



INDIRA MIRI

Braving The Odds

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Indira Miri in her autobiography ‘Moi aru NEFA’ writes that—

‘Present is meaningless
Past is the truth
Future—there is none.’

One understands her sense of pessimism after reading the book. For, after leading an active life, full of rich and vibrant experiences it is difficult to come to terms with the confines imposed by old age on a strong mind. Born on the ‘Bijaya Dasami’ day (1910) to a progressive and liberal family, she was a path breaker in the sphere of education in the real sense of the term. She lost her mother at a very young age, but her father left no stone unturned to educate his daughter. She had her early education in Shillong in a Bengali medium school, as there were no Assamese medium school there at that time. But, her father thought it better to educate her in Kolkata, if she were to be educated in Bengali. She was admitted to the Brahma Girls’ School in Kolkata in class four, stayed in the hostel and went on to pass her Matriculation examination from there. In 1928, she

enrolled herself in Scottish Church College for her graduation. She belonged to the second batch of female students to be admitted there, as it was formerly an all boys' college.

After her graduation, her father arranged her marriage with Mohi Chandra Miri, a high official of the Forest Department. Her father and her husband were the two most important persons in her life which she devotedly acknowledges in her autobiography. Just as destiny had deprived her of a mother's love at a very early age, in the same way, she lost her husband after seven years of blissful marital life.

She went back to her paternal home after this tragedy and while she was still trying to cope with her loss, she came across an advertisement that Madame Montessori would come to Ahmedabad to conduct training for six months. Feeling the need for a change, she applied for the course. Not only was she selected but also received a scholarship from the Central government to undergo the same. Her sister and her father offered to look after her three children while she was away. On returning from Ahmedabad, she stopped at Delhi on her way back. Her brother, Mohendra Lal Das who was an M.P. took her to the then Education Minister and on his advice she applied for a scholarship to study abroad. After a month or so she received an invitation for an interview and was subsequently selected to study in Edinburgh University for her B.Ed degree. She boarded the ship 'Strathmore' from Bombay on her quest for higher education. It was a difficult decision as she had to leave her children behind. The strong support of her father and family made this possible.

After returning from Edinburgh in 1947, her destiny was NEFA. The North East Frontier Province was the remotest of British Indian provinces. It was this place which was to be her 'karma xetra'. The rich experiences of her fruitful life in NEFA has been vividly described in her autobiography and one cannot fail to understand the passion and missionary zeal with which she conducted her work for the cause of education in that remote area. She was not only responsible for framing the policy of education there but was also responsible for executing it. It was under her leadership that teachers were being trained to be sent to the different parts of NEFA. For ten years she worked in NEFA and after leaving NEFA she was entrusted with the task of starting a Post graduate Training Center for Teachers in Jorhat and she joined as its founder Principal. It was the first of its kind in the state. After her retirement in 1968, she joined the Bani Kanta B.T. College as its Principal. It was the pioneer institute for imparting training to teachers and it developed under her maternal care. In 1980 she was appointed the Chairperson of the State Welfare Board. She breathed her last in 2009.

Indira Miri is a person whose life story is not only inspiring but also exemplary. Her courage, determination, strength of mind, simplicity are established in her deeds. Despite all hardships she managed to leave her footprints in the history of education not only in NEFA but also in Assam. She belongs to that group of feminists who believe that women's special qualities of kindness, forgiveness, love, devotion and sense of duty, are what set

them apart. Women need not shed their femininity to become modern or liberated or to compete with men.

A matter of great pride for Handique Girls' College is the regard Indira Miri had for Raja Bala Das the founder Principal of the college. Writing about educators who had left a deep impression on her mind, she mentions Raja Bala Das, with whom she had the privilege of working together in Panbazar Girls' High School. 'It is rare to find such souls who are so devoted to the promotion of women education,' she felt. A remarkable quality in Indira Miri was her oratorical skill. With her proficiency in Bengali, English, Hindi and Assamese, she could hold the audience spellbound through her speeches, delivered in various public meetings. □□