

The Distinct Narrative Patterns Of Articulation As Feminist Writers; A Comparative Analysis OF Indira Goswami And Suniti Namjoshi.

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Abstract

Feminist writers articulate their problems, experiences, feelings, desires, aspirations, and failures, in their writings through different narrative patterns. Some of them write about their personal lives, using their own experiences while fighting against the poor social status of and disparity against women. To avoid the possible embarrassment in their conventional surroundings, they disguise themselves in a way, as fictional heroines of their writings and exhibit their own experiences. The term 'narrative' encompasses most of the activities of human beings and its simple meaning is anything that tells a story. This 'anything' includes novel, short story, fable, drama, film, painting, history book, comic strip, gossip, newspaper etc. The article examines two Indian feminist writers Indira Goswami and Suniti Namjoshi with distinctly different narrative styles. The study also undertakes to explore the differences

in their socio-cultural milieu, Indira Goswami from the rural regions of Assam and Suniti representing urban landscapes. It is significant to understand that beyond their distinct narrative patterns and socio-cultural landscapes, they both articulate distinct feministic thoughts.

Key words – Narrative, Feminism, Fable, Fiction

Indira Goswami and Suniti Namjoshi both born in the same decade i.e., 1940s of the pre-independence India articulated their emotions and experiences through different narrative patterns; the former through novels and the latter used fables. Both articulated feminine experience and a new personal vision by creating their own literature. They tried to uncover the elements of '*self*' which had been hidden under the cultural and patriarchal myths of selfhood. Using the distinct narrative patterns, they articulated their experiences and real life situations through mythical and fictitious characters specifically created for this purpose. The article attempts to make a comparative analysis of both the writers who used different narrative patterns to articulate but their goal remains the same -projecting feministic themes in their writings.

Goswami has similarities with Namjoshi on a number of counts. Both of them write from their felt experiences drawing personal life into them. Although the background and region they belong to of both the authors are poles apart, yet there are striking similarities between the two creative artists. Indira Goswami born in the rural North-east and Namjoshi in the urban down South of India have tried to give voice for the voiceless and bring in the awareness of equality in their works. Goswami a well-known name in the field of literature in the state of Assam and other parts of the country lived her life in the northern part of India. Many incidents from her real life in north-east India find place in her novels. Her own words in this connection are noteworthy, *I try my best to*

portray the factual reality in literature. But such a method can't be applied in literature as because literature is an art. Some incidents occur in this real world, which are hard to describe. In fact, I had to regulate some strange scenes of reality through subjugation of passion.(Gogoi 218) An Indian by birth, Suniti now lives abroad in UK, where she is at home having adopted a very western life style. Nevertheless, she is basically an Indian, which is evident in her works where there are allusions to Indian mythology and the Indian way of life. Namjoshi's complex intelligence, inched by her Indian heritage and her broad culture, has given her work a shimmering complexity.

Both the writers are born in Brahmin families the community claimed to be 'upper caste' but suffered double fold exploitation first being a woman then a Brahmin. After the early death of her husband Madhavan Ransom Ayengar eighteen months after marriage, Goswami was devastated and was left in a state of shock and depression. Her status of being a widow especially in the Brahmin community was difficult and depressing. Her plight is portrayed through her characters; Saru Gossainee, another conformist, consoled miserable Durga when her gold ornaments were stolen as *it's our fate that we are born as women. We should learn to lead our lives with patience and tolerance* (Goswami 2004: 99). On the other hand, though Suniti Namjoshi established herself as a writer and specifically lesbian feminist, her mother didn't approve of, obviously for someone who belongs to a conservative Brahmin community. In an interview with Christine Cryoden she puts before us her mother's point of view, *"She has never, been particularly happy about that I'm a writer, or, a lesbian feminist. She sees these as notoriety, tarnishing the good name of the family. . ."* (Gupta121).

Another striking similarity between the two writers is that both distanced away from men in their lives. Goswami lost her husband in a car accident in Kashmir just after eighteen months after marriage and lived a complete life remaining single. Whereas Namjoshi chose to be a lesbian living

a life without men. Suniti met Gillian Hanscombe, an Australian author, in London in 1984. Presently she lives in Devon, England with her friend, a lesbian partner Gillian Hanscombe, writing and serving as a research fellow at Exter University. Namjoshi's search for identity and her wish to act according to her inner compulsion leads her to lesbianism. In her world a lesbian lives a perfect life. The life of a woman most of the times is male dominated where she has to bend before egos of male, whether she is a working woman or confined to the four walls of her house, a mother or a sister, wife or a daughter, an Indian, a European or from any part of the globe. She is a second sex. Her suffering is inner suffering of suppressed emotions and reckoning discomfort of broken self-respect. Though she bears the domination of male and smiles yet the agony of submission exists. Namjoshi's lesbianism is a solution to establish female self-respect, identity and a life of freedom. C. Vijayasree remarks, "*Namjoshi is the first Indian woman writer to have openly declared her sexual choice as a lesbian and has since held that the kind of sexual life one chooses to lead is a purely personal matter, where an individual's autonomy should neither be checked nor curtailed*" (Vijayasree 26).

Both Goswami and Namjoshi are rebellious in nature. It is evident when at the peak of her literary career Goswami wrote the controversial novel *The Man from Chinnamasta*, a critique of the thousand-years-old tradition of animal sacrifice in the famous Hindu Shakti temple to Kamakhya, a mother goddess, in Assam. Goswami reported that there was even threat to her life after writing the novel. In this novel she quotes scriptures to authenticate the argument she puts forward in the novel – to worship the Mother Goddess with flowers rather than blood. She said in an interview, "*When the novel was serialized in a popular magazine, I was threatened with dire consequences. Shortly after this, a local newspaper, Sadin, carried an appeal about animal sacrifice, which resulted in quite an uproar—the editor was gheraoed and a tantrik warned me. But when the*

appeal was published, the response was overwhelmingly in favour of banning animal sacrifice. I also had to contend with rejection from a publisher who was initially keen and had promised me a huge advance, but who later backtracked, offering instead to publish any other book of mine. But the rest, as they say, is history and Chinnamastar Manuhto went on to become a runaway bestseller!" When Namjoshi declared her identity as a lesbian, one can understand that a girl from a conservative Indian background taking such rebellious step is not a common thing. It was resulted in her tarnished relationship with her mother throughout her life which is clearly depicted in her poetry.

The narrative patterns the two writers have chosen to raise their voice against male-dominated society is distinct. Though Suniti Namjoshi has written novels, poems and short stories, she wants to be identified as a fabulist rather than a novelist. Namjoshi confesses about her status, *"I am not a novelist. I am a fabulist"* (Kanaganayakam 50). In an Interview with Chelva Kanaganayakam, Namjoshi says, *"I am always asked why I write fables and why I write about animals. I try to supply answers, but the honest truth is I don't know. We don't separate animals from human beings.* (Namjoshi 50) She makes the use of Anderson's tales, Christian myths, Panchatantra stories, Aesop's fables, Greek myths and other texts to deconstruct the patriarchal world. A woman is at the center of these fables and fairy tales. As the poet, the fabulist, the feminist as well as the lesbian, Namjoshi explicates women's marginalization, subordination, suppression, and oppression in the patriarchal society. She presents the image of woman struggling for self-identity and equality, autonomy and self-affirmation. Some of her fables deal with women's lives being erased, ignored, demeaned and mystified. She highlights the exploitation of women on social, sexual and psychological grounds.

Goswami, coping with depression and anxiety started to write and work as a teacher. She chose novel as a narrative pattern to articulate her feelings. During her literary career spanning over four decades, Mamani Raisom Goswami has, in different interviews and writings, acknowledged how different factors have shaped her literary career. Firstly, so overpowering is her urge to tell a story that life and literature have become one and the same for her. In an interview with Homen Borgohain (1932-), a noted critic and intellectual, Goswami has clearly acknowledged that contribution of literature to her life is much more than anything else. She cannot imagine her life without literature. She admits that literature has been the pushing factor for her against all odds and only literature has kept her alive. Her writings have stabilized her unstable mind. She had contributed a lot in the field of Assamese literature and some of her stories were made into movies. Some of her widely acclaimed novels and short stories are- *Mamore Dhora Tarowal*, *Hriday ek Nadir Nam*, *Adha Lekha Dastabej (autobiography)*, *Tej Aru Dhulire Dhusarita Prishtha* etc.

Goswami's confrontation with the widows during her stay in Brindavan created a master piece novel "Nilakanthar Bajra" (**Blue necked God**). It is an important work which depicts the miserable and exploited lives of widows in Brindavan. The plight of widows in Hindu society, and the oppression of girls and women were the focus in her classic creation "Dontal Hatir Uiyee Khowda Howda" (**The Moth Eaten Howdah of a Tusker**). Her novel about the bloody anti-Sikh riots in Delhi, "Tej Aru Dhulire Dhusarita Prishtha" (**Pages Stained with Blood**), is a heart-touched and haunting read. Goswami's book *Chhinmasatar Manuhto* was against animal sacrifice in the famed Kamakhya Temple, the seat of Shakti worship, which raised the hackles of the temple priests while Jatra is set against the backdrop of insurgency in Assam. Her only English book "Ramayana from Ganga to Brahmaputra" was published in 1996. Talking about the themes D.K. Baruah in his essay, *Mamani Raisom Goswami: The Insistent Pattern* has opined, "...what occupies her most is

with the unfolding of desire in a protagonist and often, or, rather invariably, in a woman character and the hazards of her existence. That to me seems to be the central theme of Mamani Goswami's novels". (Satarawala 21-22) On the other hand, Suniti Namjoshi's writing consists of fiction, fables and poetry. 'The Conversations of Cow', describes the travels of Suniti, an expatriate Indian lesbian, and Bhadravati, a Brahmini cow. It is a satirical questioning of stereotypical notions of identity and gender. 'The Blue Donkey Fables' contains poems and a number of fables in which the Blue Donkey figures. In 'The Mothers of Maya Diip', Namjoshi makes clear that merely putting women in charge (instead of men) does not necessarily solve anything. The story is set on an imaginary island off the west coast of India where 'a matriarchy bloomed unashamedly'

Conclusion

To conclude, both Goswami and Namjoshi despite from different regions and languages have interestingly a few commonalties which for any researcher of feminism give scope for further research. Both write with the themes of gender discrimination, victimization, suppression, and oppression, subjugation of women, feminist consciousness, radical feminism, the quest for identity and the plea for equality in the male-dominated patriarchy. Both of them are deadly against women's subordination and subversion and their positon as subaltern; therefore, they are in favour of women's quest for self-identity and emancipation from the clutches of patriarchy.

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