

“A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF MAMONI RAISOM GOSWAMI’S NOVEL”

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Abstract

Feminism is an emerging concept. It's a new branch of study. Several theories have developed in the study of feminism. Feminism also portrays in literature. In novel and short stories litterateur tries to depict the concept of feminism. In Assamese literature several novelist are trying to highlight the feminist concept through their literary skill. Mamoni Raisom Goswami, a renowned Assamese novelist who through her novel have raised the issues of women. In her Datal Hatir Une Khowa Haoda and Nilkanthi Braj, she depicts the pathetic conditions of the women belonging to upper caste Brahmin family. Thus the concept of feminism is occupying a prominent place in her novel.

Keywords- Feminism, novel, upper caste, Assamese, Mamoni Raisom Goswami.

I INTRODUCTION

Feminism is a diverse, competing and often opposing collection of social theories, political movements and moral philosophies, largely concerning the experiences of women, especially in terms of their social, political and economic inequalities.¹Although largely originating in the west, feminism is manifested worldwide and is represented by various institutions committed to activity on behalf of women's right and interests. Throughout most of western history, women were confined to the domestic sphere, while public life was dominated by men. Woman has no social status in the society.²Feminism involves political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference, as well as a movement that advocates gender equality for women and campaigns for women's rights and interests. Although the term 'Feminism' didn't gain widespread use until the 1970's they were already used in public sphere much earlier. Feminism has altered predominant perspectives in a wide range of areas within western society, ranging from culture to law. Feminist activists have campaigned for women's legal rights, for women's right to bodily integrity and autonomy, for abortion rights, and for reproductive rights; for protection of women and girls from domestic violence, sexual harassment and rape; for workplace rights, including maternity leave and equal pay; against misogyny; and against other forms of gender specific discrimination against women.³ There are four waves of feminism. The first wave of feminism took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's, emerging out of an environment of urban industrialism and liberal, socialist politics. The goal of this wave was to open up opportunities for women, with a focus on suffrage. The wave formally began at the Seneca Falls convention in 1848 when three hundred men and woman rallied to the cause of equality for woman. Other hand the second wave began in the 1960s and continued into the 90s. This wave unfolded in the context of the anti-war and civil rights movements and the growing self consciousness of a variety of minority groups around the world. The third phase began with protests against the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City in 1968 and 1969. Feminists parodied what they held to be degrading "cattle parade" that reduced women to objects of beauty dominated by a patriarchy that sought to keep them in the home or in dull, low paying jobs.⁴

In the aftermath of World War II, the lives of women in developed countries changed dramatically. Technological development ease the household burden, life expectancies increased significantly. The growth of service sector provided the opportunity of employment; but the cultural attitudes like concerning women's work and legal precedents still reinforced sexual inequalities. In this aspect an articulate account of the oppressive effects of prevailing notions of femininity appeared in 'The Second Sex' the bestselling book of Simone de Beauvoir. In her book she raised feminist consciousness by stressing that liberation for women was liberation for men too. There are some other books which also raised the various issues of women and demanded equal treatment of women with men.⁵

After the emergence of feminist movement and development of feminist theories, the concept of feminism also gained prominence in literature. Feminist literature include fiction, non-fiction, drama or poetry which supports the feminist goals of defining, establishing and defending equal civil, political, economic and social rights for women. In Indian literature different litterateurs have been trying to highlight the issues relating with women and demanding

equal treatment of women. But feminism in Indian literature as well as the broader perspective of feminism in India, is not a singular theoretical point of reference, it has metamorphosed with time, maintain proportion with historical and cultural realities, levels of consciousness, perceptions and actions of individual women and women in mass. The mid 1950s and 1960s mark the second important stage of Indian English writing when writers like Arun Joshi, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandya, Jhavalactc. Come out with their works that changed the face of the Indian English novel. They have opened up a new vista of human nature and man-woman relationship. Hence feminism gained a prominent place in Indian literature.⁶

Assamese literature isn't exceptional in this aspect. Different writers through their writing have been highlighting feminist perspective. They try to depict the picture of the condition of women in the society. Even in Assamese novel it was the Male litterateur who first wrote novel highlighting the various issues of the women have faced in the society.⁷ With changing circumstances several Assamese novelist try to insist on the problems and issues of women through their novel.

II AIM & OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the study is to analyse how Mamoni Raisom Goswami is highlighting the pathetic condition of upper caste women and express her feminist approach in *Datal Hatir Une KhoaHaoda* and *Nil Kanthi Braj*.

III METHODOLOGY

The study is entirely based on content analysis method. Secondary sources of data are used in the study, which are obtained from books, journals, magazines etc.

IV FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF MAMONI RAISOM GOSWAMI'S NOVEL

In Assamese novel, different novelists have tried to raise the issues relating to women. As Assamese society is a patriarch society, so women are forced to remain as an underprivileged section of the society. Hence in consonance with the feminist movement of west Assamese writers especially the novelist also introduced feminism as a theme of their novel in the second and third decades of 20th century.⁸ Among the few Assamese feminist novelists Mamoni Raisom Goswami whose real name is Indira Goswami is significant one. Goswami is acclaimed as one of the greatest novelist in Assamese literature, has written seven novels. In some her novels like *Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howda* (The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tuskaer which she translated this in English as *A Saga of South Kamrup*) and *Nilkonthi Broj* (The Blue-Necked God) she has tried to raise the issues of upper caste Brahmin women which they have faced in the society.⁹

Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howda published in 1986 is partially autobiographical novel of Goswami. Her novel like those many of the contemporary women novelist writing in various Indian languages, are women-oriented text. In this novel she shows how Brahmin girls married before the age of puberty, many become widowed at very young age subjected to inhuman customs. The novel in general encapsulates the socio-cultural milieu of a society now extinct which lived in *Sattras* (Monastery) but the sub text of the novel offers a critique on the women of these *Sattras*. The main focus in the novel is on the three widows of the family. The author's aim is to study the structuring and functioning of patriarchy and its impact on the lives of women, especially the widows, because women in particular are the wretched victim of this inhuman system. The three most important women in the novel offer three different kinds of images of a woman in an upper caste, rural patriarch set-up. Three of them are widows at very young age. The inhuman social customs oppressed them brutally. But three represent different female attitudes to patriarchy.¹⁰

Among the three Durga who widowed at very young age has faced brutal oppression of the societal inhuman customs. The life of Brahmin widow is very pathetic, as they compelled to follow rigorous social customs and traditions. So Durga is victim of this customs. She was harassed and treated as inauspicious. She was deprived from her husband's property and in spite of a daughter and daughter in law of rich *Sattras*, poverty ruined her. The dichotomy between her poverty and helplessness and her intense desire to be acknowledged as a woman of substance and virtue indicates her pathetic position in the familial and social set-up. Hence the novel insists on woman's economic independence. Durga represent the image of a silent, subservient subscribing to the repressive customs and norms, not protesting against them. Other hand Soru Goswami character of the novel is opposite to Durga, she didn't bow down her head in front of the inhuman social customs. She is the only woman who resented and fights the male-dominated *Satra* system and tries to survive within this system. Soru Goswami character indicates the image of an independent, self-supporting woman who in spite of societal pressure performs a masculine role. She tries to maintain her independence within the framework of the *Sattra*. She is an image of empowered woman as she maintained the property of her late husband, for which she appoints Mahidhar an assistant. But she became victim of male manipulation as Mahidhar has pocketed her revenue, making illegal deeds to sell her

lands secretly, stolen her ornament. So ultimately she in spite of her courage and independence she falls victim to a cheater.¹¹ Giribala, another widow of the novel, is the only woman who dares to revolt and pays the price for it. She was oppressed by her husband and after the death of her husband she was brutally tortured by her husband's family and then sent back to her parents after miscarriage. Even in her parents' home she was oppressed as she was a widow. But she raised her voice against the customs. But her brother has allowed her to collect manuscripts for Mark, an American missionary came to do research of the history of the region. So she moving about his cabin helping him with the manuscripts, she violates the rule by stepping out of the societal customs. Although when snake bite her and Mark sucks the poison from her body, her mother became anguished. Giribala has been portrayed as a potent rebel who violates the social customs of widows. She ate what was forbidden for widows, for which even she was punished. She breaks norms and because she doesn't want to follow them and she doesn't feel remorse for this. She wants to live according to her wishes. By juxtaposing Giribala's longing for Mark with her unhappy frustrating relationship with her husband the author seems to have stressed the need for some modification in the old notion of *pativrtya* (obliged to husband) to accommodate the new ideal of reciprocity in marriage.¹² Giribala's suicide is her final act of defiance against the system which annihilates a widow for harbouring desire.¹³ In her *Nilkanthi Braj* (The Blue Necked-God) published in 1976, Goswami shows how a Hindu young widow resents the societal customs, protests against of traditional customs and the evil condition of the Brindavan, the Hindu sacred place.¹⁴ In the novel she highlights about the exploitation and oppression of women, through the widows Brindavan. The pathetic conditions of widows are presented in the novel who wants to die there due to the negligence of their families. However in Brindaban which is considers as Braj, the *radheshyamis* (widows of Brahmin) are tremendously exploited by the unscrupulous *panndas* who even rob the dead old woman during the cremation.¹⁵ Soudamini, a young widow is the main character of the novel, who became widow at young age. As she belongs to higher caste Hindu family, hence she was forced to obey rigorous customs of the society. But she doesn't want to follow such customs as she was literate. Meanwhile she falls in love with a Christian young man hence her parents try to change her mind through religious customs. Her parents take her to Brajadham so that Braj might change her mind but where she experienced the dark side of the Brindavan. In Brindavan the panda who looks after the financial matters and supposed to take care of the dwellers considers by her as 'yamadoot' as he searches for gold ornaments whenever widow dies and the body even doesn't cremated properly. The administration is fully corrupt and widows are victimized by the *pandas*. When her mind has not changed she tries to serve the patients in the hospital of her father. She was unable to gain mental peace there. She reminisce the Christian lover because she can't ignore physical desire. So she denied the directions of her mother and raised her voice criticising her parents. So in this way she introduces herself as a feminine character in the novel. She went to Brajdhham to commit suicide fighting against the social customs.¹⁶

V CONCLUSION

Mamoni Raisom Goswami through her novels tries to highlight the pathetic condition of Assamese women belonging to upper caste. As she brought up in the Sattras hence she has experienced the conditions of the women faces in the upper caste family. Goswami is able to successfully depict the life of woman in the high caste Brahmnical rural Sattras which is dominated by relentless feudal patriarchal mores and is crumbling under the burden of religious dogmas in the last stage of its decay. She has closely observed the systematic, institutionalized and brutal oppression of women, especially of widows who lose their husbands and consequently their legitimate place in the family and community. The widows and women are bearing the exploitation as a symbol of the social customs without raising their voice. They accustomed with such inhuman rituals. Goswami tries to raise her voice through her novel. But she has just shown the pathetic condition of the life of widows in her novel but she doesn't insist on remarriage of widows. She even doesn't show any protest or revolt by the women against the social customs. As it was necessary to express her anguish and pain. At last it can be said that Mamoni Raisom Goswami is a feminist par excellence.

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³ History and Feminism, <http://www.gender.cawter-info.net>

⁴ Rampton Maratha, Four waves of Feminism, <http://www.pacific.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism>

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⁶ *ibid.*

⁷Sarma, Gobinda Prasad, Feminism in Assamese Novel in Preeti Barua(ed), Commemorative volume, Golden Jubilee Handique Girls college, 1939-89, Golden Jubilee Celebration Committee, Guwahati, 1989, p-125

⁸ ibid.

⁹ A Saga of South Kamrup, chapter iii, <http://www.shodhgangainflibnet.ac.in>

¹⁰ ibid.

¹¹ ibid.

¹² ibid.

¹³ ibid.

¹⁴ Borua, Mira, Nari Andulon aru axomia mohila upoinysika(1940-90, Asamiya Sahityar buranji, (ed)published by Anundoram Borooh Institute of Language, Art & Culture, 2012, pp-185.

¹⁵ Boruah, Linashree, The Blue-necked God: An eco-feministic perspective, <http://www.indianreview.in>

¹⁶ ibid.