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Depiction of Life with Reality and Bold Unconventionality in Indira Goswami's *Unfinished Autobiography*

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Abstract:

This paper focuses its light on the self of Indira Goswami, who had faced a lot of bitter, obnoxious experiences in her life. *Unfinished Autobiography* is a fiction in which Indira Goswami has shown a unique quality of writing, great courage to react towards sensitive issues of her own life. Throughout the novel, the pathetic tone of her own life and a continuous series of tragedies were portrayed and also we can hear the reverberation of her own self in the novel. But a special feature of this novel is that She deliberately and unconventionally writes the reality whatever she feels inside without any hesitation. A widow, particularly at such young age, how she misses happy moments of married life is one and the way she comes out of depression through the mode of 'Realism' a good example for her courage. This Novel is an exciting journey of Indira Goswami's supernatural honesty with which she reveals her life from her infancy to an age where her stories novels and poems come together into oneness.

Introduction:

Indira Goswami is one of the renowned names in the Literary Field of Assam. A lady who decided to attempt to suicide has grown to such a level of determination, conviction and courage to question the society about the backdrops of the society. Particularly it was such a time where there was no body to raise their voice against those socio-cultural sensitive issues.

The novel *Unfinished Autobiography* has three sections namely *Life is no Bargain*, *Down Memory Lane* and *City Of God*. The first part totally deals with her revelation of her personal life up to 1970. The meaning of autobiography is to reveal the hidden inner

secrets related to relations with other gender and twisting of the soul with excruciating pain. In this section it is clearly seen of losing two key persons in her life has taken her into a depressed state. She felt that there was nothing left in her life and it was like a fertile land suddenly changed into a barren land.

Indira Goswami wrote this novel with a great passion and a very rare sensitivity. "The desperation and suicidal tendencies of the Shillong days seemed to have secured a foothold in my heart". And "I was stricken with grief to think of the terrible effect of separation from my near and dear ones. I did not know what exactly it was. It was a shot of strange unease of my inner mind which I tried to subdue but failed" She was so panic in the last page of first part "Ages seemed to have rolled by....Life's moorings were snapped....The trusted earth beneath my feet suddenly gave way...."The following sentences expressed by Indira Goswami is also an example for reverberation of her own self "Every moment of my life reflects my past, my body, my relations with others, the tasks I have undertaken and independent, these realities sometime reinforce each other and descant together sometimes they interfere with, contradict and neutralize each other ... A life is such a strange object, at one moment translucent, at another utterly opaque, an object I make with my own hands, an object imposed on me, an object for which the world provides the raw material and then steals it from me again, pulverized by events, scattered, broken, scored yet retaining its unity ...".

M.L. Varadpande in Sunday Herald (September 30,1990), "She displays rare sensitivity without being sentimental. She is extremely sincere in portraying her experiences which are rich and varied. This has made her autobiography extremely fascinating. The reading of her Unfinished Autography tells us how the life of the author is extremely close to literary creations."

Indira Goswami kept this unfinished autobiography as an open book to all the readers where she was so frank about her emotions. There is no doubt that this Unfinished Autobiography is a mirror of Indira Goswami's mind .A strange fear and anguish kept her following in that age where she should think about a happy, colourful life. In that time her mind seemed busy counting the number of graves in the graveyard. When she was saved from her attempt of suicide there was so much criticism from the society. People had their own imaginations that she might have done something unethical due o which she attempted suicide. At that time she wanted to be far away from this society, as she explains: "I think much consideration of caste or respectability. Nor did I think much of the social status of my family. My mind was eager only for an escape-any escape - from the terrible moment which flayed me day and night". And after that attempt of suicide, "physically, I became a little worn out and lost some of my glamour after that attempt at suicide. Besides, to face the world outside become a problem for me. I hardly



dared to go out for fear of the spate of uncharitable remarks passed on me by a passerby. Some of the remarks were quite vulgar and too cruel to be forgotten. I still seem to bleed when I remember them, for they pick me like spikes even on these distant days”, she un.masks her internal suffering.

Indira Goswami’s strength lies in her focussing of reality of vulnerabilities existing in a social system. She did not compromise herself to expose many unpleasant aspects related to socio-cultural issues like exploitation of widows, marginalization of weaker sections, human or animal sacrifices etc. She condemned some of the beliefs which occur in a religious ideology. Whatever she has visualized, experienced, in her life is directly portrayed in her writings. This is what about Indira Goswami has captured the attention of all her readers. At the same time she maintains a balance to endorse humanism while exposing the selfishness and hypocrisy.

Amita Malik in Hindustan Times (October 6,1990)mentions “Mamoni’s writings are totally spontaneous, like a conversation, but it is brutally frank, heart-felt about her self and her moving.....I can salute Mamoni for the truly heroic saga that is her life.”

The first marriage of Indira Goswami was unsuccessful. She plunged her days into a well of dark depression. Her haunted mind was filled with threatening thoughts of self-annihilation. When she got married to Madhavan in 1965 according to Vedic rites, she felt as if she had entered into such a beautiful world. He was so caring and affectionate that the thoughts of all the miseries, wishes to die, agony and shame in Madhu’s company are no more. She reflects her exciting moments “For the first time in life, I felt released from those nightmarish thoughts that had preyed upon my mind and spirit for long years of my childhood and youth. I felt in my pulse, the freedom of the open blue sky above me”. This harmony brought a realization and transformation that she started thinking about other people. She wanted even to live for others. She emphatically says that this change has been occurred due to the loving nature of Madhavan.

“ what loving concern for me he had.....It is only a man’s power to lead another from darkness to light .For this, love and understanding ,lies the key.”

But such a lady who dipped herself in the love of Madhavan was unable to bear his loss in an accident. Her love for him kept her living. She was so emotional when she saw Madhu in the hospital “Madhu was lying unconscious, in blood – be splattered clothes. There were big blotches of blood all over his head and breast”, and she cried,” Madhu is dead!” For a moment she felt that her life is stopped. She had lost all the happiness, pleasurable moments in her life with his death. These sentences indicate her love for Madhu.

“.....Many years have rolled by since but the colour of Madhu's cremated bones has not undergone any change. Only I have changed several of the caskets where I have preserved them.”

The embellishment of self in the second part “Down Memory Lane” is the catharsis in life of Indira Goswami, her retrospection, nostalgia and her emerging as a writer. This section deals with her joining as a teacher at Goalpara to come out of frustration and depression. She after becoming a widow described her state of a young lady's mental condition as follows. “Perchance I would hear Madhu's voice”, and “But I know that was an illusion. Nothing lingers of a man after death. Tear your hearts to shreds, yet your beloved returns not to inquire why. Terrible indeed is this tale of the overnight separation of two being truly united once in the depths of their being. But there is no help”. The True self of Indira Goswami, as a widow can be better understood when she mentions as “who can ascertain the exact state of the mind of a woman as suddenly hit by misfortune as I was? 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. I felt like being pushed into a deep, dark abyss”.

But there was a gradual diversion towards her father, his diaries, anecdotes about her grand parents, memories related to Goalpara which arouse interest, anxiety in the minds of readers. When she was walking with Mr. Singh for the first time after the death of Madhu, it was really a different feel which she expressed without any embarrassment“ I had not really overcome the passions and desires of the flesh. They were all alive within my body”, “In first lonely shaded path, he could have easily assaulted me, or I myself could have transgressed, consequent upon the tragic frustration brought upon an ideal conjugal life in the prime of youth” but “that day, I did not extend my hand to Mr. Singh. He, too, did not feel encouraged to repeat his question”. Some of her well wishers advised her to involve in writing so that she can overcome herself from isolation, depression.

The third part of *Unfinished Autobiography* deals with the City Of God, the stay of Indira Goswami for two years at Vrindavan. This gave her an opportunity to observe the life of Radhey shyamis in the holy city. She noticed the exploitation of those widows in that pitiful ,peculiar, dreadful environment who come to Vrindavan in search of solace of God .Indira Goswami cries with “Indeed it is not easy to understand, a man's cruel nature.....”

The mental agony she faced when she was at Vrindavan was inexplicable. Though she was pursuing for her research at Vrindavan, there was no medicine for her loneliness and grief.



She says, “I asked myself the old question – how could I at all live like this? What was there in store for me? The memory of Madhu was like a severe mental and bodily pain. All my endeavor to get rid of proved futile. How could I help myself with such a mind? Sometimes, at midnight unable to bear grief and pain, I came out of doors. On such occasions, I would find the vicinity of the temple all deserted. Darkness seemed to reign supreme in the hovels. The bricks of the wall, their plaster coatings worn off, looked like heaps of bones of dead animals And night sky over my head? I somehow had the impression that the night sky alone was responsible for ruining all my happiness and throwing me into a cemetery. I went to one dark room after another. This is how I roamed about at the dead of night, a forlorn soul, afraid to face life. Sometimes, I run upstairs leading to my teacher’s room. Unable to bear the relentless agony of mind, I thought I could possibly get some peace and solace if I would lay prostrate at my preceptor’s feet. But I did not dare do a thing like that. So I returned to my own dark hovel, smarting in grief and pain”.

Indira Goswami’s utter frankness of her internal feelings were conspicuously seen in these bold lines in an unconventional manner “The moment I came in contact with Madhu’s old shirt, I felt that his bones were integrated with mine . . . No., I won’t abide by the Hindu rite of depositing the asthi in the holy waters. Wasn’t it my only physical link with Madhu?”

She had no fear to convey her relationship with one more person i.e. Munni’s brother. During her Mathura visit by tonga she had the opportunity to sit beside him and she could sense a kind of manly odour emanating from his person. According to her, “I felt at certain moment as if a poem was almost welling up in my heart but the next moment it collapsed like a building long out of repair. All the time I was sitting by this young man, my heart was busy, as it were, clearing the debris of the crumbled structure”. Once again, one late evening while returning home, she had the opportunity of sitting close to him, she says, “once again during the time I was sitting beside him, a new poem was emerging in my heart like a temple”. There are so many examples where we can see an unconventionality of Indira Goswami, unlike other Indian Widows expresses, She says, “I could not account for this impulse, was it because an instinct, long dormant, suddenly wanted to find an outlet ? Or was it for some other reason? . . . It was almost midnight. I was slowly making my way to the roof. I saw the young man also closely following me”. She says, “The young man, my lover, was standing by my side. That was the moment when I could surrender my whole being to him, a natural human desire which was suppressed by fate and circumstances since Madhu’s death but I could once more indulge myself in it. There stood the charming young man, enamoured of me, looking intently at my attractive figure. At the slightest indication from me, he would instantly take me in

his arms, and shower my whole body with hot kisses. It was a tense moment. Time stood still”.

She had faced typical, embarrassing situations, which were initially difficult to bear, but later on helped her to gain confidence and grow bold. She had a feel of guilt before her teacher when she was handed over a gift by a known businessman who visited her and told her that the packet is of Prasad. When she opened it and noticed that there was a rose – red sari in that packet instead of Prasad. She says, “It was because of the death wish deeply entrenched in my heart that I slowly grew immune to fears and anxieties of all kinds. I had to wage a long war, as it were, to overcome this obsession”.

Her confidence and boldness helped her in crossing the river of fear, guilt and loneliness. She was not scared to explain her true experiences. When she had spent a night with Mr.Kaikos Burjor, She did not hide anything. She made her readers to think of her mental status which is quite pitiable.

“A sense of mortification numbed my soul”. She explains her internal state and says, “Without knowing my mind, I had spent a night with Kaikos Burjor. That modification would be so acute I did not realize earlier. I tried to console myself that I had not disgraced myself but that act” and “on the contrary, it was a time of self - assessment. Self – assessment in relation to a man who offered himself at your door? Didn't my teacher encourage me to be ready for such a situation? Then why this sense of self - reproach?” The Pain and agony she has faced has been mirrored through her writing. These experiences were not ended with bitterness but endorsed in gaining sympathy. She was not a silent spectator of human suffering. Her writings were simply a voice against the social vulnerabilities.

Conclusion:

In this *Unfinished Autobiography*, the most prominent feature is its reality with honesty and a bold unconventionality of Indira Goswami who gave her intimate details of experience .More over her personal voice from which she wanted to overcome from frustration has been transformed into the voice of marginalized, under privileged widows .She has converted her strength of writing in to an opportunity to represent the voce of the victimized widows at large. The foremost advantage of her writing is that they are always from the real experiences of lives, but not artificial, hence accepted by people in a comfortable manner. She revealed her passions, body desires, personal grief, a tumult of voce within courageously in an eccentric way.



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