



Women Empowerment in Post-Independence Bharat: a feminist reading of Indira Goswami's An unfinished Autobiography.

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Abstract

One of the most reputed and distinguished Assamese writer Mamoni Raisom Goswami popularly known as Indira Goswami wrote her life story Adha Lekha Dastabez (1988) along with other short stories and novels. It was originally written in Assamese but later translated into English as An unfinished Autobiography in 2022 by P. Kotoky. Goswami's works focuses on several facets of women's empowerment in post-Independence India. Her stories deal with the lives of women and their problems. In a world of women there is no derth of women who act like agents of Patriarchal society and try to pass on its rules and regulations to the generations to come. Aware of this fact Mamoni Raisom Goswami therefore has brought forth this issue of women empowerment through some of the strong female voice of her novel be it her own voice in her autobiography, An unfinished Autobiography or any other voice. The portrayal of these characters have left a deep imprint on our mind and provides some clues to think about these orthodox elements prevailing in the society. This paper tries to explore how Goswami depicts the complex nuances of marginality and focus on women empowerment, which was started by the novelist much before the concept has been popularized.

Keywords:- Patriarchal, women empowerment female voice, orthodox . An English translation of her Assamese book, this autobiography exudes a quiet courage with which she faced the tormenting pain and desolation she suffered since childhood .Coming from Indira, who says, "without my pen, I will die," the book is both fascinating and repelling in its honest and sincere approach to life. There are many aspects of her writing. As a young women she found tragedy and pain whereas she was born to happiness and privileged. Performing an act of self-withdrawal she came out stronger with the realization of a map social problems relating to women. She has realized the very fact that women's historiography has always been contested domain and therefore she puts an effort in recovering the female voice and their subjectivities in reproducing an alternate history. But puting voice into her female characters she has made an attempt to acquire a space for them, which has been denied to them in their family and society.

In her autobiography Goswami recalls how she shuts herself in a small room and

contemplated suicide and how her only sustenance was the memory of a carefree childhood and the letters of her father. This novel was originally written in Assamese but later translated into English as *An unfinished Autobiography* in 2022 by Prafulla Kakoty. The novel is divided into three parts and the reading of them comes out to be a very interesting endeavor. The first part of the novel entitled, "Life is no bargain" deals with the childhood days which extends up to the unfortunate death of her husband. The second part which entitles, "Some Memory Lane" describes how she took to the profession of teaching in Goalpara Sainik School so that it could be a solace from the tragedy of her life i.e the irreparable of her be love husband. The third part of the novel entitled, "The City of God" gives us a glimpse not only of Indira's life spent in Vrindavan but also presents a contradict picture of the place that she had formed in her mind before paying a visit to this place. It is in this part Goswami throws light on the various attempt made to defeminize and desexualize widows at that time. Being a widow means the loss of beauty and charm of life for an Indian Women. The sense of being beautiful breathes it last with the death of her husband. Does her love for bindi, kajal and lipstick blow away suddenly with the death of her husband???..... Or is it a double life that she has to lead after being a widow. Confronting these ideas that the people at Goswami decides to lead a life on her own terms and conditions instead of looking for the social conventions and traditions. As much as the person suffers, the more experienced he becomes in life. This is what exactly the case with Mamoni Raisom Goswami .She is always found wrapped in an elegant red saree bordered in gold.

In this part of the novel Goswami talks about the treatment of her widow aunt in the family. She remembers how the Brahmin widows told their daughters, "Touch her not, no, you must not! Only recently she widowed. She carries in her the pollution of sin" (56). Her aunt was supposed to be "seated on a wooden plank during Ambubachi" (50). Thus, Goswami tries to bring forth the pathetic picture of the Indian widow, of that time, who didn't have any other option but to subjugate under male patriarchy while dealing with the issue of widowhood. Goswami turns into a feminist and recognizes her collective identity as a women and as a widow. Her voice is not of protective but sarcastic when she speaks on behalf of the community of the widow sisters not only of Vrindavan but of the nation at large.

It is not only the issue of widowhood that Goswami dealt with in her novels but there are many other issues related to women which comprises the substance of her novels. Indira Goswami's personal narratives and herfiction offer a carefully drawn continuum of social change. The setting of her novels may be of early 20th century but the sociological implications are absolutely current. Hindu patriarchal traditions have often got away with justifications about oppressive gender practice by claiming that "women are worshipped as goddesses" hardly leaving any option to complain about. The tribute to the pedestal and the brutality at home are the contradictions that show up in social space today and have led to the widespread protest against domestic violence. Goswami probes the cause, the rituals, and the unquestioned "beliefs" which perpetuate oppression. "The common thread in Indira Goswami's immensely diverse and rich oeuvre is the concern for women. In her personality and in her work this is echoed multifariously. I see no contradiction – only a holistic expression of India's many challenges to women empowerment into creative form "says Maharshi Lal. Her tools for engendering social

change were the written words.

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