



MAMONI (ROISOM) GOSWAMI

An Epic Life Scaling New Heights

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A renowned figure in the literary scene of Assam, nay India, is Dr Indira Goswami, popularly known as Mamoni Roisom Goswami. She was born in to an illustrious family of the Amranga Satra in 1942. Her parents were Uma Kanta Goswami and Ambika Devi, both exceptional people in their own way. While her father was an academician and bureaucrat, her mother was a liberal woman who never prevented the young 'Mamoni' from living her life in her own terms.

Her carefree childhood was spent between two beautiful places of Amranga and Shillong. She was educated in a missionary school in Shillong and the beauty of the place overwhelmed her. But she was also acutely aware of the pains and misery of the poor and the deprived. She grew to love all living beings, man or animal.

After her matriculation, she joined Handique Girls' College (Intermediate) but graduated from Cotton College. Her affair with the pen started very early in life and most of her writings deal with the sufferings of

the marginalized, like workers, women, especially widows. In 1965, she was married to Mr. G.R. Madhavan (Raisom) who had a very good family background and was himself an engineer. Unfortunately, in 1967, he was killed in a jeep accident and Indira Goswami returned to Gauhati thereafter. She carried on research in Vrindavan and later joined the Delhi University (MIL Deptt). Her early novel *Nilakanthi Braja* dealt poignantly with the pain and alienation in the lives of scores of widows in God's own place Vrindavan, while the struggle and suffering of the poor workers in a construction site caught her imagination resulting in her first major creative effort *Chenabar Srut*. The plight of the poor and the downtrodden moved her so much that she felt an irresistible inner urge to bring it to light through the medium of creative writing.

Public recognition came to her in the form of Sahitya Akademi Award in 1982 for her novel *Mamore Dhora Taruwal*. Her most celebrated novel was probably *Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah* (the Moth Eaten Howdah) which has been translated to many languages. A milestone in the world of Assamese fiction writing, this novel subtly deals with such issues as gender discrimination and casteism, besides focusing on the decadent feudalistic culture in Colonial Assam. *Datal Hatir...* signals a new direction in the realm of fiction narratives by capturing stylistically the subtle nuances of the regional 'Kamrupia' dialect. The invocation of the local culture through its linguistic resources shows how the poetics of the local can be creatively exploited in the mainstream Assamese literature. The Film *Adajya* (1996, directed by Dr Santwana Bordoloi) based on this novel has won many national and international awards. Her novels are a part of Course curriculum in many Indian Universities while foreign universities, like New Jersey University have prescribed her books for studies.

Her forte has been not only novels but short stories too and her pet subject of research has been the Ramayana. She received the International Tulsi Award for her contribution to the study of Ramayana. Some of the other Awards received by her include Assam Sahitya Sabha Award (1988), Katha National Award for Literature (1993), 2008 Principal Prince Claus Award for the first time in India in 2009, Jnanpith Award (2000) etc.

She has delivered innumerable lectures, published books, been feted and honoured by many universities in India and abroad. A member of numerous prestigious organizations and Committees, She is undoubtedly a golden star in the horizon of Assamese literature.

Her peace efforts have been well acclaimed as is evident from the award, 'International Prize Ambassador for Peace' by Inter religious and International Federation of World Peace, Seoul, S. Korea. In her own state, she has been instrumental in doing a lot to bring the ULFA 'boys', as she calls them and the Govt to the negotiating table.

Mamoni R. Goswami's *An Unfinished Autobiography* is another landmark in the history of Assamese literature for its candid and courageous portrayal of the agonies and ecstasies of her life. In fact, she has redefined the very genre and concept of autobiographical writing

through her works such as *Tez Aru Dhulire Dhukharita Pristha* and *Dostabazar Herua Pristha* in which she has crossed the generic boundaries among personal history, fiction, biography and autobiography.

Presently Dr Goswami is working on her dream project of opening a hospital for the poor and the downtrodden in a rural area of Assam. She has also recently researched and written a novel *Theng Fakhri Tahsildarar Tamor Tarwal* (2010) on a Bodo woman, Thenka Tenor, a subject which has so far remained marginalized in the official history of British India. □□