprived her of .Her world, with newer colours tends to blossom forth and she awaits the arrival of the new life that will usher in a new beginning for her once again.Her earlier stances of unfaithfulness disintegrates to usher in an all encompassing sense of identity and kinship with her unborn child. It is the pinnacle of any act of trust and faithfulne ss. The mother child relation is perhaps according to the writer a prototype created out of the ideal of faithfulness and it creates a closed,secure space quite unlike the transient,abstractions that Radha earlier grappled with. "The permanence, the constancy of the irreplaceable mother-object in being what the infant requires for survival is fundamental. A space is created that is closed, secure, objectal, and fusional" (Alizade 139). Picking threads from Alizade's opinion we can undoubtedly assert that Radha's existence as Shyam's wife or as Chris's lover was rather of an ephemeral nature. It did not make her complete or lend her an identity.While Shyam pampered and protected her to

satisfy his male instincts, Chris indulged with her on a purely passionate plane. None of them cared or tried to nurture the woman in her.They invaded her mind and body while she suppressed her desires and dreams and even forfeited her freedom to live the way she wanted. But once she bears a child her world changes and she realizes that now her existence is for the unborn child. Her life starts a new cycle where she has enough time to count her joys and blessings and think of what she wants to do with her life.It is ironical that the point of her life when Radha takes the crucial decision of leaving her lover and her husband and forging a new identity for herself,is the moment when she conceives a child and steps into the threshold of the traditional stereotyped image of a woman.

Once again, in this novel too, the writer shows that the idea of a marriage and adultery are incompatible. By transgressing marital vows Radha degrades into a fallen woman who commits a sin against trust and fidelity. She fails in her marriage, and she doesn't strive to make it work. All the while she gains emotionally by deceiving her partner on the sly. It is only when she sees the enormity of her deceit in the person of Shyam does she realize the extent of her depravity. Elaborating on the rationale for a woman's transgression, Sally Mitchell tries to validate this unusual stance and reiterate that on certain occasions a woman acts according to her discretion ,often propelled by forces that come from within— " by her self-concept, her imaginative picture of the possibilities open to her, by the roles she takes in her own fantasies"(Mitchell xiv).

We see that Radha too acts as her mind directs her. She transgresses at will. She despises Shyam for using her, using her body in a dominating and insulting manner. She hates him for raping her and plans a calculated revenge on him. While pretending a 'gaiety of life' with Shyam 'the core of pain' grows within her. She reads Tolstoy and Marquez and detests being used as a mistress to fulfill her husband's sexual needs only.She seeks solace in the arms of Chris But eventually, her relationship with Chris too leaves her parched and sets her reflecting if God punishes people for their sins or do they get punished themselves. In a pluralist society, the nature of the laws transgressed by an adulteress would not remain

constant and so perhaps, the reactions to Radha's adultery is not as explosive and vindictive as it had been with Rosie in *The Guide* or with Jona in *Bonjui*. So, in the 21st century, which has gradually evolved into a world of permissiveness, social sanctions do loosen up.The writer who is keen to depict the 'dreams and desires' of woman at the same time does convince us that the order of marriage should not be broken. Marriage is an ideal form of human commitment and adultery is a flaw. For this flaw that Radha admits into her life, and for her failure to live up to the ideal, she is punished. Her repentance for her adultery and her anguish for deceiving her husband are her penance. But the writer concludes with the assertion that the irrevocable power of motherhood calms all disruptions and endows her life with a soothing ambience. Her adultery is an offence against marriage and the writer suggests that motherhood is an alternate way of fashioning a new subjectivity.Her identity as an adulteress and as a mother do not pattern itself into a linear narrative and so the writer makes one come to a halt and rests the other within the confines of an acceptable space. The more boundaries she crosses, however, the more she tends to get stereotyped.The longing for adventure as well as the guilt she feels while pursuing it is the main driving power that makes her sway between her obligation to Shyam and her attraction for Chris. Arguably, the stringing together of the spatial elements and the time elements while Radha moves back and forth between her transgression and her apprehensions, her overwhelming desires and her composed reflections lend the narrative a measure of plausible realism and make the transgressor appear vulnerably soulful and human to the readers.

Binod Mishra in his essay "Resurrection of Self: A study of Anita Nair's Ladies' Coupe" hint that in Anita Nair's novels, the characters suffer and yet come out of it because their sufferings become their strength and weapon to fight their predicaments.The same can be said of Radha in *Mistress* as well. She rejects her husband and her lover also. In doing so she "releases herself from the role of a wife and a mistress" and becomes 'mistress' of herself.She gives her unborn baby a maternal identity by rendering it 'fatherless'(Nambiar 269). Nambiar argues that

in this highly feminist rendering of the feminine self as an individual identity, Nair tries to contest the familiar sites of patriarchal hegemony and establish the supremacy of the mother. This pattern unfolds itself in the repeated disclosures by different characters wherein paternity is called into question.After Chris and Radha who are unsure about the identity of their fathers it is now Radha again who doesn't know if Shyam or Chris is the father of her unborn child.She decides to bring up the child on her own. The idea of establishing an identity through the paternal which is considered normative is deconstructed throughout the novel and by undermining the categories of the masculine and the feminine, the writer appears to challenge the notions of femininity (Nambiar 268-9).

Vindication of Defiance

The novel *Dotaal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah* (*The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker)* describes vividly the sylvan beauty of the village Amranga in Kamrup district of Assam,which houses the ruling family of the Sattras—the house of the Gossains.Being a feudal family they are bound by the rigid conventions of tradition and aristrocracy which in turn alienate them from the common people. Being an upper class Brahmin family, they adhere to rituals with an unrelenting rigidity and at the same time make their women sad victims of the 'tyranny of orthodoxy'(Sogani 225).The three widows of this family are shown as leading a restricted life under the vigilant eyes of society.Indranath, an upperclass, idealistic young man is the protagonist of the novel but he fails to bring any change to existing structures because although he distances himself from traditional conventions,he does not have the courage to defy them. He brings his widowed aunt Durga to her paternal house and saves her from the tortures of her in-laws

who regard her as ominous.However,he fails to provide any lasting respite because she leads a miserable life and has no standing in society.Once she becomes old and sick,she has to return to her husband's house again in order to maintain her identity as an upper class Hindu widow.Soru Gossainee on the other hand is the young and beautiful widow of Indranath's uncle whose dignity and stature commands respect from the subjects of the Sattra.She is drawn in by her desire for Mahidhar Bapu, which she dares not admit. It is her secret passion and she maintains scrupulous distance from him. But in her dreams he belongs to her and then she traverses flowery paths of happiness and fulfillment. She struggles with her desires but feelings of guilt devour her and raid her peace. To her utter shock, Mohidhar Bapu turns out to be a swindler who has all along been duping her of her wealth, and tainting her good repute in various ways. Unfortunately, for him, his activities come to light and he is caught by the homeguards while attempting to escape with her money and property documents. Unable to bear the destruction of her dreams and the betrayal by Bapu, Soru Gossainee collapses and with that ends all her aspirations for love and life. The third widow Giribala is the focal female character in the novel. She is the beautiful, headstrong, and pampered daughter of the Gossain who eventually becomes a victim of the mindless, prejudiced society. On attaining puberty, she is married off hastily against her wishes to a debauch whose only stand lay in being the son of the *adhikar* of Bangara.Nobody cared to look into the man's past or present life which eventually shows to be a degenerate one. He torments her physically and emotionally too and while he squanders his wealth and time on theatres, dancing girls and prostitutes,Giribala withdraws into a shell which did not hold any vestige of love or respect for her husband. His sudden death allows her in-laws to treat her with hostility and after her miscarriage, she is sent back to her parents.

Returning home Giribala faces the heartless people and their insensitive behaviour.They treat her as an outcaste. 'Don't touch her! Don't touch her! You women with sindoor. She is a widow' (TMHT 27).She burns with rage but the women of the village who come to share her grief revels in her misfortune. They

advise her mother to send her back to her husband's house once again because that is the real heaven for her.

> You keep her for a few days and then send her back. Her husband's place is like heaven for a woman. If she runs away from her husband's house, she is like a naked woman loitering on the streets. Even if she tries to cover herself with clothes, people will snatch them away from her body (TMHT 29).

Giribala's agony provides them an occasion to rejoice,not only because she is widowed but because she had always been a class above them in all affairs and they assume that widowhood will surely make her diffident.Giribala,nonetheless is furious with them.She feels her privacy violated by their meticulous observation and so orders them out of the house.Her brother Indranath realizes that she cannot be expected to spend her days in isolation and so with an intention of engaging her in some fruitful work, he introduces her to Mark, a Christian missionary who is collecting materials for a biography on missionaries who had earlier visited Assam. In the process of helping Mark in reading out old manuscripts, the lonely Giribala draws closer to him.Besides a deep bond of empathy and friendship, they also feel a strong surge of physical attraction for each other. Giribala who has been deprived of all happiness till then reaches out in anticipation of Marc's love.Popularly known as Sannyasi Saheb, Marc understands that there exists an insurmountable barrier between them, which he dares not transcend for he is an outcaste, a *melechha* in the Assamese society. Yet there are occasions when this barrier seems to break down in an upsurge of emotion and desire. Giribala, who has beeen living on a tasteless, bland diet meant for widows, is one day discovered while taking a bowl of delicious meat curry. She is admonished and warned and after a series of moral lectures is locked in a small stuffy room as punishment for her sin. She suffers silently, but vents her frustration to Mark who comes secretly to meet her.

This act demonstrates that, Giribala does not want to adhere to the traditional concept that a wife is her husband's property even after his death.She does not feel that she has sinned by not offering flowers to her dead husband's *kharam* (sandals made of wood.)She feels no prick of conscience after consuming meat although it is considered a serious offence for a widow. Instead she divulges to Mark that her husband had never been her God even while he was alive.She never loved the man who had told her that there is no excitement in sleeping with a woman after marrying her.She is certain that sacrificing her entire life in the memory of this man will kill her.

> ...That husband of mine touched and played with that notorious woman who sold opium. He even slept with that woman! Do you know what he said to me on our first night? Pushing aside my *Gatala* he said—there can be no enjoyment in bed with the woman one brings in marriage! Absolutely none!' Still I try to put flowers and *Tulsi* leaves on his wooden sandals. But if it continues like this, I am afraid I'll turn into a ghost... (TMHT 198-99)

She wants to escape this ghoulish life where she only sees Durga worshipping her dead husband's *kharam*(wooden sandals) by day and placing them upon her breasts at night. On one occasion when she is alone with the foreigner Mark, she open her heart out.

> Oh, sahib! I am fed up! Durga *pehi* says that I am neglecting my late husband's wooden sandals;that I don't offer flowers and tulsi leaves like a pious widow!And on top of that I tasted goat's meat ...She says that I am a sinner...but, Sahib, what a strange thing! I don't feel guilty of any sin at all.Even after taking goat's meat that day!It didn't shake me even a little bit...Oh Sahib ,can you understand me? I cannot just exist, just for the sake of remaining alive like Durga and Saru Gosainee (TMHT 198).

Indira Goswami depicts conflict and resistance in her characters.Giribala resists patriarchy and her conflict with existing norms makes her vulnerable and human. "Situations create conflict for Giribala. As she draws close to Mark her instincts awaken and increasingly engage her in a forceful variance with the present" (Gogoi 31).A notable aspect in this novel is that the writer presents Giribala as a defiant character who does not shrink from revealing her rebelliousness. In contrast to the other two widows, Durga and Soru Gosainee, Giribala thus emerges as noncompliant.

Once, on a trip to collect some rare manuscripts, Giribala and Mark face the wrath of a frenzied elephant that destroys the bullock cart she is travelling in. She clings to Mark out of fear and that is her moment of bliss. All the while she prays fervently that the elephant should kill her while she is in his arms. 'Kill me! Kill me now! When I am holding this Sahib in my arms! Kill me now! At once! I'll be most happy!'(TMHT 201).Such acts work to threaten the binary gender codes that both society and individual identity (of a widow) operate upon. Society at large determines Giribala's actions as transgressive. When a drenched Giribala enter Mark's dwelling in the middle of the night, he asks her to go back because it is a sacrilege. To demonstrate the nature of feminine performance as a widow, the narrative contrasts her with Durga and offers us an insight into what society considers transgressive.While Durga is meek, pliant and pathetic,Giribala is defiant and aggressive. When Durga realizes that she is nearing her end she desires to return to her husband's *bhitha* (land)and die as a pious widow. On the other hand, knowing that she is to return to her in laws who disapprove of her conduct, Giribala rushes to Mark in the middle of the night and implores him to protect her.She cries bitterly and recounts how her husband shunned her for that opium selling woman –the woman whose lustful current of blood made her glow with an exciting sexuality. Giribala urges Mark to touch her and appreciate her beauty and her youth .

> I couldn't bind him to me with either my body or my mind. But the flesh of that woman! Was it so powerful that before it, virtue and decency, all things worthwhile in life, became futile,like mere dust on the roadside? All the treasures of mind become as meaningless as dust only because of that flesh!... Can one believe it? Oh, my love, touch me and realize just for once...just for once! TMHT 296).

This is the moment when Giribala readies herself for self destruction. Her half naked, fig coloured flesh glowed like a mystical lamp and she waited for Mark to touch her. 'Just one touch and both will burn to ashes!'(TMHT 297) But Mark stood rooted to the spot as if metamorphosed. A weary traveler, distant and aloof, (Khaund 61) he could not advance towards her or gather her close in his arms.

> Giribala's attraction for Mark is the outcome of her unfulfilled desire. This desire is the desire of the modern man—to step beyond the limits determined by society. Giribala rebels against society because her desires remain unfulfilled. She subjects herself to severe judgment and prepares for any extremity. Her bitter outbursts and poignant confessions before Mark express her wretched circumstances (Gogoi 83).

When she is discovered alone with Marc in his house, the villagers condemn her for a sin that affirm her as a transgressing figure—a figure of excess, flouting all concepts of a submissive and virtuous feminine identity. Patriarchal conventions prescribe a ritualistic penance for her—she is to be purified inside a straw hut with holy incantations and the hut will be burnt later signifying her cleansing. The writer who is positioned to side with Giribala's defiance does not let her survive this embarrassment. So Giribala enters the hut silent and impassive, and refuses to come out of it. She immolates herself in the burning hut and her death is her final act of defiance against the restrictive and cruel norms of society negating which she traverses the deviant path and becomes a transgressor. At the same time it demonstrates how transgressors are met with force and prevented

from disrupting traditional hierarchy in society. As in Thomas Hardy, joy and contentment are 'occasional episodes' in this novel also, but it is not just a discussion of women's humiliating position in patriarchy. Rather, it depicts feminine transgression in a positive light for those women who choose their happiness over the derision and rejection which their anti- feminine behaviour may attract. This is true despite the fact that Giribala meets with an unfortunate end in the novel. Being permeated with lucid warnings and consequences of behaving immorally in society, this novel can be considered a treatise on the permissible behaviour of women and widows in a traditional orthodoxy.

Giribala is the writer's creation crafted with immense tenderness and care because through her she desires to mirror the injustice of a rigid conventional society that always shrinks at giving a woman her share of happiness. While the natural instincts and desires for gratification of human impulses are same in men and women alike, society always acts towards the undoing of the woman (Sarma 127). Deriving inspiration from personal experience and witnessing the conflict between individual desires and social obligations, the novelist depicts widowhood in its gruesome reality and at the same time offers an empathetic understanding of the permissiveness which Giribala adheres to. Her death is not simply a defiance of social conventions, but it is also a mark of Giribala's awareness of the prejudice that she encounters. At the same time it is also the novelist's assertion that the social practices considered so essential for the maintenance of societal sanctity are oppressive to their womenfolk and they dehumanize them consistently. The novel calls for a change in the social perspectives and attitudes towards all those women who face undesirable situations in life and take decisions that challenge the patriarchal discourse of the chaste feminine.In the process they encounter a vindictive cultural response. Indira Goswami's desire to portray subjugated characters stems from the author's desire to express the unfulfilled potential and repressed desires in her heroines. She advocates gender equality and her realist approach seeks for a true to life ending for her ill fated heroine.It might leave the reader unsatisfied because we are not granted a catharsis at the end.This is also true

of George Eliot who in trying to portray the poignancy of unfulfilled desire often ended up in creating catastrophic situation for her heroines. Her heroines and their circumstances provoke the readers to translate their discontent into activism and protest. *Adam Bede* by George Eliot depicts the fate of a young woman seduced by a heedless, wealthy young man and tries to dwell in the causes of a women's fallen status. *The Mill on the Floss* which is the most autobiographical of Eliot's novels, is the story of a rebellious young girl and the catastrophic results of her attempts to be true to herself. Writing of George Eliot's heroine's, Virginia Woolf commented that they no longer suffer in silence.

> The ancient consciousness of woman, charged with suffering and sensibility, and for so many ages dumb, seems in them to have brimmed and overflowed and uttered a demand for something—they scarcely know what—for something that is perhaps incompatible with the facts of human existence (Woolf n.d).

We may perhaps suggest the same about this heroine by Indira Goswami. It is her desire for the unknown that makes her a transgressor. She refuses to be subverted and so her desire for the impossible brings with it mortal consequence.Their rebellious spirit and their hunger for life make them confront the world of subversions with a tenacity that often surprises the readers but at the same time makes them aware of the struggle that rages inside every spirit to attain whatever is denied to them.In moments of crisis and disillusionment they hold on to their emotions and aspirations, that no doubt render them vulnerable at times, but also render them immensely human. The writer does not frame Giribala with feminist undertones but attempts to evoke a strong protest against the excruciating conventions of society that tend to victimize a woman .Nirupama Bargohain being a feminist writer consciously creates Poteswari as a victim of patriarchy in her attempt to sensitize society about the wrongs against women.Giribala's creator is not a mindful feminist writer. However, to make society aware of all ills that

continue to subjugate women, there is a need for strong, defiant characters whose nonconformist stance suggests a feminist vehemence. Giribala is one such fiery spirit.

Ammu who is the pivotal character in *The God of Small Things* suffers a condition similar to Giribala's. Both of them are women without their husbands and hence deprived of the traditional means of subsistence. This makes them vulnerable to dependence on their maternal families who customarily exercise a great degree of control over their existences. Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things* portrays a family saga where male power eclipses female prerogative in an upper class Syrian Christian family. Ammu the daughter of Pappachi and Mamachi is a rebel whom society fails to subjugate. She is deeply aware of the fact that there is something terribly wrong with the society that refuses to treat women at par with their men.In this tradition laden society, Ammu's attempts to insist on her rights and aspirations, yearnings and anguishes, make her a marginalized creature— ignored by her parents, humiliated by her husband, despised by her brother, insulted by the police and ridiculed by society—with no 'Locusts Stand I' (TGST 57). Chacko her brother said, "What's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine" (ibid.) She is denied the opportunity for higher education .Her father thought that college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl and so on a vacation in Calcutta, she weighed the odds and 'married the wrong man' because for her anything or anyone at all would be better than returning to Ayemenem again. Her husband exasperated her to a degree 'she never thought herself capable of'(TGST:40)and when he wanted her to help with his transfer which would require her to spend a few days with his employer she left him and returned to her parents' home at Ayemenem with her two year old twins. She guarded her innocent 'frogs engrossed in each other's company, lolloping arm in arm down a highway full of hurtling traffic' (TGST 43) and her maternal instincts,which was quick to reprimand them was even quicker to take offence on their behalf. As a single mother she did not have time or thought for herself but her abandoned sexuality and her inner urges and secret desires surface at some unguarded

moments. It is this polarity that characterizes her life—the infinite tenderness of motherhood on one hand and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber on the other.

She is already a woman cast aside by society. Married against her parent's wish and divorced subsequently, she is a slur on her community. A woman with an unsafe edge, she has nothing to lose when she falls in love with a low caste Paravan,named Velutha.Together they dream the impossible and ignore the love laws that dictated who should be loved and how and how much. They have their own margins and when Velutha holds Ammu with both hands "he had no other arm with which to fight the shadows that flickered around him on the floor...in the shadows there were metal folding chairs arranged in a ring and on the chairs there were people, with slanting rhinestone glasses watching" (TGST 21).

According to Rukmani Bhaya Nair the writer in trying to depict the love between the mother figure Ammu and the untouchable Velutha is envisaging a boundary crossing which is at once beautiful, polluting and tragic. This boundary crossing is similar to the one experienced by women writers in English who symbolizes a curious 'nonself' because they produce alien products that contradicts the cultural emblem. Though such writings are termed diasporic and they are definitely a contribution to world literature, yet their 'foreign-ness' makes them a violator and group them in the 'polluting class' (BhayaNair 177-8). Arundhati Roy is writing about the small things of life. So she writes about imperfection, incompleteness, and failures. In Nair's estimation Arundhati Roy is very correct in depicting the romance and sentiment with a sharp, sensitive observation of details.There are references and descriptions of 'history' in her novel.We hear about communism and of Velutha's Naxal connections but the novelist just hints at them. She is more fascinated by the transgressions of the 'Love Laws' and experiments a liberating style that privileges the 'small things' of life. So Ammu and Velutha's love story never gets real. When it tries to, society runs its giant bull dozer over them and gets them crushed and their soulful, warm love turns cold.Velutha is tortured by the police and killed and when Ammu goes to the police station to plead his innocence Inspector Thomas Matthew humiliates

her.

> He stared at Ammu's breasts as he spoke. He said the police knew all they needed to know and that the Kottayam Police did not take statements from Veshyas or their illegitimate children...'Thomas Mathew came around his desk and approached Ammu with his baton 'If I were you', he said 'I'd go home quietly'.Then he tapped her breasts with a baton. Gently.Tap, tap. As though he was choosing mangoes from a basket. Pointing out the ones he wanted packed and delivered (TGST 8).

The writer Arundhati Roy implicitly invokes a feminist critique of the gradual process of patriarchal enmeshing that seeks to eliminate the woman's role in a society of paternal propagation. Mammachi's incapacity to embrace her offsprings with equal parental love leads to her horrified rejection of Ammu's relationship with Velutha while equating Chacko's debauchery to 'man's needs' and defending them.To facilitate the entry of the factory women into Chacko's room, she gets a separate entrance built but while conjuring up visions of her daughter mating with a Paravan her imagination and her revulsion attain a pinnacle. Here Mammachi epitomizes the patriarch who conspires with Chacko to destroy the divorced, shelterless Ammu and demolishes her esteem.A self respecting, assertive woman , Ammu had earlier revolted against her parents and even taken on her drunken, bullying husband.She never stops dreaming and the image of Baby Kochamma who is living for her flesh in her old age, repels her. She chooses to transgress because though society excludes her, her body is her own and this negates the battle that rages in her—of the human mind and human nature, of history in the form of civilizing ideas and biology in the shape of primal instincts. In Velutha she finds a kindred soul with "a lofty sense of injustice and the mulish, reckless streak that develops in Someone Small who has been bullied all their lives by Someone Big" (TGST 181-82). In the words of Rama Kundu,

Arundhati Roy tries to sensitise the society and show how women are treated as "impersonal and subjugative objects in this social structure" (Kundu 13) and hence Ammu the transgressor, who lived alone amidst family also dies alone—sick and helpless— after being displaced from the constraining, civilized society that she chose not to conform to. Love Laws being consistently broken, the novel also depicts transgressors in Rahel and Estha, whose desire for a wholeness, results in completing their incomplete halves through a physical act.They break further love laws, and this time it is the incest taboo and the novelist suggests that it is Rahel's desire to affirm her femaleness and her need to defy the tangible medians of womanhood that makes her end up in a turmoil. Roy only suggests but does not make liberation for Ammu possible. Her protagonist is placed at the core of a pinwheel that goes round and round her, overlapping the colours that emanate from her defensive and reactive stances. The result is however, always, a blurred vision of unpredictable presumptions. In conclusion, I find it relevant to engage in an opinion put forth by Rukmani Bhaiya Nair in one of her well researched essay. She believes that women have been conventionalized into playing stereotyped roles without ever speaking for herself and this silence is broken when women are empowered to control their selves and subjectivities in different ways.However, Arundhati Roy has wrested some degree of control for women by contributing tangibly towards the power struggle over the sites of pleasure.She explores the realms of a woman's pleasure and desire and in the process initiates a new concept where the novel is not only the object of desire but desire itself is the subject of the novel. Her engagement with words creates a quaint but valid world of dreams and desires that do not halt at a suppression of individuality and differences.There is always a vital struggle going on between the Big Gods that demand obedience and the Small Gods that defiantly and desperately try to ensemble a new universe (Nair 197-8).

This could be true of all those women writers who chose to write about the smaller, insignificant things that delineate a woman's world and her perspective, unique in a man's world. They engage in a changed outlook and bequeath a new

meaning to traits that have hitherto been given only a male, monolithic observation. Writing as a woman she writes from her female mind and her female body and this makes her work an exclusive portrayal of the female imagination that soaks in every trace of, agony and ecstasy while mapping out a terrain of female freedom. In all the narratives that I have dealt with above, the women writers have consciously and sometimes unconsciously reconciled to social demands and depicted the image of marginalized victims in their contemporary narratives of the fallen woman. However, when the same writers adopt an individualistic approach, they cast the victims as women in search of an identity, struggling for emancipation from their emotional and psychological ghetto.

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CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Any writing about woman is generally coloured by ideas of feminine purity and conformity to normative ideals. Women who indulge in irregular sexual relationships outside marriage, humble themselves and face reproving judgment of the society. Always considered to be the property of men, a woman has also to depend on man for her protection and maintenance. Going against the grain, she evokes varied responses from being a helpless victim to a flagrant deviant. While the former is a source of pleasure for the superior male, the latter, notwithstanding the causes and circumstances for her deviance , is always considered a woman capable of sin and therefore responsible for her own destiny. While a young man is never chastised for losing his virtue or for visiting a brothel, or for having any illicit relation outside marriage, for a woman her physical chastity is synonymously related to her virtue.

Patriarchy tends to dominate and subjugate woman only to disempower them. In a traditional Indian scenario, women are meant for marriage, submission and procreation. Marriage re empowers to a certain extent but the patriarchal order so fashions the lives of women that though overtly glorifying it actually serves in coveting, seducing and exploiting. Marriage can also be considered a socially sanctioned institution devised by patriarchy to keep woman in permanent subjugation to men.Often it ends up not being a logical culmination of a man woman relationship but a perpetuation of woman's subordination. Very often the

pervasive sexual intimidation of women by men is not just a coincidental or isolated incident but it becomes a part of the systematic , institutional sexual subordination of women which again serves as a status quo.Sexual intimidation is often built into the fabric of our economic, social and cultural life and hence women are many a time coerced into unconditional sexual accessibility by men in superior social positions.It is they who define the terms and conditions of women's existence and make them their sexual victims . Such socially sanctioned appropriation of women's bodies also necessitates and reinforces a woman's need to mediate their sexual conduct through appropriate cultural filters. Otherwise society is quick to recast them as good or bad.

The analysis on fallen and transgressing women in the earlier chapters has shed light on a very important aspect of the Indian society. Here a woman's sexuality is respected and glorified only as a procreative agency. Otherwise if a woman decides to respond without inhibition towards her sexuality, society is quick to cast her out. Those women who move beyond acceptable limits of hegemonic sexual ideology in spite of remaining within the social conditionings of being a mother, daughter or wife are considered fallen. Apart from them, it is the prostitute who embodies a sense of 'otherness' that sets her apart from other 'pure' women. Considering the fact that prostitution is actually a service industry for men, it is surprising that prostitutes alone are weighed in the scales of morality. A critique of this industry is bound to be an uphill task because the fundamentals of social power are still wielded by men and it is a male privilege to gain access to female bodies for their own gratification. The question that arises is that while all women are sexual objects, what is the significance of the social stigma attached to prostitution? At the same time, those women who live their lives on the edge of propriety by making a conscious choice to transgress are also considered fallen by patriarchal standards. They are loose in morals because they indulge in an unacceptable form of adult sexuality. Marriage being the accustomed and acceptable face, an extra marital relationship always negates the sanctity of a

marriage. Moreover, a woman's sexuality always develop within a social order and can never be considered independent of this context. Considering all these factors it is now apparent from my discussion in the foregoing chapters that whatever be the cause or circumstances for transgression a woman always seals her fate by choosing to be deviant.

I find it worthwhile to quote a passage from Hilary M. Lips' very interesting text titled *A New Psychology for Women* where she deliberates on how gender related expectations interact with cultural assumptions and stereotypes and with related socio-economic factors to condition a woman's experience and behaviour in different cultures.

> While we maintain one meaning of female sexuality (love) at eye level, other meanings (power, economic survival) lurk beneath the surface of the culture. In virtually every culture, many women use their sexuality to survive. Sexual activity is a commodity-sometimes the only commodity women control-that can be exchanged for money, security and status. A North American high school student may trade it for popularity; a young woman in Bangladesh may trade it for the security of an arranged marriage; a Filipino may trade it for the chance to travel to a new country where she hopes for greater social and economic opportunities; a woman in an African town may trade it for money to feed her family. To romanticize female sexuality too much is to ignore the way it fits into the power structures institutionalized by cultures. When men are the ones with the money, with the status, with the positions of authority, one way- sometimes the only way-for women to gain access to these resources is by using their sexuality. Such exchanges can be dangerous for a woman. She may risk unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease as well as sexual violence and the contempt of those who feel she is violating standards of proper

> female behaviour. Yet for many women, the risks are seen as necessary and unavoidable (M. Lips 417).

This idea in itself sums up my hypothesis. Female sexuality acquires fluidity in different cultures and the ways and means which a woman chooses to forge a sexual bond is often dictated by the scripts of culture. Restrictive societies define the sexual precincts for a woman and aim at controlling her sexuality at all costs and her worth is then determined by her virtue. At the same time however, the rules and responses of a society towards deviant behaviour may differ. In any case though, society identifies and classifies women into good and bad dichotomy.

In all the novels that I have discussed in the preceding chapters, there is a female character who at some point of her life deviates from the customary disciplined self regulatory life and becomes vulnerable to sexual transgression.They challenge the rules of womanly conduct and fashion an alternate life with a radically different female subjectivity.They are hence called fallen woman but the reasons for their fall are varied. Subala, the protagonist in the novel *Subala* is a prostitute and a victim of tragic circumstances. Given the conditions and circumstances of her adolescent life prior to becoming a prostitute , it is difficult to vouch that she would have remained in a safer sanctuary had she not been sexually exploited and forced to embrace a life of disrepute. In the attempt to depict Subala as a traumatized victim of seduction the writer Homen Bargohain tries to make her unmindful of retributions. He is however not able to ignore the implications of the façade of the borrowed sexuality which she carried about her. Unlike Subala, the prostitute in *A Train to Pakistan* is indifferent to her disgrace or to her standing in society. We do not know how she came into this profession but coming from a family of singers and dancers it is presumed that she is conditioned to entertain men in any way.The novelist Khushwant Singh, who is a sexual rebel in his own life relegates Haseena the prostitute to the status of a minor character.He seems eager to exclude her from respectable precincts and so makes her pay with her life for redemption of her sin. Yet another prostitute

Champa in *Jiyajurir Ghat* participates in sex work and entails for herself a life in the margins. Forced by abject poverty she chooses her trade willfully. At the same time however, being socially, culturally and economically marginalized she is dependent on her, male partners for survival, has little power of choice in sexual negotiations. This makes her all the more vulnerable to physical harm and disease. Syed Abdul Malik is keen to depict this prostitute as a target of male vice and as an object of social scrutiny. Irrawaddy in *Nectar in a Sieve* also chooses this disgraceful calling to survive starvation and death. While Irawaddy grew up with the proverbial good girl image Kunti, the tarnished character in the same novel was the bad girl who threatened societal control by her unbridled sexuality. Yet the novelist Kamala Markandaya makes the boundaries merge irrevocably when to fulfill her economic interests, Ira cashes on her sexuality to defy socially defined margins of womanhood. Unlike Subala who is violently manipulated, Ira and Champa are not coerced into acquiescence. It appears therefore that the novelists who have portrayed prostitutes in their novels are aware that prostitution is one arena of gender relation where the women are both subjects of domination and active agents as well. The stigma attached to it disciplines woman to choose a life of conventionality and those who transgress are the outcasts.

In the novels that I have discussed, there are also women who do not sell sex but are nevertheless fallen women because they reject the archetypal virtuous woman image and transgress boundaries of propriety. Their characters reveal a little too much of feminine desire, which, patriarchy asserts, should be kept under moral controls. Radha in *Mistress*, Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*, Rosie in *Guide*, Morikolanthu in *Ladies Coupe*, Ammu in *The God of Small Things*, Lalitha in *Two Virgins*, Jona in *Bonjui,* Pahi in *Aboidha*, Giribala, the widow in *Dotaal Hatir Uiyee Khowa Howdah*,and Menoka in *Antoreep* are all characters who deconstruct the myth of femininity.Their transgressions always, inevitably corrupt the aura of domesticity, which is again a feminine domain. Excluding the last two, the rest of the novels centers round the seduction of a woman who is either married or

unmarried by some man who is also either married or unmarried. In all instances the woman indulges in sexual relations outside the confines of marriage. These relationships suggest an intimacy without any social concerns. It is a total 'privatising of passion' where the private sphere is absolutely democratized. Other than the self there is no other issue to be gratified and most of the relationships are formed through mutuality rather than through one of subjugation and unequal power. (Giddens 256-64).While Giribala in *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* is a wayward widow daring to defy tradition in search of a fulfilled life, Menoka's insubordination and subsequent deviance in *The Hour Before Dawn* is a mark of her desire for avenging the all subsuming arrogance of her husband. She breaks away from her assigned stereotypic role and turns it back on the patriarchal establishment that had chosen to create it.

The theme of the fallen woman has long found representation in Indian literature because of the fact that prostitution and adultery are age old concepts. Earlier references sought to portray the fallen woman as an outcaste because a faithful monogamous marriage is the ideal to be aimed at. Inroads into modernity have changed ideologies and perceptions of living. Greater participation by women in education and work, opportunities for controlling one's sexuality and reproductive capacities, and a transformed mindset allows one to decide not just what their life should be but also how it has to be lived.This has led to flexible moral and cultural perspectives. In the novels that I have discussed it has been observed that we rarely are led into the psychological depth of the fallen woman. Subala the prostitute registers her protests sometimes through violent outbursts and sometimes the author reflects it through symbolic configurations of plot and character. The prostitutes that are mentioned in the other novels are mere appendages in the story serving to highlight male manipulations in a predominantly masculine universe. However, a number of these novels that depict some moment of fall in its woman character do focus on the conflicts they face as a result of the

breach between their individual personality and the social roles that constrain her life.

The fallen women portrayed in the novels of the male authors are stereotyped images of woman and the narratives present a critique of their overt sexual attitudes. There seems to be a strange fascination with the character of the deviant and she stands out by virtue of her behavior, attitude and sensitivity. Whereas Menoka is perhaps the only creation by a male author who resort to unconventional action against her tormentor, the other fallen women scarcely have any power to influence events or even resist their oppressors despite all their humiliation and agony. Abdul Malik's Champa, Khushwant Singh's Haseena, Jogesh Das' Gauri are all less powerful than the conventional heroines they are paired with.Though they wait and hope that situations will change, yet they live with the awareness that things can never turn out favourably for them.Menoka on the other hand fulfills so many roles as a wife, daughter in law, mother and sister in law in an Assamese middle class household that it is not easy for us to visualize her as an adulteress.Her needs for an emotional life, her repression of physical desires while her husband indulges in brazen ardour with his newly married second wife, and her final desperate attempt to assert her own will surfaces primarily in the narrative. Through the character of Menoka who transgress with calculated precision the writer seeks to expose the male social system. Her co-wife, by virtue of her submissive meekness and perpetual subversion of her candid self in trying to be a perfect domestic angel ends up in becoming a frustrated mental wreck.In contrast to her, Menoka does what she thinks to be the best for her pride and self respect even if it entails a violation of ethics.She is not prepared to accept the clash between her intense impulses for self gratification and the pressures of social conformity when society acknowledges her husband's roving nature as normal and customary . She therefore chooses to ignore the rigid ideals of behaviour and her subsequent fall from honour helps her to come up against the limitations imposed on her by the prevailing system.

Some of the women writers take up tales of transgression and social wrongs in a manner that speaks of their inclination to hold the woman responsible for her plight. Kamala Markandaya's *Two Virgins* is a depiction of the heroine's progress from innocence to experience and a final descent to vice and nowhere does the novelist exonerate Lalitha from blame for the wrongs that befell her. Surprisingly though, Ira in *Nectar in a Sieve* is relieved of indictment because her woeful married life, her humiliation, and her tryst with hunger offers substantial validation to her fall. Morikolanthu,(*Ladies Coupe*) and Poteswari(*Iparor Ghar,Siparor Ghar*)) are both victims of an oppressive patriarchal structure. They are normal young women growing up with notions of feminine duties and virtue and yet choose to digress from normative paths when they become attached to certain perverted forms of masculine sexual desire. Their virtuous conduct is not sufficient protection in a world contained by lustful and unscrupulous men. Though condemned as a whore Morikolanthu's story end with hope rather than in despair. She finds possibility of life with her son whom she had all along rejected for being the fruit of a brutal rape. She doesn't end her life but her experiences with injustice determines her to offer her son the protection and the justice that he deserves.Poteswari too reintegrates herself into the community even after her earlier disgrace and despite living a life of drudgery reaffirms her belief in virtuosity. However, it may be surmised that the writer wishes to suggest that had Poteswari been absolved of her first fault and not treated with severity by people, she might not have faced such bitter situations in her life later. While Pujan, her partner in the same fault led a guiltless life she faces the ire throughout her life. But she doesn't behave like a victim or a whore or appear broken hearted. She faces life as it comes to her and this places the novel apart from conventional narratives of seduced innocence.

Difficult Daughters portray Virmati as an unmarried girl exposed to the harrowing experience of an affair with a married man that leads to disastrous consequences and all the shame and guilt associated with it.She is a disgrace to

her family and the writer suggests that it is due to her independent upbringing in the pre independence Indian society that leads her astray.She falls from honour but unlike Poteswari or Morikolanthu, doesn't face hardships in life. Though highly educated she fails to gain anything valuable in life and her attempts to break free of the binding customs end in a fiasco. She is unable to carve out an identity for herself and her illegitimate relationship with Harish alienates her from everyone. The conflict between duty and desire is so strong here and her choice in every desperate situation is so implausible that it ruptures the fabric of conviction. She remains unacceptable not only to her own family but her only daughter too asserts vehemently that she does not want to be like her mother. We may say that Virmati as a woman is insipid in her convictions and as a fallen woman fails to draw any sympathy or anger from the readers. We remain bemused with her vacillations and wish that she was able to put up a strong resistance against the forces that sought to deter her from her goal. She falls but hardly does anything extraordinary except rejecting to marry the boy chosen for her and further carrying the child of her married lover.She appears to us as a woman who is unsure of her destination and makes her way hesitantly, faltering and stumbling at every step she takes. We can also view Virmati's secret meetings and sexual encounters with the professor as an alternative to visual sexual transgression. Being a single woman who resisted being contained within the strict parameters of societal conventions and yet did not perceive public transgression to be desirable or realistic, hers is a pragmatic form of resistance .She wished to pursue and fulfill her desires without explicitly contradicting the ideals of purity and honour. As long as her relationship was kept secret she was able to avoid damaging her sexuality and also avert public scrutiny of her private desires. In that light, Virmati's transgression and her resistance can be differently conceptualized.

In Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things* and Indira Goswami's *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* the transgressive heroine is an outcast in society and they end their lives tragically signifying a protest against the unjust trials meted

out by society. Ammu and Giribala are both without husbands and hence without any masculine protection.Their relationships with men make them inclined towards caressing their hitherto buried desires.Their relationships remain unsanctioned by society and in trying to battle the stereotyped social positions in which they find themselves, they acquire a fallen status.They become transgressors and subsequently defiling generations of breeding 'brought the family to its knees'.(TGST 257-58).Their bodies were their own and this realization kept alive their capacities to dream.But society and civilization did not acknowledge their dreams and desires and to prevent them from wrecking the predictable course of convention they are wiped out very promptly.Their deaths have a double significance—they symbolized their helpless submission and also vented the author's/narrator's/ protagonist's indignation at being subjected to humiliation and strife.

In this only novel that she wrote, the writer Arundhati Roy projects " class antagonism and class exploitation in terms of caste" and includes the poor, socially rejected people of the society in Kerela within her purview.Ammu's relation with Velutha who is an untouchable triggers off an united confrontation with all representatives of the upper class and their allies—the police, the communist leader, the feudal minded elders of the family—and together they construct a savage demolition of the down trodden(Sharma and Talwar 63).Ammu's traumatic experiences,her later isolated life and her disgraceful death are all reminders of the insecurity and ostracization that the marginalized face. Indira Goswami on the other hand depicts the ignominy faced by widows in a caste/class dominated society.Giribala through her innate courage and defiance however becomes a symbol of resistance to patriarchal hierarchies. In another short story "The Offspring" by the same writer we however observe a difference in outlook and witness a harlot clinging fastidiously to her class superiority.The story, though a forceful outburst against the casteism existing in the Brahmanical society does not portray Damayanti as a resisting voice against oppressive ideologies. The writer

describes how Pitambar, a low caste *mahajan,* uses Damayanti , a widow who thrives as a prostitute, to satisfy his lust and at the same time also provide him a son which his bedridden, sickly wife is unable to.This beautiful ,young Brahmin widow who sells flesh initially agrees to the deal and accepts monetary advances, but later hesitates to conceive a child for the 'low caste' *mahajan,* and eventually aborts the foetus. This is a story that ends in a climactic pathos but fails to offer a feminist edge because Damayanti only serves to perpetuate the very prejudices that make her a victim of male lust. Being a Brahmin widow, she could not engage in any other means of subsistence and so was compelled to sell herself. She becomes a victim of male manipulations when Pitambar *mahajan* buys her services with his money and hidden from the world, enters her ramshackle hut in the darkness of the night to appease his lust.Damayanti however is oblivious to this ignominy and rather chooses to be more concerned of her high birth. In contrast however, Giribala, the Brahmin widow in *Dotaal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah* is an embodiement of feminine resistance while being entrapped in a similar predicament like Damayanti.In this novel, the writer foregrounds women's victimization, but at the same time does not portray her as submissive and docile. She makes her strive for freedom and individuality.

Mistress sees Radha grappling with dual identities-a wife and a lover- and unable to reconcile them in any way she chooses to extricate herself from both. Her marriage of convenience proves unsatisfactory. ,so does her affair and as the marriage loses its absoluteness, the novelist restructures a different mediation by fashioning Radha's identity as a mother. To a novelist writing at the threshold of the 21st century adultery should not have been a question to be severely condemned because with the concept of equal rights between the sexes gaining ground, commitment to one person is a notion that can be overlooked for a woman as well. Nevertheless, it appears that the writer is not able to reject marriage for the sake of a free union and however stifling her marriage turns out to be, Radha suffers remorse for deceiving her husband. She despises her husband but that admittance

makes her sad and the damage that her actions cause to his person, makes her remorseful as well. A sense of guilt eats into her. The novelist frames her narrative to protect marriage and present it as the acceptable face of adult sexuality .The transgressor does not become happy with an assertion of her personal freedom Instead lies and deceits and betrayals lead her to unhappiness. So Radha regains her emotional convictions neither from her husband nor from her lover but her unborn child now quiets her heart and 'fills every step and hour of hers with wonder'. With that realization, she is now a woman who can step out and face the world with conviction.

Radha is a modern woman of the 21st century, liberated in outlook and attitude. She could match her husband's rhetoric and instead of being a helpless shrieking female ,turning pale when seeing a cockroach,Radha is given to thrashing scorpions and carrying frogs in her bare hands.. She feels a sense of disquiet with Shyam ,her husband and "flowers" in the presence of Chris. She reads Kafka and Marquez and Tolstoy and explodes when she feels that her husband is treating her like a kept woman. Nevertheless, this same woman is mortified at the pretence she puts up with her husband after her affair with Chris. "I feel disgust for what I am doing. Can anything be worth this repugnance? How much longer can I do this? This cheating, lying and pretence?" (M 290). Like Anita Nair's Radha, Poteswari the erring heroine in Nirupama Bargohain's *Iparar Ghar, Siparar Ghar* too had a chequered past for which she was labeled a fallen woman and had to undergo humiliation and agony all throughout her life. Both the writers explore the image of an unconventional woman, but the implications substantially differ. Both the writers project a society where a married woman has no existence and remains invisible until she is caught in an unconventional relationship.However in the twenty first century, the societal approach to the concept of the transgressing or fallen woman has lost its pungency considerably and the writers too have articulated and shaped the images of the fallen woman against the background of their particular societies. While Radha faced turmoil

despite being an educated and modern young woman, Poteswari ,significantly, inspite of being an uneducated woman lives unperturbed facing the intermittent humiliations from society. Perhaps her struggle for sustenance makes everything else insignificant for her. Once again Bargohain seems to suggest that poverty and refined indulgence do not go hand in hand. Radha had the leisure and a refined aesthetic sense that permitted sophisticated musings. Poteswari has neither the time nor the sensibility to ponder over her past or even grudge the society's demeanor. It has to be understood from these references that the idea of the fallen woman is a powerful metaphor that is also expressive of distinctive social and political forces that oppress woman. In societies where woman have a role in production, her position is not anomalous. In low caste groups and in the lower strata of the society, morality and conventions do not have a rigid hold.So Irawaddy in *Nectar in a Sieve*, digresses with ease chooses to sell herself, but in *Two Virgins* the same writer puts Lalitha in the ranks of a prostitute for being passionately ambitious and disregarding all decorums of propriety. However,all considerations reveal a commonality that while men are classified in terms of ranked,institutional positions,

> women are simply women and their activities, interests and differences receive only idiosyncratic note...where male activities are justified and rationalized by a fine societal classification...women are classified together ..from the point of view of the larger social system, they are seen as deviants or manipulators (Rosaldo 31-32).

I cannot resist putting forward an observation made by Samarendra Saraf who elaborates on the cross cultural perceptions of womanhood in his brilliant piece of work.He re lives some of the legends of idolization and idealization of womanhood from the sphere of literature and wonders at the range of emotions that a woman's moral and spiritual qualities invoke in a man.

> What tremendous semantic load and thrust the word 'chastity' carries with it! Has not Hamlet stressed it: '...be thou as chaste as ice'? Has not the majestic Milton said: ''Tis chastity, my brother, chastity: she that has that is clad in complete steel'? Has not even the didactic Byron placed high premium on it: 'Be warm,but pure;be amorous, but be chaste'? ...Shakespeare's *Cult of Women* is no other than his superb creation of characters *in vivo* and in all too variegated moral fibre: some of them evoking pity, others contempt; some awakening horror, others disgust; some arousing shame sanctions, others adoration and idolatry (Saraf 113).

In this study I have made an attempt to look at the concept of fallenness as depicted in novels written by male and female authors. In the process of reading the narratives .I have reconsidered certain observations and revalued certain assumptions because there has been a necessity to dislodge some preconceived notions that colour the nuances of certain relationships. I have experienced the subjective of the fallen woman through the male canon of writing and observed an approach that differs greatly from the female authored work in constructing the subtle intricacies of culture and its social and moral implications. As Adrienne Rich has observed, reading through the feminist lens would often disrupt preconceived assumptions about gender relationships as we learn about power, privilege, authority, points of view and otherness. (Rich 33) So while a narrative by a male author is moulded by the traditional scales of literary and cultural judgement, a female writer often re evaluates narratives of coercion and oppression, resistance and authority and offers a perspective of female experience.While offering a critique of patriarchy, female writers well often also attempt to map out their concerns with a distinctive female subjectivity. At the same time they also show how social and cultural connotations collude to destabilize and worsen a women's predicament. Though there is a tendency to romanticize the notions of femininity yet there is also a conscious attempt at reorienting these romantic specificities to attain a steady, unwavering perspective of the conflicts between tradition and modernity, between the restrictive demands

and the liberating impulses. From this point of view, all the novels by female authors that I have dealt with in my discussion above is an exploration of the self and sexuality of their female characters. They are caught in a maze of complex cultural and emotional repercussions while patriarchal authorities invariably insisted on a denial and denigration of self worth either by a repression of their sexuality or by a redirection and expression in masculine terms only They associate themselves with the many facets of female sexuality- the joys of growing up , reaching adolescence, experiencing the ecstasy and pain of attaining womanhood, joys and burdens of motherhood, social censure for their infertility and a tarnished repute for their deeper dreams, desires and longings. Through these revelations we glimpse the woman's real state of existence, their survival in domineering circumstances and their lack of social power.

In this discussion of the fallen woman where an array of authors has been taken up, certain basic aspects come into the foreground. All these writers explore female sexuality and women occupy a central position in all these novels. The characters that are traced as deviating or fallen are different because their conduct alienates them from the other female characters. The sexual conduct of these transgressing characters is regarded unacceptable according to the dominant patriarchal conventions of the societies that are depicted in the novels. However, all the writers despite their difference in approach, share a sympathetic attitude towards their fallen women and desire to free them from their sense of guilt and their subordination to patriarchal double standards.While writers like Jogesh Das, Kamala Markandaya and Manju Kapur use transgressive sexual passion as a tool for redemption, others like Sayed Abdul Malik, Arundhati Roy and Indira Goswami emphasizes the need to transform the patriarchal power relations through a change in social attitudes. Bhabendra nath Saikia on the other hand uses female awareness of sexual exploitation to challenge and destabilize patriarchal discrimination. In all the novels there is an unobtrusive comparison of the fallen woman with the conventional woman. However, the development of the story at

some point of time forces us to shift our attention from the image of a degraded or condemned woman to the image of a woman who emerges radically strong and unscathed despite all critique of her deviance.

Perhaps, discussions on human morality tend to be the most vexing question for most individuals because the moral sense is so ubiquitous and bewilderingly complex. It varies across persons, situations and cultures and hence it is very difficult to categorize the broad distinctions or explanations of morality. Since the sense of right or wrong differs across cultures and across individuals, western societies with individualistic social forms and liberal values might not anticipate the same criteria for moral judgement employed in our Indian cultural value system. Since social situations greatly reinforce feelings of empathy ,an western audience may respond in a lower degree towards the same critique of morality. Moreover, there are changes in moral reasonings and this would account for a diversity in rules and judgement as well. It is also true that as social individuals we develop our prejudice towards others through the institutions of the society we most respect and this creates widely held opinions which are at times difficult to influence. As a member of this discerning society I have addressed the 'fallen' woman as the fallen woman not by way of subscribing to the general view or by thinking of them of them as impure or regarding them to be against the morals of society or opposed to the laws of virtue., but with the singular intention of viewing them in the same light as a hapless woman, a kind woman, a betrayed woman or a vengeful woman. Moreover, the themes and arguments of my thesis has demonstrated how particularly severe are the attitudes of ingrained social prejudice towards these women who are always libelled and stigmatized for behaviour not considered 'proper'.

We cannot always read the narratives of the fallen woman as feminist fictions. While some of the narratives offer a tacit understanding of the contradictions of femininity and compromise with the denial of dignity for those that transgress, others do not resist a protest against masculine pronouncements on

a woman's sphere –on her choice and will. A male author discovers a woman's oppression but at the same time encapsulate the image of the feminine ideal in their characters. A woman author internalizing the domain of patriarchal decree writes the conventional story of woman with romantic notions of femininity imbibed in her characters. Seldom is there an attempt to contest the hierarchical patterns of convention. While male sexuality is shown to be predatory and aggressive, women are the submissive lot. However, there are novelists some of whom are male too, who challenge the concept of the fallen and reverse the prejudice of castigating them as outcasts. Menoka, Giribala, Rosie,Champa, Morikolanthu,Ammu, Radha, are some such examples of transgressing, deviant characters. Though an assertion of female sexuality outside the sanctions of marriage is scandalous, these writers try to articulate an anarchist view which fore grounds a freedom for their characters to choose their life and love without any assumptive dictates governing their spirit. In the present society too, an unwed mother or an adulteress is considered to be a descendant of this marginalized group of women. They invoke criticism and disrepute that reflect the preoccupation with a woman's chastity and the consequences of her transgression. Therefore it is understandable why the fictional world too could not refrain from adopting a condemning stance towards the transgressing and fallen women and hence very rarely do we find the writers assimilating these marginalized characters into the mainstream society portrayed in their narratives.Whenever they do, the characters are made to go through a process of contemplation that might eventually lead them to retrace their steps.

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