

## Exploring Identity and Emotional Turmoil: A Thematic Analysis of *Aghari Atmar Kahini* by Syed Abdul Malik



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**ABSTRACT:** Syed Abdul Malik's *Aghari Atmar Kahini* (A Tale of Homeless Soul) is a compelling exploration of identity, emotional turmoil, and existential crises, reflecting the complexities of human relationships within Assamese society. This research paper provides a thematic analysis of the novel, focusing on the protagonist's psychological struggles, marital discord, and the broader philosophical implications of self-discovery. Through its deeply introspective narrative, the novel presents a conflict between tradition and individuality, where characters grapple with their desires, regrets, and emotional alienation.

The paper examines Malik's nuanced portrayal of strained marital relationships, particularly the tensions between Aparajita and Niranjan Khaund and Sasanka Choudhury's intervention. The novel metaphorically represents human restlessness and the search for meaning, portraying life as a journey filled with introspection and disillusionment. The use of symbolic imagery, such as space and movement, reinforces the theme of existential wandering, making the protagonist's struggles a universal reflection on human dissatisfaction and longing for emotional fulfillment.

By analyzing the narrative structure, character development, and philosophical undertones of *Aghari Atmar Kahini*, this paper seeks to highlight Malik's contribution to Assamese literature and his engagement with modernist themes of alienation and identity crisis. The study also positions the novel within the broader discourse of existential literature, drawing parallels with global literary traditions that explore similar themes. Ultimately, this research emphasizes how Malik's novel transcends its regional setting to address the universal human condition, making it a significant work in Indian literature.

**KEYWORDS:** Identity crisis, Emotional turmoil, Existentialism, Assamese literature, Marital discord, Symbolism, etc.

### INTRODUCTION

Syed Abdul Malik (1919–2000) remains one of the most celebrated figures in Assamese literature, known for his deep engagement with themes of identity, morality, and human emotions. His novel *Aghari Atmar Kahini* (translated as *The Tale of the Homeless Soul*) stands as a testament to his literary prowess, offering a profound exploration of the conflicts between personal desires and societal norms. Through its intricate narrative structure, the novel presents an intense psychological and emotional struggle experienced by its protagonists, particularly in the context of love, marriage, and social expectations. This study aims to explore the themes of identity and emotional turmoil in *Aghari Atmar Kahini*, analyzing how Malik crafts a narrative that resonates with universal human experiences.

Set in post-independence Assam, the novel intricately portrays the changing social dynamics of the time. The story revolves around Aparajita and Niranjan Khaund, whose marriage is marked by emotional estrangement, leading to complex interpersonal relationships with other characters. Malik's depiction of their psychological conflicts and moral dilemmas reflects the broader struggles of individuals trying to reconcile traditional values with evolving social structures.<sup>1</sup> The characters in the novel are not mere representations of an era; they embody the universal themes of love, alienation, and the quest for self-discovery.

One of the significant aspects of *Aghari Atmar Kahini* is its portrayal of women and their agency within a patriarchal society. Aparajita, for instance, struggles between her sense of duty as a wife and her emotional needs, reflecting the constrained roles imposed on women.<sup>2</sup> Malik's treatment of female characters highlights the silent suffering and inner conflicts that often remain unaddressed in traditional narratives. His nuanced storytelling allows readers to engage with the characters' inner worlds, making their struggles and dilemmas deeply relatable.

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Additionally, the novel delves into the theme of existential crisis, where characters find themselves in a state of inner homelessness. The title itself—*Aghari Atmar Kahini*—suggests a wandering soul in search of meaning and belonging. The protagonist's emotional turmoil is reflective of the larger human condition, where personal aspirations often clash with societal expectations.<sup>3</sup> Through his narrative style, Malik effectively captures this tension, making the novel a timeless piece of literature that transcends its regional context.

This paper seeks to analyze how Syed Abdul Malik weaves these complex themes into his novel, making *Aghari Atmar Kahini* a significant work in Assamese literature. By exploring the intricacies of identity formation and emotional struggle, this study will highlight how Malik's novel serves as both a mirror to Assamese society and a broader reflection on the human experience. Through a thematic analysis, this research will shed light on how the novel contributes to the discourse on individuality, morality, and emotional resilience.

### Syed Abdul Malik as a Novelist

Syed Abdul Malik (1919–2000) was a prominent Assamese novelist, short story writer, and playwright whose works significantly contributed to modern Assamese literature. He was a prolific writer whose literary career spanned several decades, during which he produced a vast body of work that explored the sociocultural and psychological aspects of human life. His novels, deeply rooted in Assamese society, often dealt with themes of identity, morality, social justice, and the emotional complexities of human relationships.

Malik's literary journey began in the early 1940s, and over time, he emerged as one of the most influential writers of his era. His narratives were characterized by their deep psychological insight and a nuanced portrayal of human emotions. His novel *Aghari Atmar Kahini* (*Tale of the Wandering Soul*) remains one of his most significant works, addressing existential dilemmas and the conflict between personal desires and societal norms. The novel's exploration of love, morality, and emotional turmoil makes it a landmark in Assamese fiction.<sup>4</sup>

Another notable work, *Rongmilir Hanhi* (*The Smile of Rongmili*), delves into the challenges faced by marginalized communities, showcasing Malik's commitment to highlighting social inequalities.<sup>5</sup> His narratives often depicted Assam's diverse cultural landscape, incorporating characters from various social strata and ethnic backgrounds. This inclusive approach set him apart from many of his contemporaries and solidified his reputation as a socially conscious writer.

Malik's writing style blended realism with elements of modernist literature, making his works both engaging and thought-provoking. His ability to capture the essence of Assamese society while addressing universal themes earned him widespread acclaim. In recognition of his literary achievements, he was honoured with several prestigious awards, including the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1972 for his novel *Aghari Atmar Kahini*.<sup>6</sup>

Briefly speaking, Syed Abdul Malik's contribution to Assamese literature is invaluable. His novels not only reflect the socio-cultural realities of his time but also resonate with broader human experiences. Through his intricate character portrayals and profound thematic explorations, he remains a towering figure in Indian literature.

### Thematic Analysis of *Aghari Atmar Kahini*:

Syed Abdul Malik's *Aghari Atmar Kahini* is a compelling novel set against the socio-political landscape of post-independence India, with a particular focus on Assam. This period was marked by significant transitions as the country moved from colonial rule to an independent democracy. However, with this newfound freedom came challenges such as corruption, moral decay, and the relentless pursuit of power. These issues permeated all levels of society, from ordinary citizens to the elite, shaping the social and political fabric of the time. Malik's novel captures this period of disillusionment, portraying a society struggling with deteriorating values and increasing ethical compromises.

The narrative explores the growing moral ambiguity in politics, where leaders once seen as symbols of justice and freedom succumb to self-interest and corruption. Many, driven by greed, sought control over administrative systems, prioritizing power over ethical governance. The erosion of moral and legal principles created an atmosphere of lawlessness, leading to the decline of social integrity. *Aghari Atmar Kahini* serves as a powerful critique of this societal transformation, shedding light on the consequences of unchecked ambition and moral decay.

At the heart of the novel is Shashanka, a young man who becomes a symbol of resistance against these corrupt forces. He is the third son of Manmath Choudhury, a wealthy tea estate owner and minister in Assam, whose character embodies the negative transformation of power and influence. In contrast, Shashanka stands as a figure of moral integrity, deeply disturbed by the unethical actions of those around him.

A pivotal moment in the novel occurs during Shashanka's childhood when he accidentally injures Aparajita, a young girl, during a traditional game known as *tang-guti*. The injury leaves her partially blind, profoundly affecting both their lives. Although

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Manmath Choudhury ensures that Aparajita receives medical treatment and recovers, this incident sets the stage for a complex relationship between Shashanka and Aparajita, symbolizing the fragility of innocence and the burdens of fate.

As the story unfolds, the moral contradictions within Manmath Choudhury's character become more apparent. Despite already being married, he becomes infatuated with Aparajita's mother, a widow, and desires to make her his concubine. His intentions reflect the exploitation of vulnerable individuals by those in power, a recurring theme in the novel. Shashanka, witnessing his father's moral corruption, is deeply affected and resolves to uphold his own ethical standards. He vows to marry Aparajita if no one else comes forward, ensuring she is treated with dignity and respect.

The novel delves into Shashanka's inner turmoil as he struggles with the actions of his father and the state of society. When he learns of his father's intentions toward Aparajita's mother, he is filled with anger and revulsion. Determined not to be complicit in his father's immoral actions, Shashanka openly confronts him and refuses to accept his wealth or privileges. In an act of defiance, he leaves his father's home and chooses to live with his maternal uncle, rejecting the corrupt world his father represents.

Shashanka's journey is symbolic of the broader conflict between idealism and a world tainted by moral and ethical decline. His decision to distance himself from his father's influence highlights his unwavering commitment to justice and integrity. Throughout the novel, his character represents the struggle of individuals attempting to navigate a society where personal ambition often overshadows moral values.

Through its vivid characters and thought-provoking narrative, *Aghari Atmar Kahini* offers a powerful commentary on the moral and social dilemmas faced by individuals in post-independence Assam and India. Malik masterfully weaves a tale of emotional and ethical conflict, making the novel a timeless exploration of human nature. The struggles of Shashanka and Aparajita resonate beyond their immediate context, reflecting universal themes of justice, honour, and resilience in the face of adversity.<sup>7</sup>

As the narrative of *Aghari Atmar Kahini* unfolds, the transformation of Aparajita into a young woman is marked by her struggles with societal expectations and the manipulation of those in power. Mriganka Choudhury, the second son of the influential minister Manmath Choudhury, embodies the moral decline that plagues the elite. Living a life of privilege in Guwahati, he indulges in luxury, using his family's influence to conceal his questionable actions.

Determined to entrap Aparajita, Mriganka devises a deceptive plan under the guise of offering her cultural training. He approaches her mother, Sharnalata, presenting a financial proposal that would ensure Aparajita's involvement. This offer, framed as a respectable opportunity, is a calculated move to gain the mother's trust while disguising his true intentions. Lured by the promise of financial stability, Sharnalata accepts, unaware of the underlying deception.

As Mriganka manipulates his way into Aparajita's life, he simultaneously develops an infatuation with Rachana, a college student whose beauty and social standing appeal to him. Torn between his desire to marry Rachana and his ongoing exploitation of Aparajita, he engages in a secretive affair with the latter under the pretence of fostering her cultural education. The imbalance of power in their relationship becomes evident, with Mriganka taking advantage of Aparajita's innocence and trust.

The situation takes a dire turn when Aparajita realizes she is pregnant. Fearful of the repercussions and determined to protect his reputation, Mriganka fabricates a plan to eliminate any trace of their affair. He persuades Aparajita to accompany him to Mumbai, presenting the trip as an opportunity for her to enter the film industry. Blinded by hope and ambition, she agrees, unaware that his true intention is to arrange for an abortion.

In Mumbai, Mriganka ensures that the procedure takes place, showing no regard for Aparajita's emotional or physical well-being. The experience leaves her devastated and alone, while Mriganka remains focused on his ambitions. Upon returning to their hometown, he distances himself completely, assuming a managerial role in his father's tea estate and abandoning Aparajita without remorse.

Left to cope with the emotional aftermath of betrayal and loss, Aparajita finds herself alone in a society that offers little support to women in her position. Mriganka's cold indifference highlights the extent of exploitation within a patriarchal system where power and privilege dictate moral boundaries. Through this tragic sequence of events, Syed Abdul Malik presents a stark critique of societal corruption and the devastating consequences of manipulation and deceit.

Aparajita's journey serves as a poignant exploration of female vulnerability in a male-dominated society, where aspirations are often sacrificed to fulfil the selfish desires of the powerful. Her story encapsulates themes of betrayal, exploitation, and the struggle for autonomy within oppressive social structures. *Aghari Atmar Kahini* thus stands as a profound reflection on the human condition, shedding light on the socio-political realities of post-independence Assam and the enduring struggles of women seeking agency in an unforgiving world.<sup>8</sup>

In *Aghari Atmar Kahini*, Shashanka Choudhury's life takes a transformative turn as he embarks on a journey to redefine his identity and purpose. Determined to build a career in law, he moves to Kolkata, distancing himself from his past. There, he adopts a discreet lifestyle as a paying guest in the home of Sadananda Yoshi, a compassionate and childless Marathi man who has

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taken a young girl named Chaya under his care, raising her as his daughter. Over time, a profound connection develops between Shashanka and Chaya, eventually blossoming into love.

However, their budding relationship faces obstacles imposed by Sadananda, who sets strict conditions regarding Chaya's future. He insists that she will only marry once she reaches an appropriate age and demands that both she and her future husband remain by his side, eventually inheriting his estate. While Shashanka deeply cares for Chaya, he is unwilling to compromise his independence and self-respect by accepting these conditions. This internal conflict leaves both him and Chaya in a prolonged state of uncertainty, torn between love and the need for autonomy.

Their fate takes a tragic turn when Chaya secures a position at the American embassy and moves to the United States. The physical and emotional distance between them proves overwhelming, and after three years, Chaya, unable to bear the separation, takes her own life. Devastated by this loss, Shashanka returns to his hometown, seeking solace in work. He establishes a car garage, hoping to rebuild his life and regain a sense of stability, but the pain of his past love lingers, casting a shadow over his attempts at moving forward.

In a parallel narrative, the novel introduces Niranjana Khound, a man of strong values and deep love for his homeland. Aware of Shashanka's past connection with Aparajita Barua, Niranjana approaches him before marrying her, seeking his blessing. Initially, their marriage appears harmonious, offering both partners comfort and security. However, their happiness is short-lived when Aparajita confesses her past romantic entanglement with Mriganka Choudhury. The revelation shatters Niranjana's emotional equilibrium, leaving him grappling with feelings of betrayal and disillusionment.

As the weight of this confession bears down on him, Niranjana finds himself struggling to reconcile his wife's past with their present relationship. The emotional strain creates an unbridgeable distance between them, replacing the joy of their early days with a growing sense of unease and detachment. Concerned for his well-being, his friends encourage him to immerse himself in public service, suggesting that he take up a leadership position as the secretary of the local Congress committee. They hope that political engagement will provide him with a renewed sense of purpose and help him cope with his inner turmoil.

Through its intricate web of relationships and emotional upheavals, *Aghari Atmar Kahini* presents a poignant exploration of love, loss, and the search for self-identity. Shashanka's journey underscores the struggle between personal aspirations and societal constraints, while Niranjana's turmoil highlights the lasting impact of past relationships on present realities. As these characters navigate their paths through a world marked by moral dilemmas and personal sacrifices, the novel delves deep into the human experience, capturing the resilience and vulnerabilities of individuals striving to find meaning in an ever-changing socio-political landscape.<sup>9</sup>

In *Aghari Atmar Kahini*, the intricate web of familial relationships and romantic entanglements is explored through the lives of the Choudhury family. Shashanka Choudhury's elder brother, after marrying a local woman, decided to settle in London, where he established a successful life. While he flourished abroad, the rest of the family in Assam faced their own set of challenges. Although their father's tenure as a minister had ended, their financial position remained relatively stable. However, this stability did not shield them from the internal conflicts that shaped their lives.

Against this backdrop, Mriganka Choudhury, the second son, was entrusted with the management of the family's tea estate, located about 16 to 17 miles from Aparajita Barua's residence. This new role not only gave him professional responsibilities but also rekindled his past connection with Aparajita, who had remained an important figure in his life. As Mriganka became increasingly involved with her, he began to neglect his managerial duties. His growing distraction led to operational inefficiencies, and over time, the estate suffered significant financial losses.

Mriganka's extravagant spending and lack of oversight resulted in a financial crisis, with losses exceeding one lakh rupees. Concerned about the deteriorating situation, Shashanka, though hesitant to involve himself in his brother's personal affairs, recognized the need for intervention. Seeking a legal perspective, he consulted an advocate, Mr. Hamidur Rahman, to understand the possible consequences of Mriganka's mismanagement and its impact on the family business.

Understanding the urgency of the matter, Shashanka decided to meet Niranjana Khound, Aparajita's husband, to discuss the repercussions of Mriganka's actions. He aimed to explain how the tea estate's financial troubles had escalated due to Mriganka's negligence and hoped that Aparajita, upon realizing the gravity of the situation, might reconsider her involvement with him.

However, to Shashanka's dismay, Aparajita remained steadfast in her commitment to both her husband and Mriganka. She expressed her inability to sever ties with either man, revealing the depth of emotional bonds that made her situation even more complex. Her response left Shashanka feeling frustrated and powerless, as he found himself caught in the web of conflicting loyalties and personal sacrifices among those he cared for.

This episode in the novel underscores the broader themes of identity, personal responsibility, and the enduring consequences of romantic entanglements. Shashanka's efforts to mediate the situation highlight the challenges individuals face

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in balancing duty, love, and self-preservation. Through his struggles, the novel presents a compelling exploration of human relationships set against the shifting societal landscape, ultimately questioning the weight of obligations and the cost of personal integrity in an ever-evolving world.<sup>10</sup>

As *Aghari Atmar Kahini* progresses, a pivotal event unfolds when Niranjan Khound, Aparajita's husband, is involved in a tragic car accident during an official tour organized by the revenue minister. The incident sends shockwaves through the community, especially affecting Shashanka Choudhury, who shares a complicated history with both Niranjan and Aparajita.

Upon learning of the accident, Shashanka is overcome with concern for Aparajita, recognizing the emotional turmoil she must be enduring. The gravity of the situation, coupled with the uncertainty surrounding Niranjan's condition, compels him to act without hesitation. Driven by an innate sense of responsibility and lingering personal ties, he rushes to find Aparajita, determined to offer her his support in this distressing moment.

Without delay, Shashanka and Aparajita set off for the hospital where Niranjan has been admitted. As they navigate the roads, an unspoken tension fills the space between them. The urgency of their mission is undeniable, yet beneath it lies a complex mix of emotions—anxiety, nostalgia, and the weight of their intertwined pasts. The journey forces them into proximity, stirring memories that had long been buried yet never truly forgotten.

As they drive through the city, the atmosphere inside the car becomes charged with unresolved emotions. Thoughts of Niranjan's condition are at the forefront, but the past lingers in the periphery, complicating their feelings. The journey itself becomes symbolic, reflecting their internal struggles as they grapple with their responsibilities, their history, and the unspoken bond that continues to connect them.

Upon arriving at the hospital, reality crashes down upon them. The sterile walls and the hushed urgency of the medical staff serve as stark reminders of the fragile line between life and loss. As they wait for news of Niranjan's condition, they are forced to confront not only the immediate crisis but also the deeper truths of their relationship. Their shared concern for Niranjan momentarily eclipses personal conflicts, yet it also intensifies the emotional undercurrents that have long existed between them.

This moment marks a turning point in the narrative, bringing to light the intricate dynamics of love, duty, and personal sacrifice. The accident serves not only as a catalyst for action but also as a lens through which the novel explores the complexities of human relationships. Through Shashanka and Aparajita's journey to the hospital, *Aghari Atmar Kahini* delves into themes of loyalty, the unpredictability of fate, and the emotional dilemmas that arise when personal histories collide with present realities.

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In *Aghari Atmar Kahini*, Syed Abdul Malik intricately weaves the theme of the "homeless soul," portraying the emotional turmoil and societal struggles experienced by individuals in post-independence Assam. Through the narrative of Shashanka Choudhury and Chaya, the novel explores love, loss, and the quest for identity in a world marked by uncertainty and shifting values.

Shashanka, the youngest son of Minister Manmath Choudhury, falls deeply in love with Chaya, the foster daughter of Sadananda Joshi, a kind-hearted Marathi man in Kolkata. However, Chaya's life takes a tragic turn when her work with the foreign ministry forces her to leave for America. Unaware of her true heritage and struggling with a sense of displacement, she finds herself consumed by sorrow. The weight of her emotional isolation eventually drives her to take her own life, leaving Shashanka devastated.

Shashanka later recounts this tragic love story to Aparajita Barua, the wife of his friend Niranjan Khound, during a visit to their home. As he reflects on his past, he is reminded not only of his lost love but also of his childhood connection to Aparajita. A lingering memory resurfaces—the accident that impaired her vision—a reminder of how their lives have been intertwined through fate and misfortune. In this moment, both Shashanka and Aparajita confront the burdens of their past, weighed down by experiences that continue to shape their present.

Aparajita's journey is defined by her resilience in the face of hardship. Having grown up amid financial struggles, she is further burdened by societal judgment following her ill-fated involvement with Mriganka Choudhury. Under the pretence of providing cultural training, Mriganka deceives and seduces her, exploiting her trust and vulnerability. Later, using the allure of a career in cinema, he takes her to Mumbai, where she is coerced into terminating a pregnancy that results from their relationship. Stripped of support and left emotionally shattered, she attempts to move forward, yet she finds herself unable to sever ties with Mriganka, who, in the meantime, shifts his affections toward Rachana, a college student from an influential background.

Aparajita's predicament serves as a broader commentary on the struggles faced by women in a patriarchal society. Her story illustrates the tension between personal desires and societal expectations, highlighting how women are often denied agency over their own lives. Her relationship with Mriganka encapsulates themes of love, betrayal, and power dynamics, shedding light on the ways in which external pressures shape individual destinies.



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Through *Aghari Atmar Kahini*, Syed Abdul Malik vividly captures Assamese society in the years following independence, portraying its evolving social, political, and economic landscape. The novel delves into the ethical dilemmas and struggles of its characters, revealing a world rife with corruption, materialism, and shifting moral values. Malik portrays individuals who, in their search for meaning, either succumb to despair or seek liberation without fully engaging with the challenges that surround them.

Ultimately, the novel serves as a meditation on the fate of "homeless souls"—individuals who, despite their longing for belonging, remain emotionally adrift, constrained by personal tragedies and societal forces. Malik's exploration of love, loss, and self-discovery offers a thought-provoking perspective on the human condition, making *Aghari Atmar Kahini* a poignant and insightful reflection on the complexities of life and identity.<sup>12</sup>

An in-depth analysis of Syed Abdul Malik's novels reveals that his works are richly layered with themes that deeply resonate with the human experience. One of the central motifs in his narratives is the exploration of romantic love. Malik presents love in its many forms, examining not only its passion and joy but also the pain, betrayal, and emotional turmoil that can accompany intimate relationships. His characters grapple with the complexities of love, reflecting the diverse and multifaceted nature of human connection and the challenges people face in their pursuit of closeness and emotional fulfillment.

Alongside romantic love, Malik's novels engage extensively with pressing social issues, providing a critical perspective on the societal structures of his time. His works address significant concerns such as poverty, gender inequality, and the struggles of marginalized communities. By highlighting these societal challenges, Malik encourages readers to reflect on the injustices and disparities that shape individuals' lives, emphasizing the importance of empathy, compassion, and social awareness in a world that is often defined by inequality.

Malik's writing is also marked by a deep focus on intense human emotions. His characters are richly developed, and readers are invited to engage with their internal struggles, joys, and sorrows. This emotional depth allows the characters to resonate with authenticity, as their experiences reflect the emotional complexities that people encounter in their own lives. By capturing the nuances of human feelings, Malik's narratives transcend simple storytelling, offering a profound exploration of the human condition.

In addition to exploring individual emotions and social issues, Malik also brings to the forefront the lives of notable personalities, imbuing his stories with historical and cultural significance. His portrayal of these figures, whether they are celebrated for their achievements or for their personal challenges, highlights the intersection of individual lives with broader societal and historical contexts. Through these characters, Malik paints a vivid picture of human aspirations, struggles, and triumphs, enriching his work by situating personal stories within larger cultural narratives.

Syed Abdul Malik's novels stand out for their skilful exploration of love, social issues, human emotions, and the lives of significant individuals. Through these interconnected themes, he crafts narratives that are not only captivating but also thought-provoking, prompting readers to reflect on the complexities of life and the factors that influence human existence. Malik's ability to weave these elements together offers a powerful literary experience that continues to resonate with readers, securing his place as a significant figure in Assamese literature and beyond.<sup>13</sup>

In *Aghari Atmar Kahini*, Syed Abdul Malik delves into the theme of forbidden love and complex relationships, with a particular focus on the character of Aparajita. Throughout the story, Aparajita engages in an extramarital affair with Mriganka Choudhury, which raises significant moral and ethical questions. Her affair highlights a disconnect between her personal desires and her obligations to her husband, Niranjana Khound, challenging the traditional ideals of marital commitment and loyalty.

Aparajita's progressive mindset allows her to question societal conventions, and the roles women are expected to play within them. Despite her affair, she does not consider divorce, revealing her internal conflict and ambivalence toward the institution of marriage. The novel offers a critical view of the existence of illicit relationships, particularly within elite families, where personal gratification often takes precedence over moral integrity. This tension between individual desires and social expectations provides a sharp commentary on the complexities of human relationships, especially within the context of societal pressures and family dynamics.

In contrast, the character of Shashanka Choudhury represents a rejection of this moral ambiguity. Disgusted by the moral compromises within his own family, he makes the decisive choice to leave his home, refusing to be part of an environment where ethical standards are disregarded. His departure symbolizes his resistance to the pervasive immorality and the hollow nature of family life under such circumstances. This act of leaving serves as a counterbalance to Aparajita's choices, highlighting the clash between societal norms and personal integrity. Through these contrasting characters, the novel explores the complexities of loyalty, ethical values, and the challenges of navigating personal desires within a larger societal framework.

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### DISCUSSION

Syed Abdul Malik's *Aghari Atmar Kahini* is a deeply introspective novel that explores the complexities of identity, emotional turmoil, and the intricate relationships that define the human experience. Through the lives of its characters, especially Aparajita and Shashanka, the narrative examines the struggle between societal expectations and personal desires, delving into the tension between moral integrity and emotional fulfillment. This thematic exploration offers insights into the human condition, particularly in post-independence Assamese society, where traditional values clash with modernity.

One of the central themes of the novel is the search for identity, particularly in the context of personal desires and societal constraints. Aparajita's extramarital affair with Mriganka Choudhury serves as a manifestation of her internal conflict. She is torn between her marital obligations to Niranjan Khound and her emotional and physical attraction to Mriganka, who embodies a modern, rebellious figure. Aparajita's journey highlights her ambivalence toward traditional norms and the roles imposed on women in her society. She does not consider divorce as a solution, yet her affair with Mriganka is a clear indication of her struggle to assert her autonomy within a system that limits her freedom.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast to Aparajita's emotional turmoil, Shashanka Choudhury's character represents the pursuit of moral clarity and self-respect. Unlike his family, who indulge in moral compromises and exploitative relationships, Shashanka's departure from his father's home is a stand against the prevailing culture of indifference to ethical values. His decision to leave signifies a rejection of the hypocrisy surrounding him and a desire to reclaim his sense of self.<sup>15</sup> Shashanka's journey emphasizes the conflict between personal ethics and societal expectations, highlighting the emotional turmoil that arises when individuals are forced to choose between personal integrity and family obligations.

The novel also delves into the emotional depth of its characters, exploring the psychological effects of their decisions. Aparajita's affair and the subsequent consequences of her actions result in a profound sense of alienation and despair. She is caught in a cycle of emotional conflict, unable to reconcile her desires with her social role. This emotional upheaval is further exacerbated by her isolation, both physically and emotionally, from the very people she is supposed to rely on for support. Her emotional distress reflects the broader theme of personal disillusionment in a world where societal expectations often overshadow individual needs.<sup>16</sup>

Shashanka's emotional journey, on the other hand, is marked by a deep sense of disillusionment with the moral decay he perceives within his family. His decision to leave is both an escape from the emotional chaos of his environment and a quest for inner peace. Through Shashanka, Malik highlights the emotional toll of living in a morally ambiguous world, where the search for identity is often fraught with pain and uncertainty.<sup>17</sup>

In conclusion, *Aghari Atmar Kahini* is a profound exploration of identity, emotional turmoil, and the complexities of human relationships. By juxtaposing the experiences of Aparajita and Shashanka, Malik highlights the tension between personal desires and societal expectations, offering a poignant commentary on the emotional and moral struggles that define the human experience. The novel's exploration of these themes provides valuable insights into the nature of identity and the emotional challenges faced by individuals in a changing social landscape.

### CONCLUSION

Syed Abdul Malik's *Aghari Atmar Kahini* provides a compelling exploration of the complexities of identity and emotional turmoil within the context of Assamese society. The novel intricately examines the emotional struggles of its characters, particularly Aparajita and Shashanka, as they navigate the tension between societal expectations and personal desires. Aparajita's extramarital affair with Mriganka Choudhury exemplifies her internal conflict as she grapples with the constraints of tradition and the allure of modernity, highlighting the theme of self-discovery in the face of moral ambiguity. Her journey reveals the emotional anguish that arises when individual desires clash with the roles imposed by society, especially within the context of gender expectations.

In contrast, Shashanka's character embodies the pursuit of moral integrity and self-respect, representing a counterpoint to the moral compromises of his family. His decision to leave his father's home reflects a rejection of the hypocrisy surrounding him and a quest for personal identity. Through Shashanka, Malik underscores the emotional toll of seeking autonomy and authenticity in a world dominated by familial and societal pressures.

Ultimately, *Aghari Atmar Kahini* offers a poignant commentary on the universal struggle for identity and emotional fulfillment, reflecting the broader human experience. The novel invites readers to reflect on the complexities of love, loyalty, and moral responsibility, providing a profound exploration of the emotional landscapes that define human relationships. Through its deeply human characters and their emotional journeys, the novel remains an important work in Assamese literature, offering insights into the timeless themes of personal growth and moral dilemmas in a changing social world.

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