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The Problem Of 'Home' In Arupa Patangia Kalita's *Felanee*

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Abstract:

The concept of home is frequently defined as a place of residence, typically a house or stable location. Scholars across disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, history, human geography, and philosophy have examined this concept extensively. In the modern Anglo-European context, home is often associated with the family house, symbolising a formative “place of origin” and “return” (Mallet, 63). Postcolonial perspectives expand this understanding to encompass instability and memories shaped by nostalgia, sentiment, and trauma. Feminist writers of the 1970s and 1980s have identified the home as a site of oppression and patriarchal control. For many diaspora writers, home represents both longing and an irretrievable place. This paper investigates the concept of ‘home’ as it pertains to internal diaspora communities (IDPs) in the North-East, specifically evaluating whether home is best understood as a static place, a personal location, or an imagined space in Arupa Patangia Kalita’s novel *Felanee*.

Keywords: IDPs, Home, Northeast, trauma, post colonialism

I.INTRODUCTION:

Defining home solely as a physical dwelling or shelter addresses only one aspect of the concept. Shelley Mallet, in her essay "Understanding Home: A Critical Review of the Literature," argues that home is a multidimensional concept and highlights the need for multidisciplinary research in home studies, given the term's diverse and sometimes contradictory meanings. This complexity can be explored by examining the term ‘house’ across various cultural and historical contexts. John McLeod, in *Beginning Postcolonialism*, asserts that home plays a significant role in individuals' lives, providing “a sense of our place” in the world and indicating origins and a sense of belonging. Personal and familial experiences significantly influence social change and the understanding of home. Shifts in employment patterns, organisational structures, work locations, wealth distribution, and evolving ideas about community, family, and the good life all affect the notion of an ideal home. Within this context, the present paper analyses the concept of ‘home’ as it applies to internal Diaspora communities, focusing on internally displaced people (IDPs) in India and the North-East. It examines the socio-economic and political factors shaping IDPs' perceptions of home and homeland, and considers how home is defined locally. Some researchers describe home as a private space that may or may not

be tied to a specific location. This paper evaluates whether home is best understood as a static place, a personal location, or an imagined space in Arupa Patangia Kalita's novel *Felanee*.

Internally Displaced People (IDPs) are individuals forced to leave their homes but remain within their country's borders. Although sometimes called refugees, they do not meet the legal definition. Globally, an estimated 20–30 million IDPs present a significant crisis, straining humanitarian relief and national sovereignty. Unlike refugees, IDPs often receive less attention, and governments are frequently reluctant to address their needs.

Displacement is caused by internal armed conflict, economic problems, and natural disasters. IDPs of all ages face harsh living conditions and have trouble meeting basic needs. A 2016 UN report states that India has 2.8 million IDPs, mostly displaced by development projects, conflict in Jammu and Kashmir and the North-East, the Naxal issue, and natural disasters like floods. The North-East stands out because its displacement is different from that in other regions. The area was once sparsely populated, but now many ethnic Bengali Hindus and Muslims have come from Bangladesh and West Bengal. This has brought more competition for land and jobs and increased tensions among ethnic minorities and migrants. Ongoing conflict leads to frequent military presence, and the North-East has long seen guerrilla warfare. Unlike the bloody violence in Bangladesh's break from Pakistan or in Kashmir and Punjab, conflict here often centres on ethnic groups seeking homelands and autonomy. More illegal migration and refugee settlements have increased distrust and fears of being pushed aside. The biggest displacements have happened in Assam, Manipur, and Tripura. Assam witnessed its largest displacement due to the Bodo-Santhal conflict in the 1990s. Insurgency is still rising, with new groups forming even as others sign peace accords. The Assam agitation created anti-national and anti-migrant feelings, and ULFA came out of the anti-foreigner movement against Bangladeshi settlers. Violence and calls for new states or greater autonomy now shape the region's politics.

The concept of home for IDPs is similar to that of diaspora communities living abroad. While diaspora communities settle outside their country for generations, IDPs remain within their borders but are uprooted from their homes. For first-generation diaspora, home is often imagined, disconnected from current reality, and remembered only in fragments. Their sense of home shifts, challenge the idea of home as a single, stable place. For IDPs, the meaning of home is complex and varies by state and individual experience. Unlike refugees, IDPs may have the option to return, but ongoing conflict and unresolved disputes often prevent this. For many, home exists only in memory, marked by loss, violence, and insecurity, leading to feelings of rootlessness and identity crisis. M.J. Holton, in *Longing for Home: Forced Displacement and Postures of Hospitality* (2016), discusses how forced displacement disrupts individuals' connection to home and fosters deep social alienation. Memories of home are often nostalgic and emotional, and any analysis of home provokes strong feelings and debate. For IDPs, recalling home directly affects their present reality.

Felanee (2011) by Arupa Patangia Kalita examines the problems faced by IDPs in the region. The novel is set during India's independence and the refugee and migration crisis in Assam. It gives details of the Assam agitation against foreigners and the anti-Muslim and anti-Bengali violence. These events triggered insurgency and led to demands for Bodoland in the 1960s and 1990s. Felanee, the main character, is born to a Boro mother and Bengali father. She marries a Koch. When pregnant and with a seven-year-old son, Moni, her calm life is ruined. Her husband, Lambodar, tells her to pack and leave by morning because the village will be attacked. Felanee cannot accept this loss. Her world is built around the home her husband made. She wants to bring all she can—the star fruits, bananas, roses, and the fish-filled ponds.

“She was quondary-where could she go? How could she go to her husband's home which she had neither visited nor seen before? She belonged to a different community, and was a widow-would they give her shelter?” (*Felanee*, 43)

With a vague fear gripping her: the past incident, the attack, the drum sound, the burning of flesh. Everyone seems to be going away from the camp, leaving only the undesirable lot behind. Where should she go? She wonders. Where were her people? She was an orphan: "Should she go with Moni to Mauzadar's home? (her grandmother ancestral home) Would not they provide her two square of meals, a corner to sleep in? But then, how would she introduce herself? What would she say?

No one seems to claim her. Someone asks, "Who are you? Who is she? Does she not have an identity? A khitish? A Boro? A Bengali? A Koch?" All she remembers is that she is just a human being. Felanee prepares to move. Bulen is leaving the camp for a new settlement. He is distantly related to Kinaram, her grandfather. Bulen has greatly supported them in the camp. How will she manage alone? Her future feels blank. She must decide:

"Where will I go?" she asked in a small voice

"Why? You'll go to the same settlement as us..."

"What about the land?" (52)

She doubts she can survive out there without her husband or anyone else's support. She had to be bold and courageous. With the share of tin sheet allotted to them by the government, Felanee left the camp with Bulen and his family, wife Sumala and son, to the new location with fear and a gloomy future lingering ahead. She had to do this for her and her son Moni's survival. This vacant land stood on the bank of the river Radhika, which had its source in the Bhutan hills. It was the Rabha village, where there were some Nepali, Bengali and Assamese settlers. He first impression of the settlement on Felanee was:

"All the roofs had similar bamboo slats and bricks on top and the same number of sheets. People inside the huts also look alike. It seemed as though cyclone had hit a colony of ants and they were trying to built new anthills."(55)

Most of the camp's residents moved to the settlement, having been evicted by floods, wild animals, hunger, or violence. The settlement offered them a new beginning and hope. Bulen built a small house for himself and arranged a room for Felanee with an elderly woman known as "Kali Boori," one of the first evictees to arrive. Felanee, with no income or support, felt deep anguish and loneliness. She missed her husband, whose presence had always comforted her. She imagined the touch of "rough hands on her shoulder" and a voice saying, "why must you cry, Malati? Don't carry on so!...I am not dead." With only five rupees left in her shawl, she wondered if leaving the camp was a mistake. At least there, she had a roof and a weekly rice quota, even if the rice was sometimes of poor quality.

Felanee faced significant hardship as she struggled to secure basic necessities alongside other settlers. They worked diligently to meet their daily needs. Felanee assisted Kali Boori by selling moori and cleaning the temple. She also became a vendor, moving from house to house to sell moori (puffed rice) in the locality, often accompanied by other women from the settlement. She managed to enroll Moni in school. Although violence initially seemed distant in this settlement, it soon encroached upon their lives. Following the signing of the Assam Accord and the approach of elections, many leaders who had organised the agitation arrived to campaign for votes. Felanee felt no desire to see these leaders, as she had already endured enough. A familiar fear gripped her. She vividly remembered the night when, while hiding with Moni in dry banana bark, she witnessed the murder of a tall, strong leader who was caught in a net and stabbed to death by villagers as an act of revenge, with "jets of blood" gushing from his body. After that incident, their village was completely devastated. She shuddered when recalling those traumatic days.

In the novel, the Assam accord and election did not go well with some sections of society. Dissension began within the political group, and the leader of the underground group ULFA emerged. Many young men join the group. Minoti's Prince Charming joins the group, too. An atmosphere of fear and mistrust prevails. Something worse is coming. There were demands for money, more killing, and more murder in broad daylight. The settlement became a ground for killing. Most of the victims were traders and moneylenders from different communities. The police and army cordoned off the area. More killing, bomb blasts, and curfew were imposed; everything was not the same again.

II. CONCLUSION:

Kalita portrays the harsh reality of mass displacement, showing how individuals are left without rest or a place to call home. Felanee and her village are forced to leave everything behind due to political unrest and communal violence. The loss of a stable home deepens feelings of isolation and displacement. Despite these hardships, Felanee demonstrates resilience and the ability to adapt and grow. Her story reveals how displacement and identity crises shape individual lives. Kalita's novel examines the complex nature of ethnic identity during the Assamese conflict, challenging the notion that identity is solely determined by family background. Felanee's experience highlights the instability of ethnic identity and emphasises her fundamental humanity. The novel vividly depicts the suffering of both men and women during violence, including the loss of family, homes, and livelihoods. Homelessness, especially for women, causes deep emotional and psychological distress, affecting individuals and the wider community. Through Felanee's story, Kalita highlights the violent changes in Assam during the late 1970s and the struggles of those made refugees within the state, drawing attention to major social and political issues in Assamese society.

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