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### INDIRA GOSWAMI'S *THE UNFINISHED AUTOBIOGRAPHY*: MELANCHOLIC DOOM OF WIDOWS IN THE TRAP OF CREDENDA

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**ABSTRACT:** Goswami's works focuses on several facets of women's empowerment in India. Her stories deal with the lives of women and their problems. Her book *Neelkantha Braja* was one of the earliest works of Indian literature to highlight the exploitation of destitute widows in Brindavan. The plight of widows in Hindu society, oppression, suppression and exploitation of girls were main themes of her novels. The paper seriously attempt to bring out the melancholic doom of widows in the trap of credenda of Indira Goswamy's autobiography.

**Key words:** Love, marriage, sex and widow

Indira Goswami was known as Mamoni Raisom Goswami and popularly as Mamoni Baideo. She was an Assamese editor, poet, teacher, scholar, professor, writer and peace adorer. Her works are published in Assamese and English. She was encouraged by Kirti Nath Hazarika who published her first short stories. Her work *The Moth Eaten Howdah of a Tusker* is considered as one of the best works in Indian literature. It is a classic in Assamese literature and about the plight of Brahmin widows in Sattras of Assam. Amrita Pritam regarding *The Moth Eaten Howdah of a Tusker* says that "Indira Goswami is one of those rare souls who have been able to get an insight into the great power which is working behind this universe. In turn the endeavor to grapple with that finds reflection in this book and lends strength to it...This power that this metamorphosis has bestowed upon her has now become a matter of pride for every Assamese women" (vi). Goswami got the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983 for the novel *The Rusted Sword*. Her novel *Pages Stained with Blood* is about the bloody anti-Sikh riots in Delhi. She focuses on the problems of women from different aspect. Regarding Indira Goswami, Preeti Gill says, "... to me she was very much a feminist writer stating her views strongly and effectively in story after story and engaging with the social injustices and the inequalities she encountered" (Goswami, 2012: 121).

There are a few Indian women auto-biographers who have given about their regional language. She is one among them. Her autobiography *Adhalekha Dastaveja* which was published in 1988 and later on it was translated into English as *The Unfinished Autobiography*. A journalist called Homen Borgohain invited her to

write an autobiography of her in his weekly newspaper 'Nilachal.' She wrote under the pen name Mamoni Raisom Goswami. Many people think that autobiographies are only commercial but it is not true always. They are written to describe the writer's experiences in a sincere way. Sodhi (1999: 13) rightly says that "It is a revelation and a "re-creation of the self." It is very important for women writers, as they have faced uncountable problems from society such as gender discrimination, oppression and sexual exploitation. Women writers wanted to show their problems to male domineering culture. The women autobiography is an autobiography which reveals the unfolded feelings of inner hearts of women which can't be uttered orally in high traditional Indian society. She did not simply project her own experience on others. She has given a candid voice to the grief and loneliness of widowhood in her memoir. She examined the social and psychological deprivations of widowhood. She says in the introduction of the book: "I have tried to show how the mental and physical state of a young widow takes a different shape and how this change affects her life after her widowhood."

## II

*The Unfinished Autobiography* is divided into three parts. First part 'Life is No Bargain' deals with her life since her childhood days spent in Shillong up to the unfortunate death of her husband. The second part 'Down Memory Lane' covers how she had taken teaching profession in Goalpara Sainik School to defeat her loneliness. The last part of the book entitled as 'The City of God' is important one that gives her life spent in the unpleasant and unhygienic conditions of the city of Vrindavan.

Goswamy studied in a school at Shillong called Pine Mount School and graduated from Cotton College with Major in Assamese Literature. When she becomes an adult, her physical changes attracted male members in the society. She has observed others gaze and their gestures. It is very dangerous thing to talk with boys and have love or sexual relationship for the girls of the Vaishnavite Brahmin society. She frankly accepts that she is a beautiful girl and many young boys like to gaze her. She says: "True, of lovers and admirers and well-wishers I had no end, but I had not been to bed with any of them" (14). Her early life is with full of depression and she attempted suicide. She met a young engineer when she went to university for higher studies. He is Madhevan Raisom Iyengar who came to Assam to work on the construction of the Saraighat Bridge in river Brahmaputra. She fell in love with him and married. She was happy for a few days because she lost her husband in an accident after about eighteen months of their marriage. The couple do not have children. She went into depression for so many days. She could talk with others for so many days. She could not forget her husband quickly and said: "It is only in a man's power to lead another from darkness to light. It is man alone who can bestow a new life upon another. For this, in love and understanding, lies the key" (25). It is her husband who is her God and her world. It is a sin to think or talk about another man. A married woman or a widow is not supposed to think about any other man except her husband. Generations are changed but the system of Sathi Savitri has not been changed. Tiwari (2005: 210-11) mentions that "The model dictates that a woman should never think of any man other than her husband. Marriage is a spiritual and religious bond. A woman's life is meaningful only in serving her husband in every sense of the word. She should pray to get the same husband in coming seven lives." Those ideas are still touching middle class Indian women. Similar example we can take it. She talks of her excitement in the company of Major Sindhu, a young man from the nearby camp where Madhu worked. She confesses: "Major Sindhu abruptly held me by the hand and pulled me towards a small hillock nearby.... The touch of the youthful Major gave me a thrill of excitement....Major Sindhu's valour and manliness, and his fond adoration for me, ruffled my mind for a short while. But it was only a bubble. My mind got its calm again, and retreated to its safe haven in Madhu's heart, for it was he who had possessed my entire mind and being. For me, his heart was the most secure abode, like a mother's to a child." (42-43) She knows that it is a wrong thing to do with others.

Goswamy was habituated to take high dosage of sleeping medicines. But she recovered from her misery and finally joined the Goalpara Sainik School as teacher. When she had been working there, she came to realize many surprising things for a widow. She has to follow a strict pattern of life as a widow. In deed she needs moral support and help from her family and society but in vain. She everyday reminds the days how she had spent with her husband. She used to spend in a single room. Indira writes, "Who can determine how the

abrupt end of a happy conjugal life affects the poor wife? Most of the time, as I realized, a sense of endless, ruthless pain suppressed all the yearnings of the flesh" (54). She reads the letters and diary of her father and recalls all her happy days. Of course there are many restrictions for a widow in Indian society. In that sense, a widow means the loss of the charm and beauty of life. It is cruel thing to ask a widow throw bindi, kumkum, kazar and lipstick. Is it justice to ask a woman to be like that. Their heads should be bent and they were supposed to be calm always and clad in white saris. She recollects how she was kept in a small room in Goalpara. She again contemplated to get suicide. She accepted a suggestion to choose a life in Vrindavan, the most traditional destination of bereft Hindu widows. As a widow, she remembers her childhood days where she was told not to touch a widow. Her foremother told her that it is a sin. "Touch her not, no, you must not! Only recently she is widowed. She carries in her the pollution of sin" (56). The death of her father and husband left her shattered. She almost became mad. She had tried to commit suicide many times. Fortunately she was escaped from it. She faced the life full of struggles and hardships. The calamity of her life made her to know the problems and be a more mature person. In 1971 she joined Delhi University as a lecturer of Modern Indian Language. She started writing her first novel. From that time to till her death, she never stopped writing. Her only English book is 'Ramayana from Ganaga to Brahmputra' was published in 1996.

Vrindavans are the widows who devoted their entire life in the worship of Lord Krishna. Goswami stayed in Vrindaban which is the place where Lord Krishna spent his childhood days. There she meets many tricksters, religious hypocrites, the priests who are exploiting the devotees by telling the name of religion. The Hindu widows devoted their entire life of widowhood only in the worship of Lord Krishna. Some women earn their living by singing bhajans. Some visit the place because they are neglected by the society. Indira visits the place in search of peace. She associates herself with Vrindavan, the city of God, as she says, "Vrindavan is a city that rose up like Phoenix, again and again, after it had been razed to the ground with every attack by Muslim invaders" (162).

Assam is one of the most troubled states in India. Besides writer, Goswami was very affectionate and helps poor people when they are in needy. She is a great human being at heart and social activist. Amitav Ghosh (2011: 01) who is one of the famous Indian writers says that "Goswami has for many years been one of its most powerful voices of peace." She, as a writer protests against male domination, completely spoke about the problems of society. Ghosh (2011: 01) says that "Indira Goswami is one of those rare figures whose achievements as a writer are closely paralleled by their accomplishments as a social and political activist." Besides all of her achievements and success, she also came to public interest for her role in acting as an arbitrator on behalf of People's Consultative Group (PCG) to find out a peaceful solution between the Central Government and banned outfit ULFA. Although the discussion was failed, her efforts were extremely appreciated and extensively acclaimed in the society. In deed she wanted a united Assam despite of the diversified culture and communities. She passed away on 29 November 2011. She was suffering from illness for a prolonged period of time. Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi (2011: 16) said that "Her death has created a void in the literary scene in India."

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