



AS A RESISTANT ENTITY: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE FEMALE CHARACTER MENAKA IN DR. BHABENDRA NATH SAIKIA'S NOVEL ANTARIP

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Abstract:

This paper examines Menaka, one of the central characters in Novel Antarip. Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia occupies a distinct place among the established storyteller, novelist, playwright, essayist and film director at the same time. His Landscape novels are only four in number. The Novel "Antarip" is a favorite of every reader for its depth of thought, Subtlety of Observation and fascinating prose style, Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia is concerned about the position of women in Society. They are shown protesting against the atrocities. The novel shows the unusual but strong protest of women against the authoritarian rule of men our society for centuries and this protest is made by the heroine "Menaka". This paper attempts to analyze the protesting character of Menaka, the heroine reflected in the novel 'Antarip' by Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia

Keywords: Antarip, Bhabendra Nath Saikia, Menaka protest, Novel

1. Introduction

Dr Bhabendra Nath Saikia, one of Assam's most celebrated literary figures, is known for his sensitive portrayal of human relationships, particularly the nuanced inner lives of women. In Antarip Saikia constructs a psychological landscape where his characters struggle between societal expectations and personal desires. Menaka stands at the Centre of this struggle, embodying the quiet turbulence of a women negotiating identity in a world determined by patriarchal norms.

Studying Menaka as a resistant entity reveals how Saikia uses subtle realism to reflect broader themes: autonomy, emotional repression, dissatisfaction and moral courage.

2. Objective of the study:

Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia, who started writing novels as a student, is a storyteller, playwright, novelist, essayist, children's writer and film director. The novel based on the story a wealthy family in a pre-independence town in Assam. The novelist paints a picture of the male dictatorship at the time. The Paper is designed to show how the main female character of the novel 'Antarip', Menaka protests against such feudal rule.

3. Study Methods:

This paper is prepared in an analytical manner using the novel "Antarip" by Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia as the main source and some reference books as secondary sources.

4. Menaka's Social Position and constraints:

There are many female characters in Assamese literature but the most widely discussed is the character of Menaka. Menaka is in a sense a symbol of fundamental protest in terms of the independent rights of women who have been oppressed for centuries in a patriarchal society. Menaka is a unique work of Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia born into a cultured family. Menaka was a strange personality.

4.1 Patriarchal Norms:

Menaka exists within a society where a woman's value is often tethered to:

Marital Loyalty

Domestic responsibility

Emotional endurance and sacrifice

4.2 Emotional Labour and Silence:

Menaka as a woman who internalizes conflict rather than vocalizing it, Her Silence, however, is not passivity; it becomes a space of observation and self - reflection an internal rebellion against the noise of societal dictates.

5. Menaka as a Resistant Entity:

During the period of writing the novel *Antarip*, it was not uncommon for men to marry second or third time, what is unusual is how Mohikanta's wife Menaka reacted. Menaka's female mind, softer than flowers, became harder than Braj this time. Menaka's protesting nature is first clearly seen when Mohikanta's prevents her from going to his mother's Shraddha at Mohikanta's brother Ratnakanta's house and Menaka insists, "I will go when I decide to go, tell me how it feels to live with my wife. I can't sit in a crowd." (Page 256 Dr Bhabendra Nath Saikia's Novel) The conversation between Mahikanta's and Menaka clearly reflects Menaka's protesting nature, Menaka wanted to take revenge on her husband. And so she abandoned her morals and secretly met Madan in the back garden, who had come to steal from her house, Menaka said to Madan with pain and anger to take revenge Mohikanta "My body has aged that's why so many things happened. Then I will have to explain if its old isn't just me." (Page 271, Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia's novel)

Unlike the Stereotypical submissive wife, Menaka does not pretend to be fulfilled Her internal dissatisfaction, though quietly expressed, is a refusal to accept imposed happiness. She resists by:-

Withholding emotional surrender,

Not allowing her individuality to disappear into her marital identity, questioning the moral authority of societal norms, Menaka makes choices rooted in integrity and self-respect. Even where her decisions appear conventional, they are often the outcomes of deep personal negotiation rather than blind adherence to norms. This moral autonomy distinguishes her from characters who remain unquestioningly bound by societal expectations.

Menaka is crafted not as an idealized woman, but as someone deeply human—emotionally sensitive, morally conflicted, intelligent, empathetic, and capable of intense introspection. Her strength lies not in loud gestures but in her capacity for self-awareness and emotional honesty.

a. Emotional Depth and Self-Reflection:

Menaka's internal monologues and reflections reveal a woman acutely aware of her circumstances. This self-awareness itself becomes a form of resistance, because women in patriarchal structures are often expected "not to think beyond their roles". By recognizing her unhappiness, her desires, and the contradictions of her relationships, Menaka asserts the legitimacy of her inner life.

b. Refusal to Accept Emotional Marginalization:

In her interactions especially with the male characters; Menaka quietly asserts that her feelings matter. Whether she chooses to distance herself, question motives, or remain silent, these gestures contribute to an ongoing resistance against being emotionally sidelined.

c. Complexity in Morality:

Menaka does not conform to the archetype of moral perfection imposed on women in traditional narratives. Her moral compass is self-forged, shaped by experience rather than rigid social doctrines. This nuanced morality allows Saikia to present her as an agent of her own choices, rather than a passive subject of social norms.

6. Symbolic Dimensions of Menaka's Resistances:

Menaka can be read symbolically as:

i) A critique of societal expectations of womanhood

ii) A representation of emotional re-silience

iii) And on embodiment of inner strength distinguished as compliance.

Menaka represents a form of resistance that does not depend on dramatic acts, but on interior strength. Her resilience comes from:

➤ emotional intelligence

➤ critical thought

➤ self-awareness

➤ moral courage

In doing so, she offers a new template for female agency in modern Assamese literature.

Symbolism and Thematic Significance.

Menaka's presence in "**Antarip**" carries symbolic weight.

a. Menaka as the "Interval" (Antarip):

The title "**Antarip**" can be read symbolically as the emotional and moral gap between societal expectation and personal truth. Menaka embodies this gap. She stands at the threshold between compliance and autonomy, between tradition and selfhood.

b. Menaka as a Mirror:

Menaka mirrors the emotional emptiness of people around her. Through her, Saikia exposes the moral shallowness of patriarchal society and its inability to understand women's emotional needs.

c. Menaka as a Catalyst:

Although she does not seek to change others, her presence forces other characters to confront their own limitations, hypocrisies, and emotions. She triggers introspection, making her a subtle catalyst for transformation.

7. Conclusion:

The author Bhabendra Nath Saikia paints a picture of a house wife from a wealthy family in the thirties of the fortieth century in his novel "**Antarip**", Menaka as a representative woman of Assamese society who goes to take revenge on her violent husband Mohikanta. There are many reasons why women who think they have done good in life have suffered the painful consequences, The empty experience of life has made a loving, Tender and very simple women like Menaka as hard, brave and stubborn as a rock. In the novel "**Antarip**" the herein Menaka's unusual and bold protest destroys the pride and arrogance of the protagonist Mohikanta. The novel "**Antarip**" is a wonderful work of Bhabendra Nath Saikia and is rich in poetic qualities such as narrative style, simple language, metaphors and rhetoric.

Menaka in Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia's "**Antarip**" is not a revolutionary in the conventional sense. She does not shout, protest, or radically break away from societal structures. Yet she stands firm as a resistant entity, quietly subversive, emotionally intelligent, morally aware, and self-reflective.

Her resistance lies in:

- ❖ her refusal to be emotionally erased
- ❖ her subtle defiance of patriarchal expectations
- ❖ her commitment to emotional authenticity
- ❖ her inner strength and self-respect

In portraying Menaka, Saikia demonstrates that resistance is not always loud; sometimes it is found in the gentle assertion of selfhood against forces that seek to diminish it. Menaka's journey in "**Antarip**" thus becomes a profound study of how women negotiate identity, autonomy, and dignity in restrictive social structures.

Ultimately, Menaka stands as one of Saikia's most compelling female characters an emblem of quiet resilience and an enduring symbol of feminine agency within Assamese literature.

Thus, Menaka becomes not only a character but also a symbolic representation of countless women whose quiet resistance reshapes their inner worlds and subtly, the society around them, Saikia's nuanced portrayal ensures that Menaka's Struggle remains timeless and universally resonant.

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