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**Exploring the Impact of War-Distorted Nationalism in Arupa Patangia  
Kalita's *The Story of Felanee***

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**Abstract:**

Arupa Kalita Patangia is an Indian novelist and author of a short story. She always remains inclined to keep her fictional setting in Assam. Her literary contributions have garnered significant recognition, leading to her winning the Bharatiya Bhasa Parishad Award, the Pratibha Saikia Award, and the Katha Prize. Her literary narratives are largely built on the foundation of Assamese culture and history. She speaks out against the sufferings of women who lost their childhood and the existing insurgency in Assam. In 2014, she was awarded the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for her short story book, *Mariam Austin Othobo Hira Baraua*. Her literary contributions have been translated into many other languages: Bengali, English, and Hindi.

Arupa Kalita Patangia's *The Story Felanee*, which was translated into English by Deepika Phukan, was further short-listed for the Crossword Book Award. *The Story of Felanee* is a realistic story. This is a story of courage, strength, violence, and ethnic clashes, which inflict suffering on innocent people and distort human lives through widespread hatred and disharmony. *The Story of Felanee* is set in Assam. The novel revolves around the protagonist Felanee, which means "trash" or "thrown away," as she was disowned by her own mother in the violence-broke village. Felanee was discarded into a marshy land, and she was abandoned to die. However, Felanee bravely battled to survive in a harsh world where the dominant principle is the "survival of the fittest." Felanee experiences emotional exhaustion in the violent Assam region, where the first violence outbreak claimed her husband and home. As the atmosphere intensifies into violence, Felanee begins to live in fear, faces threats of death, and struggles to raise her son in the violence-torn Assam. This story illustrates the psychological effects of civil war on vulnerable women and children. *The Story of Felanee* highlights two key aspects: a man's adoption of jingoism to exist in a war-torn nation and a woman's heightened vulnerability to violence. Arupa Patangia Kalita questions the ethnic identity, which is uncertain and inconsistent. *The story of Felanee* explores the theme of broken psychology that gets torn apart due to unstable ethnic identity.

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**Keywords:** Violence, women, ethnic identity, Assam, marginalization

Arupa Patangia, Kailta is an academicians from the insurgent Assam; she uses her tumultuous homeland to design her literary endeavors. Arupa Patangia Kalita was born in 1956; Arupa Patangia Kalita is a prominent name in Assamese literature. Her literary contributions reflect the turbulent socio-political atmosphere, history, and culture of Assam. Further, Arupa Patangia Kalita portrays the deeper complexities of human relationships, self-introspection, and the quest for identity. She bears up incantatory narrative skills. Kalita employs non-linear narrative structure, stream of consciousness, magical realism, and social realism in her literary works. She also covers up the issues of gender stereotypes, broke-out insurgency, prolonged social injustice, and the unbearable consequences of political turbulence. Patangia has gained recognition and acceptance for her unbeatable literary contributions to the field of Assamese literature. Her books reflect the turbulent socio-political fabric of Assam. She is a significant voice in the field of Assamese literature. Her novel, *The Story of Felanee*, incorporates an element of trauma that shapes certain traits in the fictional characters and leads to their psychological impairment. The females are often silenced by violence and trauma, and the same happens with Felanee, the most vibrant character of the novel. This research paper aims to investigate the psychological, emotional, and financial hardships experienced by the masses in insurgent Assam. Additionally, it focuses on how post-traumatic disorder contributes to the progression of the plot in the novel *The Story of Felanee*. *The Story of Felanee* unfolds against the backdrop of insurgent Assam, which emerged from The Assam Separatist Movement, a series of insurgencies that sparked inner turmoil and ethnic clashes in Assam in the 1970s. This conflict began when the native indigenous Assamese people confronted the Indian government over issues of socio-political and economic disparity, as well as the increasing number of illegal migrations from Bangladesh. The massive assault claimed the lives of 12,000 soldiers from the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). Several minor organizations were accountable for the prolonged violence in Assam, including ULFA, Karbi Longri, the N.C. Hills Liberation Front (KLNLF), and the National Democratic Front (NDFB). Assamese nationalism is known to have the foundation of ethno-linguistic identity and its violence, which attacks brutally on "outsiders," but violence is stimulated by self-centric, socio-political forces that attack people irrespective of ethnic identity. "Most people had locked their homes and left. In most of the Assamese, Boro, and Bihari homes, the men remained behind while their families had left. In

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Bengali homes, even the men had gone" (Patangia:16). The prolonged insurgency and counter-insurgency in Assam have eroded the democratic foundation of this northeastern state.

*The Story of Felanee* exposes how identity politics justifies inhumanity to devastate, degrade, and malign "the other." The discourse of ethnicity frames the concept of "self" through the deception of "non-self." *The Story of Felanee* is the journey of a female who loses her counterpart, later her home; after that, she brings up her son all alone. It is a tale of resilience, survival, bravery, and insurgency, shattering Assam into numerous fragments. The militant uprising in Assam has crippled its economy. *The Story of Felanee* unfolds the callousness and disrespect for humans, the dirty play of power for electoral gain, and the horrific bloodshed.

The novel unfolds the journey of three generations of women in politically charged Assam. The Language Movement, which aimed to establish Assamese as the official language of the state, also caused difficulties for immigrants. The novel *The Story of Felanee* opens with the child widow Ratanamala, who is from an elite Maozadar family. She marries a mahout named Kinaram and establishes her life in Bhutan. The villagers discovered Kinaram's bullet-hit corpse after she died while giving birth to Jutimala. The villagers were raising Jutimala. Jutimala gets married to a shopkeeper, Khitish Ghosh; meanwhile, Assam gets hit harder by the turbulent socio-political and economic disorder, and many innocent lives are lost. Jutimala dies after giving birth to Felanee. The baby Felanee was discarded into a pond by her own mother, Jutimala; further, the child was saved by Khitish's brother, Ratan. *The Story of Felanee*, as fiction, has hit every household with the reality of violence. *The Story of Felanee excels* in the portrayal of complex human relationships. The novel is a bold and bare portrayal of the feeble and turbulent history of Assam. Felanee is the character of the periphery. Other characters in *The Story of Felanee* can also be viewed as peripheral characters, situated far from the centrality of the conventional socio-political framework. The novelist Arupa Patangia Kalita has portrayed the characters as the victims or survivors of ethnic clashes. She grows up, gets married to Lambodar Koch, and gives birth to a son named Moni Felanee. She, as well as her husband, know that they are being caught up in violence, which can impede their child's innocence.

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While the uprising was going on, Lambodar Koch met his demise. Felanee manages to flee with her son Moni. Regrettably, unforeseen circumstances compel Felanee to leave her home, and she relocates to a government-established refugee camp. The novel unfolds the journey of violence-hit masses whose lives are suddenly turned distorted by ethnic clashes. Felanee herself transforms from a native Assamese to a refugee in her own homeland, Assam; her inner desire to define her identity haunts her at every turn. For instance, when a doctor at a refugee camp who she is? she slipped down into a phase of perplexity. She begins to see glimpses of her deceased loved ones, including her grandparents, Ratanamala and Kinaram Bodo; her parents, Jutimala (an Axomiya) and Khitish Ghosh (Bengali); and her husband, Lambodar Koch. "What are you anyway?" stunned at his question, she kept gazing at him. The boy gazed back at her. Why she was taking so long to answer such a simple question, he thought. 'What are you?' Yes, she thought, what am I?" (32)

Felanee remains numb in her answer. Her consciousness revolves around her multi-ethnic identity, which is impacted by war-distorted nationalism. The only word that she answers from her shivering lips is "Human." The questions that were asked to Felanee to raise her identity were also objectified: "What are you?" despite "Who are you?"

Felanee is not embarrassed by her multi-ethnic identity, but she celebrates her diverse ethnic lineage, which makes her life difficult. Unfortunately, she becomes the target of a militant uprising, which forces her to embrace the customs and traditions of the Bodo people and to wear a Sokhna. Felanee is a Boro, an Assamese, and a Bengali because she procured these multi-ethnic traits from her antecedents, a group of extremist boys who warn her to make up with people of other ethnic communities: While rubbing the blood stain in her sador, she wandered about her ancestors whose genes she carried in her 'blood.'

Her Grandmother, Ratanamala's?

Her Grandfather, the elephant mahout Kinaram Boro's?

What about her mother? Did she have more from Ratanamala or Kinaram? And what about herself? Did her blood have stronger genes from Khitish Ghosh? And what about the man who put the baby in her lap and decorated her hair with the red singer? What about Moni's blood? (Patangia: 185)

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Critics describe Felanee as the bare narrative of the horrible hardships of the underprivileged communities, which are devastated by ethnic clashes. Further, war-distorted nationalism has disproportionately impacted women and children. Dr. Kalita excels in illustrating how war's distorted psyche affects multi-ethnic people and how ethnic ideologies imbibe the concept of "the other" or "non-self" or "non-human," thereby justifying violence, hatred, and disharmony. In *The Story of Felanee*, two senior Assam leaders propagate ethnic cleansing: "told the Assamese people to forget words like humanity, love, and compassion." (20) This humiliating approach to ethnic politics gets extended at the refugee camp, where the doctor denies treatment to Felanee, a pregnant woman ailing more with trauma and anxiety. The war doctor considers her as 'Bengali' and 'an outsider.' She becomes an enemy because she wears shelled bangles on her hands:

She held up Felanee's wrist with the white shell bangles, traditionally worn by married Bengali women and asked "is this the reason for neglecting her?" another boy in a white coat flung angry words at her, "why do you have a such a soft spot for these people?"

"Because they are human beings," she restored.

"Do you call these locusts human beings? It is because of people like you that the Assamese people are in this plight," the boy said, accusing Felanee.

The novel *The Story of Felanee* sheds light on the marginalization and forced silence of women. Tracing out the streaks of trauma in *The Story of Felanee* opens new horizons to explore the novel with a broader aspect; in this novel, different characters face variable trauma with different intensities. The presence of trauma contributes to the emphasis on the psychological aspect in *The Story of Felanee*. We consider violence and trauma as two interrelated concepts, with violence falling into two categories: physical and psychological, both of which contribute to the production of the other.

For the Assamese refugees who were consistently facing war-torn nationalism, they realized that the indoctrination philosophy of militants to build "Golden Assam" is a deception, but in fact, it is an exercise to destroy Assam in every possible way. 'Golden Assam,' 'Xunor Assam' is the widespread campaign by militants that encourages the masses to join the forces. Felanee and the other characters of *The Story of Felanee* found themselves caught between 'Xunor Assam' or 'Golden Assam.' War distorted Assam's ability to bring up her child in a peaceful way. Fear of violence haunts the novel's

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characters constantly, and the sound of bullets firing deepens their consciousness as the Bodo Movement breaks out and demands a separate state. Felanee, along with the other refugees, was forced to return to her bloodshed-hit home, which made the Assam Movement worse. Felanee confronts Bulen—the Bodo radical—when he instructs her to take out her bangles and wear the Sokhna- “wear your dress, or else you too will be finished. You will end up in ashes”. (180)

*The Story of Felanee* can also be considered an eco-critical novel. Mountains do have two representations for Felanee: it is a home for civilians, but for militants, it is the place to hide extremism:

Her (Felanee) mind was filled with the blue hills she could see in the distance. Felanee visualized the hills being cultivated and having villages and towns filled with people. There must be jungles, too. ... And what about those boys? Where did they live? They were riddled with leech bites and racked with dysentery and fever. These were boys from good homes who could have steady jobs and lived in comfort. Instead, they went from hill to hill, learning to use bombs and guns. (195)

Felanee and other Assamese regard mountains as their homes, yet during times of violence, they are viewed as a "miracle." Michael Foucault calls it "Heterotopia," which means a space that has many hidden meanings. Heterotopia means the space of "otherness," encompassing both dual mental and physical aspects. A space carries several layers with itself, such as memory, trauma, natural harbor, and people. Felanee herself is attached to hills: "The hills had called her, they really called people. They had called the boys, and they had called Bulen. Today the hills had called her; she shivered as a terrible fear gripped her body and soul". (196)

Hills in *The Story of Felanee* has various connotations for those Assamese who access it. For mutineers hills are natural veil to conceal their extremism. For Felanee mountains are premonition of devastation. *The Story of Felanee* is a realistic narrative that illuminates the struggles faced by females in their efforts to overcome patriarchy. The central theme of *The Story of Felanee* is trauma, but it also explores other subthemes such as ethnic clash, women, violence, gender disparity, patriarchy, exploitation of nature, and economic disparity.

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Patriarchy rules the life of Felanee, which is also making her suffer; she cannot afford to be liberated, and she finds herself stuck in the web of dominance. Simone De Beauvoir, in her mother's text of feminism, *The Second Sex*, states, "The woman herself recognizes that the universe as a whole is masculine; it is men who have shaped it and ruled it and who still today dominate it" (Beauvoir 639). *The Story of Felanee* is also the narrative of gender discrimination. Felanee embodies courage and strength, and her unwavering zeal prevents patriarchy from hindering her from taking a firm stance. She champions the rights of marginalized and oppressed women, ensuring their liberation.

Arupa Patangia Kalita exposes gender politics, prejudiced gender roles, degrading women's craft, and restricting women as mothers, daughters, and wives. In *The Story of Felanee*, only Felanee, Kaliboori, and Jonar Ma break the gender disparity to become individuals. They built their own shifting homes. They choose economic enterprises for survival. The role of males is limited in their lives; this shows the way Arupa Patangia Kalita has anatomized the gender roles: "The novel is the recreation of some of the most gruesome and devastating events that took place during that period both at the time of the anti-foreigner agitation and then later ethnic clashes between Assam's diverse communities." (Kalita 314)

Felanee is a single mother. Felanee, after finishing all the household chores, provides Moni with a meal and gets ready to sell puffed rice. Felanee consoles her child, "Moni, I will bring you a book today; you do not go out and stay safe at home." (67)

The moment Felanee learns the worth of economic independence, justice, and freedom, her experience teaches her how to face life; she wants to take charge of her own life. Kaliboori says, "Instead of shedding tears, women have to be like a tiny chilly to look at but real fire once in the mouth." (169) Felanee's friend Minoti finds her lover exploiting her in the insurgencies, and the man later rises to prominence as a powerful political figure. He manipulates Minoti with the dream of "a happy home in the golden state of Assam." (113). This incident reveals the way a man is ready to exploit a woman. How dehumanizing he is! How callous a man is? How can somebody afford to tear apart anybody's dream? Assamese dissenters are turned into extremists in some ways; they carry extremism in their minds, which makes the woman "the other."

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Minoti: "He used to say that this was the only person who could drive out the infiltrators from Assam. He was the only person who could change the whole face of Assam and bring progress, and then the two of us could have a happy home in the golden state of Assam..."

As they walked home amidst the turmoil, a scene in the corner of the road shocked them an elderly man was arguing with a group of boys...." you must take back your words about the future of the Assam Accord".

(Old Man) "No, I won't. I tell you, nothing is going to come of this Accord."

(Boys) "Why not? It is traitors like you that talk thus!"

(Old Man) "your leaders will be busy amassing wealth: Assam will soon become a graveyard."

(Boys)...." Beat him up."

(Boys) "Finish traitors" (114)

Insurgencies bring contempt, too, in the communities where people are taught to hate each other. The conversation between Felanee and the doctor shows the growing contempt in the heart of the masses, the way violence is making people dead at heart. The Assamese lady who comes to a refugee camp. Felanee feels disheartened, and that lady badly condemns the Assamese leaders for propagating ethnic hatred just to gain power.

"Your revolutionary leaders want to lord over the common people to sit on thrones and deprive them of their hard-earned money. You people call for blackouts in the name of the revolution. There will come a time when Assam will have a perpetual blackout; do you understand?" the woman was trembling in rage, with his hands raised, and one of the boys came charging at her. She, too, walked upon him aggressively. "Yes, come along! What do you want to do? If you kill me, it would be like killing an ant. You want to break that person's skull and throw him onto the road. You want to destroy anyone who wants to take Assam on the path of advancement. Your leaders are playing this game in order to enjoy princely comforts at the cost of Assamese people!" (31)

Insurgent Assam claims the lives of many innocent people. Felanee tries to empower other subordinate women. She transforms their lives from "struggles" to



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"survivors." She teaches them the value of being free. All the women are gathered, and they become ready for their men to be free from imprisonment. Kaliboori Jon's mother, Minoti, Felanee, and Ratna's mother together state:

"We have come to take our men back to their homes" (244)

The term "boys," which is consistently used in Felanee, refers to young militants who are conditioned to be extremists. There is an instance in the novel. *The Story of Felanee*, in which a group of young militants rebukes Felanee for standing with a Bengali couple. They argue that Assam is their own land; they want it to be free from non-Boros, but Felanee, whose Grandfather was a Boro, has to bear the repercussions of their aggression. "Mind you, these people will have to go from here; you will unnecessarily get a raw deal along with them." (184)

Felanee remains shocked:

"Where will the people go? Who will live in their independent land? And who will live in Bulen's state? What will they divide? Could they decide the sky over their heads? Will they divide the waters in the rivers: the trees, land, the people?... Will these boys?... What about the fragrance of the flowers? Would all communities be allowed to enjoy their fragrance? She could find no answer in her heart" (185)

Insurgency in Assam had brought lots of damage to public spaces. Baruah opines: "Counter insurgency operations in contemporary Assam include public execution of suspected rebels by Indian soldiers often in front of villagers and sometimes even in front of their family members...As if the audience were made to watch the re-emergence of arcane and violent forms of sovereignty..." (Baruah: XII)

Arupa Patagonia Kalita has raised the question behind the devastation: Why is there a constant urge from revolutionaries to have a separate land? What is the motive behind it? Where is the government in this crucial time? Mutineers constantly want Assam to be free from immigrants; the Bodo movement also cried out for the same thing: that Assam has to be free from 'hegemony,' that is, 'outsiders.' The most affected people by war are women and children who undergo the trauma of war distortion as the passive absorbers, while males are the active contributors to violence. *The Story of Felanee* has trauma as the central theme. Trauma evolves the women characters in this

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novel; their identities are shaped and reshaped. Mehta and Shah expressed their feelings in an interview about the sufferings of unheard-of women. "She believes the riot was instigated by a leader of a communal political party... government fails to arrest antisocial, and the police remain passive." (Mehta and Shah 2523)

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