All that glitters...

Is the Arundhati Gold Scheme a boon or bane?

Gold, it seems, is being understood as a symbol of marriage. But is ‘gold’ central to weddings in our State? It was never so in Assam, at least. Here gamosa, tamulpaan, mekhela-sador, kahi-bati, and other essential items are given to a bride for her convenience as she begins a new phase in her life. These will now be less attractive in comparison to gold. Women will be further commodified in the marriage market.

The use/access/control on the role of gold or its equivalent cash must be in the hands of the young adult woman. However, the reality is different, as a woman generally remains under the control of her family, both natal and marital, who will eventually decide and manipulate the fortune of the tola of gold during or post-marriage. There is every possibility of manipulation of certificates related to age, marriage, education and even the bills related to the purchase of gold. Women are not recognised as agencies of their own. So, a scheme with the best intentions, as claimed by the government, may remain defeated in the long run and render women disempowered.

Rather, the Rs. 800 crores annually earmarked for the scheme must be allotted to make safety plans for women in public and private spaces which are accessible, affordable and functional for all women and girls, especially the most distressed women. The amount must, instead, be invested in initiatives like helplines, legal aid, institutional care services, safe streets, transport and workplaces, etc., and incentives in education and literacy, literary clubs, sports, fine arts, technical skills, promotion of non-conventional livelihoods, health care, building women's capacities to participate in public and political life, etc.

Will ‘Arundhati’ make women ‘glitter in gold’?