

VOICES OF THE SELF: SURVIVING TRAUMAS IN INDIRA GOSWAMI'S *AN UNFINISHED AUTOBIOGRAPHY*

Anupriya Roy
 Research Scholar
 Department of English
 Banaras Hindu University
 Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh

Born in an orthodox family in Assam, Indira Goswami, popularly known as Mamoni Raisom Goswami, rose to fame with her writings which exhibit human pathos of lives lived on the margin. Her life story, *An Unfinished Autobiography* (2002), first written in Assamese – *Adha Lekha Dastavez* (1988), is a precious document that records the plight and sufferings of a lonely woman and the journey of her undaunted self to rise to the esteemed status of a writer of repute. It is a saga of despair and desolation of an extremely sensitive and fearless soul that in spite of recurrent mental agonies and repeated cruel blows of fate resulting from her separation from near and dear ones, has never learnt to accept defeat. Her life was full of turmoil produced by her relentless fate, constraining social conventions and the unpredictable natural disasters, leading to her immense mental pain. She writes: “There are occasions in the life of an individual when he finds the past breaking itself loose from the close confines of memory, and casting its tormenting spell upon him. The severity of the spell can be gauged only by its victim and none else” (*Unfinished Autobiography* 211-12). Therefore, she invariably needed a space of her own to open up her heart in order to reduce her intense inner wounds. Her autobiography provided her an outlet to pour out her grief. Her self variously constructed in her life story, evolves through her writing. It is written in the backdrop of the socio-cultural contexts of Assam and Vrindaban, along with whatever she has seen and lived in Shillong, Guwahati, Gujarat, Kashmir and in Delhi.

An analysis of her self in her autobiography reveals that there is existence of her artistic self that has been submerged under her other selves constructed in nostalgia recalling her self as a girl, self as a married woman and later as a widow, till she finally devotes herself to academic research. As the title indicates, this autobiography is an unfinished treatise of the author's life as it covers only her life span of about 30 years. In an interview with Ranavir Rangra, she says:

I have not written about the entire span of my life in my autobiography. It is an account of my life from childhood to the year 1970, i.e. about 30 years of my life.

That's why it is called *An Unfinished Autobiography* in English and *Adha Lekha Dastavez* in Assamese. (174)

Encouraged by the well-known Assamese writer, Homen Borgohain, Indira Goswami took her pen to document her life story as she says: “His letter moved me and touched some inner cords in my heart, and I decided to write my autobiography” (*India-50 Years of Independence* 174). In the preface of the book, Goswami has quoted a few lines of Borgohain's letter wherein he exhorts her to take the pen to combat struggles of her life:

I know even without your telling me, how deep is the sadness within your heart.

But for an artist, creation is so absorbing that it does not care overmuch for

personal misery or happiness. An ordinary man or woman may bow down to pain and sorrow, and exist like a living corpse – but that is not the fate for you – because you are an inborn artist, and your creation is the only salvation for your agony, sorrow and even partial death.(xvi)

In the beginning she published a few chapters serially in a monthly magazine but later Goswami discontinued writing her life-story. She felt the pressure of being not equal to the task as she writes in the preface of her book about the skepticism of a group of Assamese readers to her: “They expected autobiographies only from great men and women at the fag end of their lives. The Assamese literary scene at that time was not ready to accept the idea of an autobiography being written by a young girl” (xv). Many years later, Tilak Hazarika, the editor of a publishing house requested her to “pick up the threads again, and complete the autobiography” (*India-50 Years of Independence* 174). Besides him, another Assamese publisher Bijoy Dutta, requested her to write about her life at Vrindaban and to publish the whole life-narrative in her mother tongue. So she resumed writing her autobiography and published the first phase of her life till 1970. The book is divided into three sections, covering three periods of her life: her childhood at Shillong, recollections of the days at Sattra (religious monastery), and her life at Vrindavan.

The self of Goswami seeks solace in recollecting her past. Rarely there is a note of happiness and joy in her life-narrative, except the part where she writes about her extremely unforgettable blissful childhood days. As a mature woman she yearns for her early days – when she grew up as an innocent child in the lap of Nature and imbibed its ecstasies. She is nostalgic and exceeds joy in the second part of her autobiography – “Down Memory Lane” which shows how she entwined herself being of Nature, how her self is constructed by the benign presence of Nature and how her soul communed with the soul of Nature. Indira has spent most of her childhood in Guwahati and Shillong, but the ecstasies of Nature that she has cherished during her stay in Sattra had a deep impact on her mind and it stayed permanently with her. Her affinity with Nature is distinctly evident from her portraiture of the huge pine trees, green paddy fields, the glittering hilly streams and small lakes, the dense forests, oceans and rivers, waves and pebbles, the beautiful rays of sun, and all the sights and sounds of Nature that come alive with the fine strokes of her pen in various places of her autobiography. There is hardly any mention of mountains in her writings as she was more attached to the rivers. The imagery of river is a recurrent theme in almost every work of Goswami. In an interview with Ranavir Rangra, she says:

During my stay at Guwahati, the mighty Brahmaputra, became source of inspiration to me. I used to feel that somehow, mysteriously, the souls of the persons who were dear to my heart and who were no more, had been gathered to the basin of Brahmaputra. Very often I used to think that my beloved mother was sleeping there under a net made of drops of water from this massive river. (175)

From river Ahirom, Chenab, Yamuna, Jagalia to Sai, there are pictures of many rivers repeatedly drawn in many of her works. As a river flows down uninterruptedly with rocks, pebbles, gravels, sands and whatever comes in its ways, similarly the author associates with it the perpetual struggle of her life that prolonged persistently with her perennial woes. But she has never learnt to stop. She writes:

On the banks of so many rivers, I consigned so many slices of my life and being....Ah! Each one of them seems to illumine still more sharply the plaques of memory carved in the heart. The journey of the heart and that of a river seem

always to be intertwined in a mysterious web of thought. (*Unfinished Autobiography* 189)

Nature has shaped her character, her psyche and her self. She has depicted well in her autobiography how the wild elephants in Sattrra, were inhumanly tamed. The process of forceful training seemed to her a pitiable torture on these innocent animals and that had left a deep scar on her mind. She remembers how her playmate, Rajendra, the last elephant of Sattrra became mad and in a state of murderous frenzy, it killed a man and later it was shot dead by the order of the Government.

At the very beginning of her autobiography the self of the author as a girl is constructed in full jubilation as she spent her days with her father, followed by the gloom of utter dejection after his death. Indira Goswami was much attached to her father Umakanta Goswami who remained her idol and ideal inspiration in her life and therefore a fear of losing him always haunted her mind. She could never imagine her life without her father. She writes:

I was at best ten or so at that time, and yet was obsessed with the thought of taking my own life. It all arose from my fear that the agony of my father's death, when it comes – for come it must, after all, I knew – would be too terrible for me to bear. (*Unfinished Autobiography* 4)

She writes in the preface of her autobiography that her father dominated the world of her childhood. Describing her paternal attachment Goswami writes: "That was the time when I had a unique relationship with him. This filial attachment is quite natural. But my adoration of my father was exceptional. It is beyond me to put into words" (*An Unfinished Autobiography* 4). When she grew up she always spoke of her father with pride. But with the sudden death of her father, a dreadful melancholy captured her mind and heart. She acquired suicidal tendency and made repeated attempts to end her life. She writes: "In those days the terrible thought of self destruction got rooted firmly in my heart" (*An Unfinished Autobiography* 4). Indira suffered from nervous breakdown and was admitted in the Civil Hospital at Guwahati for many days where she left herself to the hands of fate. But as her luck would have it, she gathered courage and confidence, and gradually came round to lead a normal life. Before going to Vrindaban, she used to sit alone in her hostel room in the Sainik School, Goalpara, read her father's diary and drew inner strength from it. Being nostalgic she writes: "In my desolation, I did not care to seek solace in religious works. Nor was any picture of any holy man hanging on my walls. I only read my father's diary and felt like ceaselessly sauntering along the vistas of bygone times" (*Unfinished Autobiography* 77).

Indira Goswami has drawn the transformation of her self after her father's death from an adolescent young lady to a mature woman. She was shattered from within and paucity of love from near and dear ones led her to dejection. She could not find any meaning or purpose of her life. Her inner self was so vigorously tormented that she often tried to put an end to her life. She writes:

The desperation and suicidal tendencies of the Shillong Days seemed to have secured a foothold in my heart. Even as a child, 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 sort of strange unease of my inner mind, which I tried to subdue, but failed. (*Unfinished Autobiography* 7)

Marriage proposals ceased to come her way. Her lonely widow mother was devastated as she was also worried about the fate of her younger daughters. Her desperate search for an eligible Assamese Brahman

groom for Indira failed over and over again and it left the author in distress and anxiety every now and then. Goswami describes in the very first part of her autobiography – “Life Is No Bargain”, that once, she signed a court marriage paper secretly out of folly with a stranger whom she hardly knew; whereas from the core of her heart she loved Madhavan Ransom Iyenger, the South Indian engineer from Mysore who settled in her neighbourhood. She narrates pulling apart of her self due to her dilemma of choosing the perfect man with whom she could spend the rest of her life peacefully. She writes: “Woe is me! Has anyone else suffered like me? The marriage was contracted with one man, but love and sympathy were felt for another! What a dire dilemma” (*Unfinished Autobiography* 22). On numerous occasions, she faced this kind of hesitation. Out of loneliness and lack of support, Indira vacillates between acceptance and indecision. This vacillation, too, continues to be a source to be a source of constant torment all through her life.

As the news of her secret marriage spread, her embarrassment knew no bounds. She had to break her legal marriage and it took a heavy toll on her mind. She writes: “After coming back home at Guwahati, I plunged for days into a well of dark depression. Again those sinister thoughts of self-annihilation haunted my mind!” (*Unfinished Autobiography* 23). It was at such a moment of despondency Madhavan came with his proposal of marriage to her mother who, without giving a second thought, rejected it. A cloud of gloominess and despair enwrapped her and she was utterly disheartened. Madhu came up to pull her out from her intense depression and it was his love and encouragement that made Indira to muster up the courage once more to arise like a phoenix from her ashes. She writes in her autobiography that the days that she spent with Madhu were golden days of her life:

For the first time in life, I feel 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. Each new day was now a glory, a revelation....The old desperation that had gnawed into my vitals was gone. The constant death wish that had oppressed my mind and body, was now a thing of past....The realization slowly dawned upon me that the justification of our life lay not in itself, but in our earnest endeavour to live for others....I had little idea before I came into Madhu’s life, that love is such a tremendous power. (*Unfinished Autobiography* 24-25)

The portrayal of her self as a happy married woman having all that life could offer anybody for a very short span of eighteen months of her married life with her husband, Madhu, is vividly depicted in her autobiography. Where he went for his construction works, he took his loving wife Indira with him. They spent days at many places in India after marriage like – Kunvarbet in Gujarat, Reasi in Kashmir, places in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. This experience helped Goswami to obtain a very close observation of the lives of the downtrodden and oppressed, of the poor labourers working in the construction site of her husband that later provided ingredients for her novels. She writes: “I loved writing about the lowly and the lost. My sympathy went to those who were denied justice and were victims of oppression” (*Unfinished Autobiography* 20). She has mainly raised her voice for the multitudes belonging to the lower strata of the society. Her self constructed amidst adversities has prompted her to take up the controversial and poignant social issues and she has written about them with the sole purpose to eradicate the social evils. With Madhu’s love and support, her life completely changed. Her confidence rose high and the shadow of pessimism and dark gloom that always haunted her

mind suddenly vanished. She writes: “It is only 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” (*Unfinished Autobiography* 25). With him, she treaded those dreadful zones of Indian borders where women fear to tread. Her courageous self once again gathered inner strength and she held her pen tightly to compose whatever she felt and saw there. She used to keep a notebook with her wherever she moved and that provided acute details of her experiences which later became the source of her works.

Goswami’s blissful married life once again was torn apart by the untimely death of her husband, Madhu, in a jeep accident in Kashmir at the age of 29. No sooner had she make out what married life is, than her husband passed away leaving her as a childless widow. After this huge mental blow, finding nobody to share her grief Goswami took refuge in the embrace of philosophy and religion and later to creative writing. Her repeated inclination towards suicide in her life-narrative, born in the formative years of her life out of the fear of losing her father, later developed more with his sudden death, and reached its maturity with the untimed death of her husband. This remained the ultimate cause of her neurosis. She desired to escape from this mortal world that would bring her relief from her incessant mental torments. She writes: “As for me, the two old persecutors of my soul – agony and despair – continued to inflict their lashes as violently as before” (*Unfinished Autobiography* 12). A change of atmosphere was necessary for her at that moment, in order to keep herself alive alone in this mortal world. Therefore she took up her research study on *Ramayana* under Professor Upendra Chandra Lekharu who asked her to go and stay in his home in Vrindaban. A dreadful dilemma is noticed when she was about to resign from her Sainik School and leave Goalpara in Assam to undertake her research in Vrindaban. But she set herself as she was determined to pursue her academic career long before when she was at school, recalls her teacher D. K. Barua in his essay, “Mamoni Raisom Goswami: The Insistent Pattern”, and says that she has been a meritorious student throughout and the most talked about child for her skill.

The third section of her autobiography, ‘The City of God’, deals with her life in Vrindaban, and her power of keen observation of the religious life of the place, of which she became an indispensable part, is distinct in her writing. To soothe herself from the grip of agony, lamentation and death, she became one with the soul of the city – its sights and sounds, its people, culture, festivals, though she was highly critical of its social evils. In this phase of her life, Goswami’s creative genius found its full bloom. She has depicted the predicament of the widows struggling to survive in this male hegemonic world that set up norms and restrictions for them. Her extensive study of the place prompted her to take up this poignant issue in her autobiographical novel, *The Blue-Veined Vraj (Nilkanthi Vraj)* which she admits is based on her own experiences during her stay at Vrindaban. She writes: “The anguish and frustrations of its heroine, Saudamini largely reflected my own emotional state. Her suffering and pain at the beginning of the work, were exactly mine” (*Unfinished Autobiography* 134).

In her autobiography, she has written down about the people of Vrindaban, the immigrant pilgrims, the temples and lanes, the mind refreshing sights and sounds of the city, the historical anecdotes of Vrindaban, and about the wretched lives of the widows, mostly Bengalis of Bangladesh, who were forcefully thrust upon in the corner of the city to lead a life of utter poverty. The inhuman torture they face often led them to sell their bodies and their shame and respect to earn their bread. Young widows had to compromise with what life has granted them. They were compelled to act as sexual objects – like use and throw commodities, resulting into the growth and development of the institution of prostitution in concealment in the heart of the city. In our society, widowhood predicates

an end to all hopes and aspirations of a widow and to them, widowhood seemed synonymous with life in death. Seeing their miserable conditions, her pent up heart full of turmoil found its vent by pouring forth her sufferings in her writings. In an interview with Ranavir Rangra, she says:

All this became a part of my own mental agony and it poured out of my pen almost spontaneously in the novel and formed a portrayal of Vrindaban as seen and felt through my senses, during the period 1969 to 1970. (169)

At Vrindaban, if somebody died, these destitute widows were forced to sit by the side of a human corpse and mourn till the relatives of the dead arrived. These widows, better known as *Radheshyamis*, sing 'bhajans' in the temples to earn a meager living. Nobody provided shelter to them unless and until they had money for the funeral rites to be performed after their death. The sad demise of her loving husband battered her and a change of atmosphere that she sought was just to escape her agony, though it was difficult and impossible. But during her stay there, repeatedly the shocking tortures inflicted on the widows reminded her of her own condition. She writes:

Even the illiterate, ignorant, neglected dregs of humanity, the *Radheshyamis*, have picked up these pearls of wisdom. They have accepted life as it is. They have not jumped into the Yamuna. They have accepted life with all its pitfalls, all its struggles. I have seen their splashes of blood, but never seen them surrender to despair. Notwithstanding this realization, the desperation of my mind did not abate. I still thought of collecting those pills as a means of escape. I suffered from an acute self-conflict. (*Unfinished Autobiography* 158-159)

When overdose of sleeping pills still failed to make her sleep in peace, when repeated reverberation of Madhu's (her husband) memory arrested her mind, then she accustomed herself to stay locked within her room, or tried to soothe herself with the distant sound of the ringing of the temple bells of Vrindaban. She often went for her lonely strides in the mysterious forests and in the dark nights across lanes to alleviate her sorrow and pacify her soul. She writes:

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. That perhaps explains my preference – subconscious it seems now – for the single room in the school hostel then, or for a dark hovel later, at Vrindaban....An overwhelming sense of grief and misery and an uncertain future combined to disconcert me. I did not have the courage then to look up, literally, to the sky above my head. So, I often kept myself confined indoors. The sense of void that possessed my soul then, no words can describe. In the narrow confines of the room, I engaged myself in rounding off, as much as possible, the half-done novels, which I had started while at the work-site in Kashmir. That was a kind of struggle, as it were, with my own self. A sense of overwhelming conflict, resulting in tears, and geysers of blood shooting up unseen in my heart, marked those moments of utter dejection. (*Unfinished Autobiography* 54-55)

When this also failed to comfort her, she used to meet the holy saints just to relieve the torments of her mind and to know what more sorrows were there in store for her in future to come. The excessive

sense of pain and grief which accumulated in her bosom, she thought, could only be cast off with the grace of the pious soul. There are incidents in her autobiography of her repeated meetings with so many holy saints of the city as she believes: "The intermittent agony of my soul could perhaps be set at rest only by some holy man" (*Unfinished Autobiography* 137). With her benedictions from one such seer, she writes: "I only wanted to know from him how to free my mind from tormenting thoughts and feelings. I only wanted to know if I could ever get any respite from those fondly painful memories of Madhu that gripped my heart and soul" (*Unfinished Autobiography* 136). The dismal life drawn by the author in her autobiography speaks only of her despair and desolation. To unchain her thoughts and to ease herself, she inevitably needed a space to breathe. She could not open up her heart to anyone to share her mental grief. It could have unburdened her heart. She writes:

Every morning, I woke up to find my mind sagging under an acute pain of depression, so much so, that the old obsession of suicide, which haunted me from my early childhood but left me whole after I met Madhu, once more started nagging me in the secret recesses of my mind....Day in and day out, I carried for long, within me, an undefinable load of grief, with the result that my heart got hardened and became insensitive to delight and happiness of other people. I could not abandon my heart to joyous occasions. Even after lapse of many years after the tragedy, my mind remained in such spiritual stupor. (*Unfinished Autobiography* 79-81)

At Vrindaban, Professor Lekharu stood firm by her side and taught her how to fight back the adversities of life. In Madhu's absence, it was a huge contribution of Professor Lekharu and his wife Mrs. Lekharu in the life of the author, who stood behind her as a strong support. Their parental love many a times compels Indira to be nostalgic for her past. Professor Lekharu was not only her teacher, research guide, guardian at the unknown city of Vrindaban, he was like a father-figure who encouraged the depressed and desolate soul of the author to throw away her worries. At Vrindaban, she used to sit by the window and listen to her teacher's life experiences. It reminded heavily of the days she had spent with her father, she writes: "I felt I was passing through a second childhood. It was as if I had wrapped myself up again, in the long-lost protective warmth of my father" (*An Unfinished Autobiography* 190). Goswami always showed her obedience to her teacher, Professor Lekharu, who as a responsible guide to his disciple, accompanied her with suggestions, strength, confidence, and courage till Goswami settles with her job in Delhi University. Mrs. Lekharu with her motherly love, affection and care used to look after Indira in her every need. She took her to the holy saints of the city to embalm her mental wounds. Indira Goswami in turn showed love and respect to her.

But ultimately she survived the odds through her creative writing and her artistic self found its full fruition, appreciation, love and honour of her readers. Only her latent talent of creativity saved her life. Victimized as a young widow at every sphere, Goswami supported by none, stood firm and took up her pen to wage war with the woes of her life. To combat with the situation, she devoted most of her time to her research and to her writings. She questions herself: "What indeed would I have done had I not known how to wield the pen? How, then, could I fight those unseen geysers of blood?" (*Unfinished Autobiography* 55). In an interview with Ranavir Rangra, she says:

Yes I do believe that life is a compromise and every human being has gone through this experience some time or the other. Even in my days of turmoil, it was

only creative writing which sustained me. I used to forget the pain of many unpleasant incidents while writing. Writing became my companion. It was like a fusion between life and the written word. Both existed side by side. (171)

Creative writing emerged as a therapeutic process that cured her repeated mental torments and suicidal inclinations. It healed her mind and heart leading to an expansion of her artistic self. Goswami practiced creative writing from the very beginning of her childhood, in her school and during her college, much before this dreadful situation appeared in her life. She writes: "Early in life, I thought I would be a writer. My experience of life and things was yet limited and vague; still, I started writing, and tried to render sensitively in words, my perceptions of life, however inadequate" (*Unfinished Autobiography* 12). One of her well-wisher and the editor of a daily, *Natun Asomiya*, Kirtinath Hazarika, was the man who inspired her to write and initiated her to her early writings. Indira Goswami relates her gratefulness to him for his contribution towards her achievement in writing career. She writes: "It is primarily due to his inspiration that I stuck to the vocation of writing. I made writing a sort of an escape from the terrible experience of my life" (*Unfinished Autobiography* 205). She took to her writing seriously after her father's death in order to evacuate herself and this moment may be termed as the moment of birth of the artistic self of the writer which was so far locked up within her. Later after her husband's death, there grew up camaraderie between Goswami and her creative writing that in the long run became her life mate. Amrita Pritam writes in the foreword of this autobiography that it was at this moment:

I do not know what kind of stars were influencing her life at that time. But it was certainly a fateful moment when Nature herself made her take her first step towards metamorphosis. She picked up her pen to do creative writing. She turned out a spate of stories, all of which had the distinction of being published. It was really something to gloat over. (ix)

This artistic self has situated her in the heart of her readers and helped in reducing her heavy-heartedness. Creative writing has helped her to gather courage and withstand the mental traumas of her life.

As a voracious reader, Goswami devoted a considerable part of her life to reading of literature. To her it occurred that her engagement towards reading and writing could palliate her mental injury. She writes: "As a college girl, I took active interest in literature, which I read and practice regularly almost every day. There was a day when I looked upon it as an escape from all the ills of life, as a drop of nectar that would soothe all my woes" (*An Unfinished Autobiography* 16). She adds: "The hours devoted to literature gave me peace of mind. At other hours, my mind was lost in agony and strife" (*Unfinished Autobiography* 20). Even at Vrindaban, in the dark lonely hovel she took up reading in order to nullify her depression. She writes: "I read a great deal in those days only to escape from a gloomy existence, so much so that ceaseless reading became a kind of second nature for me" (*Unfinished Autobiography* 125).

Goswami was inspired by the tumultuous life of Tulsidas. She writes in her autobiography: "To tell the truth, I was moved more by the life of this great poet than his work. I drew a kind of inspiration from his life" (*Unfinished Autobiography* 124). After an extensive research on *Ramayana*, she realised that a creative writer is born from the womb of pain and agony. Until and unless an individual experiences suffering in his life, his pen cannot produce heartrending literature. Apart from talent and skill, creativity requires purgation of the inner self in the flame of life. Tulsidas suffered from the scorns of his father for being born under some inauspicious spell that Goswami relates to her own. But that did

not stop him; he continued his combat with life to produce the huge epic, *Ramayana*. This inspired Indira to stand firm amidst adversities of life. Amrita Pritam writes in the foreword of the book:

...Tulsidas's life had become a great source of inspiration to her....like Tulsidas, her life had also gone a metamorphosis. Her pen gave birth not only to her autobiography but also to her novels and collections of short stories. She has touched upon many social problems through the medium of her stories.... The power that this metamorphosis has bestowed upon her, has now become a matter of pride for every Assamese woman. (xi- xiii)

Indira Goswami has also acknowledged the love of her readers in formation of her self as a writer. She writes that her heart was filled with joy when her readers corresponded with her in letters after the publication of her autobiography. She writes:

I received words of praise from many Assamese writers too.....I have preserved their letters with care....I received letters of all sorts. It gave me quite a thrill to receive letters of praise from readers from unknown quarters....Although I did not think highly of my own writings, a word of praise from a reader or a fellow writer enthused me much. (*Unfinished Autobiography* 205-206)

She has named many writers and eminent scholars, like Gulabdas Broker, the famous Gujarati writer, Dr. Harbhajan Singh, the renowned poet of Punjab, Kamala Ratnam, the famous Sanskrit scholar of India, Amrita Pritam, the well-known Indian writer, and many Assamese writers – Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya, Syed Abdul Malik, Maheshwar Neog, Satyandra Nath Sharma, Hiren Gohain, Nilam Kumar, and many others, who after reading her works praised her and hailed her to a high place among the men of letters. The heartbroken life-story of the author has moved them. It helped her readers to develop an optimistic attitude to life. Its positive aspect has taught them how to earn victory in the face of odds. Many readers have written to her that it has opened a new vista and has carved a new purpose and meaning of life.

On the other hand, these pieces of papers provided courage to the author and raised her confidence to write more literature. It has encouraged her to write more for them. The readers who criticized her before, too, came up to stand by her side after reading her life-narrative. This support she missed all through her life. This love she vehemently needed to stand firm ever in the face of her personal loss. Goswami has received many prestigious awards and honours like Sahitya Akademi Award (1983), Jnanpith Award (2000), Netherland's prestigious Principal Prince Claus Award (2008), and many more, but this noted litterateur says in the preface of the book that "For a writer, no recognition is more valuable than the spontaneous response of the readers" (xvii). In an interview with Ranavir Rangra, she says:

I feel happy with the colourful letters I get from my fans. I also feel extremely happy when I read in some of the letters that many of them get strength and solace after reading my autobiography....The immense love of my readers for my writings has given me more happiness and fulfillment than any award for my literary achievement. (175)

It can be concluded that each phase of the author's life depicted in her autobiography is very much connected to one or another individual who appeared in her life and supported her to come into being. Her self as a girl is affectionately attached to her father, as a married woman she is connected to

her loving husband – Madhu, as a widow who devoted her life as a researcher to studies is committed to her revered teacher at Vrindaban – Professor Lekharu and her self as a writer is associated to her adoring readers. To whomever she showed her strong affiliation – her father and her husband – they all left her alone. Goswami writes:

But all things come to an end one day. Nothing abides. Not even one's closest companions keep one company for ever. They, too, take their turn, and disappear. Only a lonely, mysterious path lies before all of us. A person can be said to live, in the full sense of the term, only those few days when the people who are tied to his heart-strings, are still around him. (*Unfinished Autobiography* 181)

She located a room of her own in the genre of creative writing and thus survived her trauma. For that her sincere reverence to her teacher is appreciated with her words that end her autobiography:

It is now many days since my most revered teacher Upendra Chandra Lekharu breathed his last. I have preserved till today, the amulet that he fastened on my arm. I have not forgotten the incantation either, that he had whispered in my ears. My teacher inspired me to be neither a famous writer nor an eminent scholar, but an individual endowed with all human qualities. Nothing measures up to humanity. For my teacher, humanity alone was the prime consideration, and nothing else.... (*Unfinished Autobiography* 219-220)

Through her writing Indira Goswami has tried to portray the predicaments of Indian women and their sufferings. Her dissension and discordance with the practical harsh realities of life and her decry of the forceful imposition on women in the name of tradition substantiate that she has objurgated the social norms through her writing. Her voice is the voice of her subjugated counterparts, the submissive women, who are duped and dumped at the periphery of human conglomeration, silently suffering, fearful to open up their soul and are assaying to set forth their own identity. Indira Goswami's *An Unfinished Autobiography* is an inspiration to them.

Works Cited:

- Barua, D. K. "Mamoni Raisom Goswami: The Insistent Pattern". *Indian Women Novelists*. Ed. R. K. Dhawan. Set III: Vol. 6. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1995. Print.
- Goswami, Indira. *An Unfinished Autobiography*. Trans. P. Kotoky. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 2002. Print.
- Rangra, Ranavir. Ed. *India-50 Years of Independence: 1947-97: Status Growth & Development. Women Writers: Literary Interviews*. Vol.-7. New Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1998. Print.