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## **The Female Voice in the Novels of Mamoni Roisom Goswami: Ushered in of a New Era of Women Empowerment**

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### **Abstract:**

Mamoni Roisom Goswami, one of the most eminent writers from North East India, has received numerous accolades including Jnanpith Award and Sahitya Akademi Award. Through her writings Goswami has shown a deep concern for the marginals of the society. She interrogates several facets of women empowerment in India. Of these mention may be made of her attitude to girl children, marriage and widowhood.

In the world of women there is no dearth 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 Roisom Goswami, therefore, has brought forth this issue of women empowerment through some of the strong female voices of her novel be it her own voice in her autobiography Adha Lekha Dastavej or any other voice. The portrayal of these character 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 focuses on women empowerment, which was started by the novelist much before the concept has been popularized. For this two of her novels have been dealt with.....Adha Lekha Dastavej and Neel Kanthi Braja.

**Keywords: Women empowerment, widowhood, female voice, etc.**

**Methodology:** The paper will be based on secondary data collected from various sources, books, journals, internet etc.

Writings in English from North Eastern region, in spite of being so much “of this land” also have universal appeal. This is the reason why so many names are now becoming well known outside the region, even though English language writing here does not have a very long history. It is probably also true that this Phase of “rootedness” to the land is not going to last forever. The writings are already getting increasingly urbanized. Even then, the unique gaze of writers in English from this part of the world will continue to enrich the world of letters.

One of the most reputed and distinguished writers from the North East Mamoni Roisom Goswami, popularly known as Indira Goswami wrote her autobiography Adha Lekha Dastavej along with her other novels and several short stories. There are many aspects of her writing. As a young woman she found tragedy and pain whereas she was born to happiness and

privilege. Performing an act of self withdrawal, she came out stronger with the realization of a map of social problems relating to women. She has realized the very fact that women's historiography has always been contested domain and therefore she puts her effort in recovering the female voice and their subjectivities in reproducing an alternate history. By putting voice into her female characters she has made an attempt to acquire a space, for them, that has been denied to them in their family and society.

In a moving autobiography Adha Lekha Dastavej published in 1988 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 2002 by Prafulla Kakoty. The novel is divided into three parts and the reading of them comes out to be a very interesting endeavour. The first part of the novel, entitled "Life is no Bargain", deals with her childhood days which extends upto the unfortunate death of her husband. The second part which entitles, "Down Memory Lane", describes how she took to profession of teaching in Goalpara Sainik school so that it could be a solace from the tragedy of her life, i.e. the irreparable loss of her beloved 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 attempts 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 its 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 had at that time Indira Goswami Decides to lead a life of her own terms and conditions instead of looking for the social conventions and traditions. As much as the the person suffers, the more experienced he becomes in life. This is what exactly the case with Mamoni Roisom Goswami. She is always found wrapped in an elegant red saree bordered in gold.

In this part of the novel that 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 the days of Ambubachi" (56). 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 this 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.

Another novel Neel Kanthi Braja is an amazing narrative combining fact and fiction, autobiography and reflection. This novel was translated by Prafulla Kakoti as "Shadow of Dark God" in 1986. Through this novel Goswami tries to show how the mental and physical state of

young widow takes a different shape and how this change affects her life after widowhood. The protagonist in this novel volunteers to take on severe deprivations of the body a sort of self purification. After this her needs in life are reduced. In spite of having caring parents, Saudamini, the protagonist, probes as deep as possible into the meaning of widowhood. Neel Kanthi Braja is about social attitudes and the inner consciousness of a woman who has been brought up to believe that widowhood is somehow her “fault” or her “destiny” and she should undertake “penance”. Saudamini accepts, analyses and finally rejects the construction of the widow stereotype.

The message that is further pertinent to the issue of women empowerment may be read through the presentation of three women in the novel. Saudamini and her acquaintances, Shashi and Mrinalini. Shashi suffers because of her loveless attachment to an impotent priest. Goswami has nuanced the widow’s deprivation of body, passion and emotion and woven it into a perceptive text much ahead of the rest. Saudamini’s other companion Mrinalini who is the daughter of a temple owner has fallen upon poor days due to mismanagement of his fortune. This again shows the supremacy of patriarchy where a girl has to suffer due to her economic dependency on the father. Mrinalini’s ancient family is brought to penury though no fault of her.

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 comprise the substance of her novel.

Indira Goswami’s personal narratives and her fiction offer a carefully drawn continuum of social change. The setting of her novels may be of early 20<sup>th</sup> 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 causes, the rituals, 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. Despite the complex interstices, I see no contradiction- only a holistic expression of India’s many challenges to Women empowerment and a gifted writer moulding them into creative forms” says Malashri Lal. Her tools for engendering social change were the written words.

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