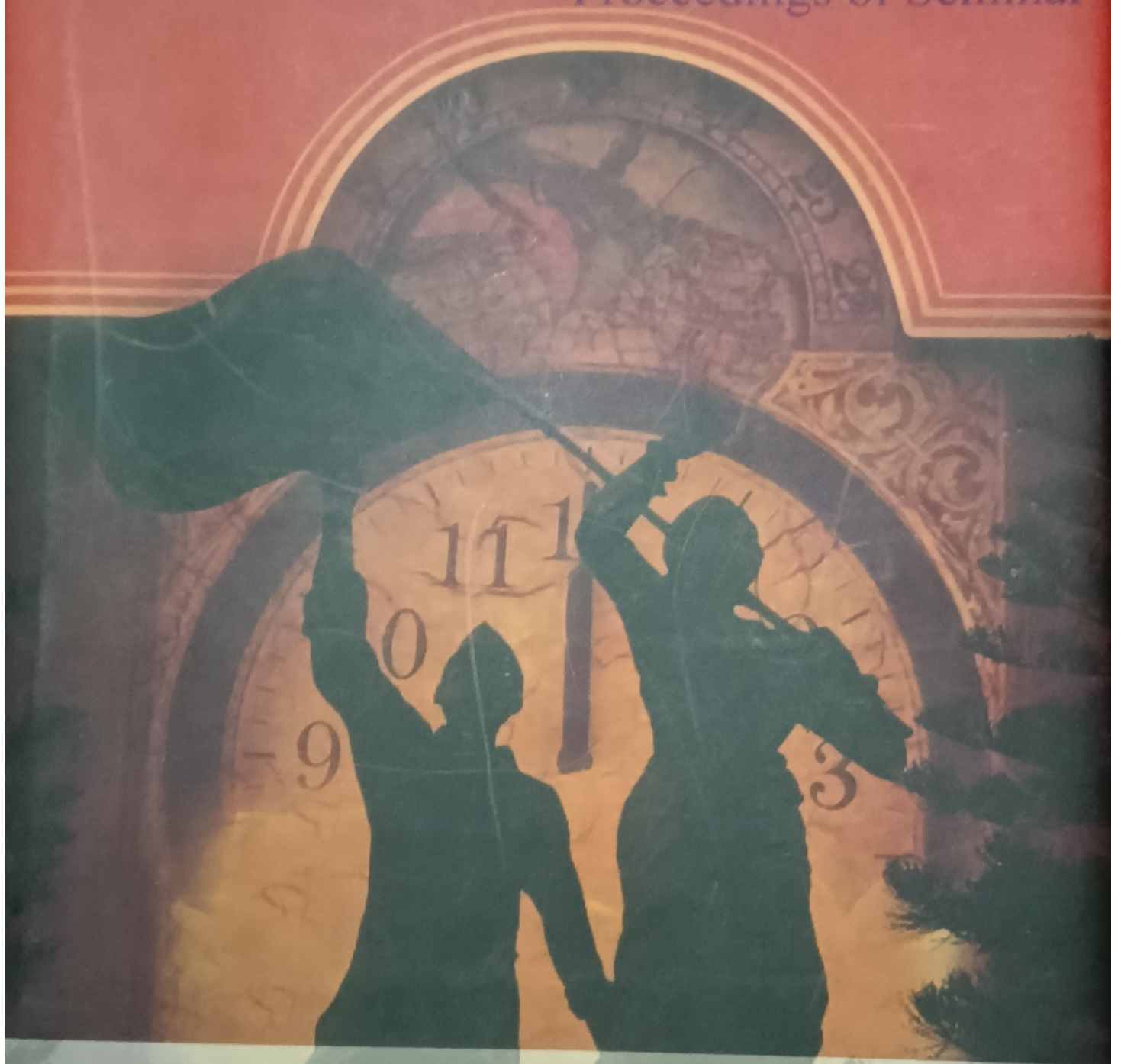


# INDIAN FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN NORTH EAST INDIA: ACKNOWLEDGING UNSUNG HEROES

VOL - II

Proceedings of Seminar



*Srijon Sahitya Chora*

Digboi Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Digboi

**EDITOR**

**DR. ABUL FOYES MD MALI**

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# Unveiling Fortitude: A Narrative Exploration of Women Empowerment, Liberation Movements, and Societal Metamorphosis in Nirupama Borgohain's *Abhiyatri*

Gagan Talukdar  
Dr. Krishna Kalita

## Introduction

In the contemporary milieu, the paramount discourse of our era gravitates towards the women's liberty revolution, an epochal narrative that has come to embody the quintessence of societal transformation. Through the annals of history, entrenched in the bosom of customary perspectives and societal reforms, men propagated a paradigm that relegated women to a subordinate status. Concurrently, women, mirroring this outlook, internalized these perceptions, casting their creative endeavors and literary expressions as mere byproducts of a male-centric ethos.

Yet, after enduring epochs of subjugation, women have, in a resolute act of emancipation, risen against the shackles of discrimination, thereby securing for themselves a distinct and rightful niche within society. The focal point of our discourse revolves around the concept of Women Empowerment, elucidated through the prism of the contemporary novel 'Abhiyatri' by Nirupama Borgohain. Nirupama Borgohain is one of the most prominent women voices in Assamese literature. She was born in Guwahati, Assam on 17th March, 1932. She attended Cotton College, Guwahati and Calcutta University from where she received postgraduate degrees in English literature and Assamese. She worked as a lecturer of English at various colleges. She was the first Assamese novelist to deal with feminism consciously through her novels like *Anya*

Jivan, 'Sei Nadi Nirabhadi, Abhiyatri, Iparor Ghar Hiparor Ghar, Champavati, etc.

The rationale underpinning the selection of this theme lies in the pioneering role played by Chandraprabha Saikiani, who emerged as the vanguard of Assam's women's liberty revolution. Chandraprabha Saikiani, transcending the confines of gender norms, actively engaged in politics, charting a course that mirrored the aspirations of women for liberty. Her indomitable spirit and accomplishments not only positioned her as a symbol of modern womanhood but also catalysed the feminist movement in Assam. The literary opus 'Abhiyatri' by Nirupama Borgohain serves as a biographical canvas, portraying the life of Chandraprabha Saikiani. This novel not only chronicles the pre-independence societal status of women but also delves into their participation in the freedom movement and the establishment of the Women's Association of Assam.

Moreover, the narrative unfurls the colossal persona of Chandraprabha Saikiani, showcasing her arduous endeavors to elevate women to a plane of equality with their male counterparts. In essence, this paper endeavors to explicate the concerted efforts that have shattered age-old societal norms, empowering women to transcend traditional constraints. Employing a descriptive methodology, this discourse aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter, underscoring the transformative journey of women from the peripheries of convention to the zenith of empowerment.

The literary opus 'Abhiyatri' intricately weaves its narrative around the luminous lives of Chandraprabha, also known as Chandrapriya, and her sister Rajaniprabha, acclaimed as Rameshwari, hailing from the recesses of a remote village in the verdant expanse of Assam. Emanating from humble origins, these prodigious women traversed the arduous path of education, fervently dedicating themselves to the advocacy of women's rights and liberty. Within the rich tapestry of this novel, seminal themes unfold, not merely empowering the women of a bygone era but resonating with a timeless resonance that reverberates in the empowerment of contemporary women.

The thematic discourse, nuanced and profound, delineates various facets that coalesce into a formidable argument for women's emancipation. Foremost among these articulated points is the pivotal discourse on women's education and the societal perspective that has historically encumbered its progression. In the grand mosaic of nations, where the female populace often outnumbers its male counterpart, the imperative for a nation's development lies in the empowerment and education of its women. An edifice of progress, according to this narrative, is insurmountable without the foundational bedrock of women's education. Historically, women found themselves relegated to subordinate roles, shackled by societal norms that dictated their confinement to household chores, perpetuating a cycle of ignorance and subjugation. The didactic echoes of Mahatma Gandhi reverberate, positing that the true mark of an educated family lies in the education of its women—a sentiment echoing the fundamental right of women to education, a right comparable to that of men.

Swami Vivekananda, in his sagacious pronouncements, elucidates the indispensable role that women play in the edifice of societal greatness. According to him, a society bereft of respect for women is destined for mediocrity, for every woman embodies an inherent potency, a reservoir of power capable of steering the destinies of nations. The narrative then unfurls the significant contribution women make in organizing communities and nations. An educated woman, it contends, becomes an agent of empowerment, a catalyst for societal progress. Post-independence, various educational commissions and committees were seen to give priority to female education. The Radhakrishnan Commission, 1948-49 recommended for separate curriculum for boys and girls to equal salary for male and female teachers. In the same line, the Mudaliar Commission suggested for including Home Science, Art and Music in the curriculum for girls and also for setting up girls' school. Even a National Committee for Women Education was set up in 1958 chaired by Durgabhai Patel and which specifically aimed at development of female education. The Hansa Mehta Committee (1962-64), appointed by the National Council of Women's Education (NCWE) suggested co-education be adopted as the general pattern at the

elementary stage and vigorous propaganda was made in its favour. The NCWE appointed another Committee under the chairmanship of M. Bhaktavatsalam in 1963 to investigate the cause for lack of public supports for education of girl's particularly in rural areas and to suggest suitable measures to secure public cooperation. Based on the recommendations of the Kothari Commission, 1964-66, the National Policy on Education 1968 stated that the education of girls should receive emphasis, not only on ground of social justice but also because it accelerates social transformation. All such measures and their recommendations were surely instrumental in dismantling barriers obstructing women's education, emphasizing vocational, technical, and professional training.

In the crucible of this socio-educational landscape, the figure of Chandraprabha Saikiani emerges as a paragon of resilience and determination. The novel poignantly captures her relentless pursuit of education, surmounting societal impediments and entrenched gender biases. At a tender age, she assumed the mantle of a torchbearer, breaking the shackles that confined women to domesticity, and passionately endeavoured to impart knowledge to her female peers. Her embodiment of fortitude did not escape the notice of her brother-in-law, who, in admiration, extolled, "Little Chandra! How burdensome a load you carry upon your petite shoulders. Truly, there exists no parallel to you in the entire cosmos." In the evocative prose of 'Abhiyatri,' the challenges faced by women in their pursuit of education and the societal paradigm that historically constrained their intellectual aspirations are rendered with exquisite finesse. Amidst the socio-cultural strictures that relegated women to the sphere of domesticity, Chandraprabha Saikiani emerges as a beacon of defiance, charting an inspirational course toward the empowerment of women through education.

### **Conclusion**

The metamorphosis of Chandrapriya to Chandraprabha bears immense significance in the life of the protagonist of the novel. Chandraprabha, a girl from a remote village of Bajali with a resolute determination dreamt to break the boundaries of her world. She wanted to demolish

the hurdles, odds and difficulties on her way by means of education, rational ideas thereby expanding the mental horizon of her time. Her marriage, though it was an illegitimate for the society could not squeeze, shatter and destroy her life. She stood tall and fought all the odds. Chandraprabha Saikiani can be called a feminist. Undaunted she carved her own life which in turn becomes an inspiration and milestone for the posterity. The narrative of the novel is successful in captivating the unravelling spirit of the protagonist of the novel. The novel 'Abhiyatri' and the life of Chandraprabha Saikiani as well call for more exploration and study on the subjects like female education, women empowerment, subjugation and women's life, etc.

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