

## PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

### **Women Empowerment: A discussion based on the novel 'Abhiyatri'**

*Purbalee Gohain*

Cotton University, Guwahati, Assam, India

Email: gohain.purbalee@gmail.com

**Purbalee Gohain. Women Empowerment: A discussion based on the novel 'Abhiyatri'--Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 17(8), 903-908. ISSN 1567-214x**

**Keywords: Women Empowerment, liberty, equality, freedom movement , revolution.**

#### **Abstract:**

The women's liberty revolution is now considered as the most significant topic of today's age. For many years based on the point of view of conventional customs and reforms of the society, men had a different notion about women and similar to men, women also started to judge themselves through the same point of view . So the ideas that were revealed through their creations and compositions were repercussions of male centric notions. But after many years of slavery, now women decided to revolt against this discrimination and hence able to establish their own place in the society. The topic that I am going to discuss is Women Empowerment : a discussion based on the modern novel 'Abhiyatri' .

The main reason behind selecting this topic is because ChandraprabhaSaikiani was the first flag bearer of the women's liberty revolution of Assam . She equally took part in politics like man for exploring the path of women's liberty and also established herself as a symbol of modern women in front of society. NirupamaBorgohain's 'Abhiyatri' is the life oriented novel of ChandraprabhaSaikiani who was the leader of Assam's feminist movement. Along with showing the social position of women before independence , their participation in the freedom movement, and organising the Women Association of Assam , the novel also showed the huge personality of ChandraprabhaSaikiani, her work and effort to establish women in equal position like men . Based on the effort which has helped women to break all the traditional customs and rules of the society and empower themselves , this topic has been selected for discussing in this paper. A descriptive method is used to write this paper.

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

One of the most wonderful creations of God is woman. In general, woman refers to a lovely and kind hearted mother figure . Woman is also the symbolic identity of love and mother of whole mankind. It is a woman who has continued the integral flow of creation in this universe. The dynamic continuation of a society is only possible because of a woman. From the ancient times to the modern time society is alive because of the equal

participation of men and women in different areas of work. In Vedic Era, women and men occupied equal positions. Women were allowed to participate in religious events, attend Gurukul for education, earn sanctitude, can select their own grooms, take part in other social activities etc. They were not confined under any boundaries and were able to earn these rights equally like men. But towards the medieval age, the status of women started declining. The conventional rules and norms of society were the main reason behind the degradation of the dignity of women.

Time changes its course. Along with the time, society also transformed. The promotion of modern education brought freedom into the lives of Indian women. Due to education the repression that women suffered from the male dominating society started losing. But some evil activities like dowry practice, rape, kidnapping etc still threatens the entire female community. However by receiving education women gathered courage to revolt against these patriarchal dominations and established their own status in the society. In Assam the main leader of this revolution was Chandraprabha Saikiani. Based on real life and work of this feminist, the novelist Nirupama Borgohain in the year 1993, published her greatest feminist novel 'Abhiyatri'.

#### **Purpose of the Study:**

Nirupama Borgohain's novel 'Abhiyatri' that won the prestigious "Sahitya Akademy Award", in the year 1996, is not only a novel but it motivates and encourages the whole women community. This novel made women self-reliant and enthusiastic to engage themselves in various sectors of work. The main aim of this research paper is to empower women by ignoring all the unnecessary norms of the society and engaging themselves in different areas of work.

#### **Scope of the Study :**

'Abhiyatri' is a pure feministic novel. While talking about women empowerment based on the novel 'Abhiyatri', factors like women education, society's point of view regarding women education, love and betrayal, problems of caste and community, Women Association, and participation of women in freedom movement etc are included in the scope of this proposed research paper.

#### **Record of the previous Study :**

In many other books and writing pieces, there is a mention of the novel 'Abhiyatri' which is considered as a feminist novel that encourages women empowerment. As an instance the novel of Dr Govinda Prasad Sharma 'Naribaad Aru Axomiya Uponyax' and the novel edited by Dr Nagen Thakur 'Ekho Bosor Aru Axomiya Uponyax' are notable in this context.

#### **Methods of the Study :**

In this proposed research paper, descriptive and critical viewpoints are used for discussing the topic.

## 2. A brief introduction of the novel 'Abhiyatri' :

Although all women associated together in order to get equal rights like men but in the field of literature , it was male writers who in the second and third decade of 19th century engaged in writing about problems and rights of women in their novels. After Padmavati Devi Phukani , the female novelist during the early age of Assamese novel , few feminist women novelists emerged during twentieth and thirtieth decades of 20th century. NirupamaBorgohain was the first novelist who published the maximum number of novels based on feminism from the sixtieth to ninetieth decades of the 20th century. In novels of one of the famous and powerful novelists MamoniRoisonGoswami , a feminist outlook can be seen. It is also notable that in novels of today's youngest writer ArupaPatangia ,an essence of feminism is seen.

From the Seventieth decade , NirupamaBorgohain started writing novels in order to establish feminist viewpoint and ideologies clearly in the society. Her novels not only encourages the feminist viewpoint but also removed the absence of female writers from the Assamese literature. Borgohain was very much responsible for women's freedom and development. Actually she was a pure feminist novelist. Her most famous novel was 'Abhiyatri'.

This novel was written based on the life of a revolutionary woman who after suffering from ignorance and dominations of the patriarchal society, fought without accepting defeat and was successful in establishing the seed of liberty revolution in Assam. This woman was none other than ChandraprabhaSaikiani. To rise the issue of feminism, she then started writing novels .

In the novel ' Abhiyatri' the sad story of Chandraprabha and her sister Rajaniprabha was discussed. It showed the status of women before independence , their participation in the freedom movement and the development of Women 'sAssociation. It also showed the utmost effort of ChandraprabhaSaikiani to place women in an equal position like men in the society.

## 3. The novel 'Abhiyatri' and it's features regarding women empowerment :

The novel 'Abhiyatri' was written around the lives of Chandraprabha also known as Chandrapriya and her sister Rajaniprabha also known as Rameshwari who was born in a remote village of Assam . They took education and work for the rights and liberty of women . In this novel some important topics were discussed which not only empowered women of that age but also empowering women of today's age. These topics were further classified into smaller points :

### **Women education and society's point of view regarding women education:**

In all the countries among the total population the rate of female citizens is higher. So in order to develop the country it is necessary to develop its women . So women education is very much important in this context. Because without education no development is possible. Everytime women got a weaker position than men and in the field of education also it was no different. Female child were taught household works and also faced child marriage, Sati , dowry

tradition etc . They were not allowed to study and roam around freely like boys. So the literacy rate of women declined. According to Mahatma Gandhi, a family will be considered educated only when the woman of the family is educated. Like men, education is also the fundamental right of women. Women are not husband's slaves but their life partners. Again Swami Vivekananda said " a community who does not give respect to women cannot be great in the present or in future. Every woman deserves the right to solve their own problems " . According to him women represent power.

The contribution of women in organizing a community as well as a country is very significant. So to run a country it is necessary to educate the women. In other words educating women is another way of empowering them. After independence, the government took many steps for the development of women education. It included "National Education Policy 1986" and "National Policy of Empowerment of Women of Assam 2001". The first policy accepted to remove the illiteracy rate of women and also remove the obstacles from the way of their education. It also gave importance to provide vocational , technical and professional education to women. In 2001 the government of India then started the policy of women empowerment that included all the areas which were needed to empower.

In this situation only the simple girl of village ChandrababhaSaikiani was able to crush the wall of all hindrances and stepped into the field of education and worked for the development of the whole women community. In the novel 'Abhiyatri' , the obstacles that women faced regarding education and the point of view of the society on women education was beautifully described.

During that period of time women were only allowed to do household work. Education was only possible in their imaginations. Because they were so busy doing household chores, they did not get time to think about their education. And the society also stood as a wall between the women and their education. Attending school was considered as a sign of disrespect towards the entire caste and community. But from her very childhood ChandrababhaSaikiani was aware of her rights. ChandrababhaSaikiani went ahead in her life by considering that women were not at all weaker than men. She could not tolerate any negligence on the part of women. After completing her education at the age of twenty by overcoming all the obstacles, she somehow managed a place to educate other girls of the village. At a very young age ChandrababhaSaikiani decided to work as a teacher in order to empower the girls of the village by providing them with proper education. Appreciating the work of ChandrababhaSaikiani, her brother -in-law said , "Little Chandra ! how much load you have taken in your little head. I have not seen any other girl like you in this world".

### **Love , Betrayal, problems of Caste and Community and Defamation:**

From a very early age we have seen that whenever we pronounce the men and women together, the woman is pronounced in a very lower tone. As if women should always stay under men is decided by any great person or is mentioned in any great book. That's why women were neglected by society. Whenever anybody faces betrayal in love, our society will always blame the woman. If someone will point on her character then someone will say that she doesn't belong to the same community . Otherwise she will be considered as a self centered girl. If the husband dies after marriage, the society will blame the

wife only . From our birth only we know such defamations about women. Now also the impact is not completely demolished from the society. In fact women are the main enemy of other women . Instead of supporting , a woman always tried to defame other women. When ChandraprabhaSaikiani first rode a cycle , many women said in disgust " look how she is riding a cycle. If she was not left by her husband she could not have rode it. Her husband would have broken her legs" . The feeling of love twice bloomed in the heart of Chandraprabha. Once for DondiKalita and another for her country. Her first love gave nothing to her except a son in her lap. DondiKalita couldn't fight for his love and left Chandraprabha with a son without marrying her. So she thought " she gave birth to a son who was very charming and was a part of very intellectual person but his birth brought defamations to her life " . But ignoring all the allegations , she shined like gold and walked ahead in her life. Her attitude and ideologies still help women to empower themselves.

#### **Women Association and participation of women in freedom movement:**

During the twentieth century, the national Congress party started an agenda for welfare of women . The leaders and the reformers allowed women to join politics equally like men. As a result , women participated and established themselves as a symbol of modern women. Based on this idea, in 1917, the Nikhil Bharatiya Women Association was formed.

In Assam the reform movement and freedom movement gave birth to active and educated women like ChandraprabhaSaikiani and Rajbala Das. Because of their persistent effort in 1926, "Assam Women Association" was formed for the welfare of the women . However before this the association was already formed in Dibrugarh and Nagaon respectively in the year 1915 and 1917. This is how an area was set up through which women can be empowered. In a literary meeting session in Dhubri , Saikiani requested all the women to break the barriers and come forward. She shouted ," Why men were allowed to sit freely and women were kept behind the bars. What do you want to prove by this? that women are weaker than men . Where is it written? " She told all the women to break the bars and come out . This is how the women association was formed.

Later on in Tezpur she met Mahatma Gandhi and became an active part of the freedom movement. One of the ideologies of the freedom movement was educating and developing women and ChandraprabhaSaikiani accepted this ideology as her own ideology .

#### **4. Conclusion :**

All the traces of women empowerment are very much reflected in NirupamaBorgohain's novel 'Abhiyatri'. Besides that ,the need for women education is also described beautifully in the novel . At the age of twenty, ChandraprabhaSaikiani completed her education and decided to teach other girls of her village to empower them . ChandraprabhaSaikiani also faced betrayal in love . She gave birth to a son before marriage and ignoring all the defamations of the society , she raised her son and set a bright example of women empowerment. ChandraprabhaSaikiani offered her best services as the worker and leader of Congress to serve the nation and also engaged herself in establishing women associations at different places for welfare of women.

Apart from lack of well transportation system, ChandrabhabhaSaikiani moved from one place to other to fulfill her promises and aims and objectives of women empowerment. Through the women's association, she talked about earning equal opportunity like men to do different works. She believed that women could easily perform any tasks along with men equally. As such, we can say that ChandrabhabhaSaikiani was a powerful woman, an Assamese freedom fighter, activist, writer and social reformer who dedicated her life in serving the country and in the development of women. The novel 'Abhiyatri' will always remain as a symbol of morality for all the women which is written on the basis of the life of ChandrabhabhaSaikiani who tried to empower the entire womenfolk.

#### **Contextual References:**

1. Dr. KavitaGogoi (edited) : NARI: "SamajSahitya, Sanskriti" , page 47
2. NirupamaBorgohain : Abhiyatri, page 42
3. Aforementioned book: page 149
4. Aforementioned book: page 109
5. Aforementioned book : page 146
6. Aforementioned book: page 147

#### **5. References :**

1. Gogoi , Kavita(edited): NARI: Samaj,Sahitya, Sanskriti, publication cell, Moridhal College, Moridhal, Dhemaji- 787057 , First edition, 2013
- 2.Thakur, Nagen ( edited) : EkhoBosororAxomiyaUpanyash , JyotiPrakashan, Panbazar , Guwahati- 781001
- 3.Borgohain, Nirupama : Abhiyatri, Journal Emporium, Nalbari, Guwahati , 2016 ( 7th edition)
4. Borgohain, Homen (edited) : AxomiyaSahityarBuranji ( 6th edition) , Anandaram Boruah Bhasha Kola SanskritiSangstha, Axom
- 5.Sarmah, Govindaprasad : Naribad Aru Axomiya Uponyax, Axom Prakashan Parishad , Guwahati , 2011 ( 2nd edition)
6. Sarmah, Satyendranath: AxomiyaUponyaxrGotidhara , Saumar Prakash
- 7.. Hatiboruah, Diganta : ManabAdhikar , SaraswatiPrakashan , Bhagawati *Manab Adhikar, Swaraswati Prakashan, Bhagawati Prasad Chaliha Path, Golaghat-785621 (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)*