

**STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE IN INDIAN WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES  
IN ENGLISH: A STUDY OF SELECTED WORKS**



THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
KARNATAK UNIVERSITY, DHARWAD  
FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

**Doctor of Philosophy**

In  
**English**

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## Conclusion

The literature produced in India before independence did not have the qualities of existentialism, because Indian English literature then focused on social and political issues. In later years a gradual growth of Indian English literature turned from external world to internal world or the world of individuality. To express the self man has chosen autobiography as a tool. Earlier in Indian society women were treated as an option, and they were made to grow up with submissive nature. Society insists them not to rebel against the man-made system. Indian women accepted it and adopted themselves with circumstance. They were not recognised as the persons of the family and their feelings got suppressed. Society reminds woman of her duty as daughter, wife and mother and her commitments to family. She has been deprived of all the rights and freedoms. A few intellectuals made women to think independently. These women realized about their condition in man-dominated society. They wanted to overcome the experience of the ‘other’ Indian literature witnessed the roles of women evolving through the ages. Gradually women started the urge of her soul through the pen. Women writers started focusing on women’s conditions. Writers like Amrita Pritam, Kamala Das, Indira Goswami, Urmila Pawar and Bama went a step ahead and wrote autobiographies which have the question of existence and they celebrate the spirit of rebellion and present their struggle for existence. The outstanding feature of Indian women’s autobiography is its originality. When Indian men started writing autobiography, they imitated the form and norms of English autobiography. But they evolved their own ways.

The motto of every autobiography is a deliberate opening up of the self. Autobiography is a product of inner force or urge to represent the self. It is the story of success, weakness, defeat,

victories, thoughts and fantasies of the author's life. 'I' is very important in any autobiography, because it represents the honesty of the writer. Therefore the autobiography has its unique place in literature. It is suitable for women because it is a kind of purgation, which realizes all human feelings. For men it is not easy because a few men do not know to cry or they are ashamed of tears because they have a stereotyped image. Autobiography is the best way for women to express her self or disclose her intense emotions of joy, depression, rejection, restriction, injustice, suffering, struggle, discrimination, domination, loneliness and alienation.

All the five autobiographies selected for the present study are unique. When we analyze each one of them, it is difficult to give a collective conclusion, because their area of interest, time period in which they lived and the cultural background to which they belong made them different. All these factors did not allow me to bring a common conclusion.

Usually women writers focus on the conflicts in man-woman relationship and the female psyche conditioning it to survive the oppressive forces. From Rasasundari Devi to till today, it is more than one century passed and along with the time many things changed, women's position is changed too. The circumstance is changed, but sacrifice and other typical nature of women are not much changed. Many women gave up their fight with life because of unfavorable situations but a few brave women made their own way and created history. These women faced difficulties of life and became models to other. The post-Independence Indian woman is aware of her rights, virtues, duties and conventions. She has a complete knowledge of her heritage and is proud to be part of a great tradition. Social obligations and moral responsibilities have conditioned her. She is aware of her fears, weaknesses and limitations; the length of the road she can tread upon, and the dangers she has to overcome. Her awareness of herself has reached to a full circle. However, she has a complete control over both her body and mind; and is quite capable of maintaining a

rightful balance between the two. The female writers of the new generation stress on her adaptability and adjustments. She can be aptly compared to life's necessity; like the water taking the form and shape of any vessel that is poured into. She mingles into any surroundings and blossoms amidst atrocious difficulties. She shows the path for others to follow. She is the essence of life-force.

My study "Struggle for Existence in Indian Women's Autobiography in English -A Study of Selected Works," has been an attempt to understand the struggle of women to establish their identities. This chapter summarizes the findings and the conclusions of my research work. The five women writers have presented their point of view of life through their autobiographies. They have presented their life with cultural, geographical and historical backgrounds. They represent contemporary women. There are a number of issues related to this study like how do they find their existence? What kind of self-identity they get as a writer and woman? What was their professional status? How these women did express themselves in their writings? Did autobiography help them to express their self? How these writers conduct themselves in society? Do their lives become a model to others? Do the autobiographies give a message to society? How society looks at them? What are the conflicts between society and their point of view? Did the Dalit and non-Dalit writers face the same struggle in society?

Autobiography as a genre gives us individualistic qualities. It is an expression of experience of life which brings transformation in the person. It is a realistic piece of life. It is a story of person or growth of self in general. Here the individual life is significant and other characters and situations are subordinated to individuals. It is full of memories. But when we study women's autobiography it is entirely different from the traditional way of autobiography. Women along with their personal life present the family, background, her relationship with

husband, parents, siblings, in-laws and children. In most of women's autobiographies woman tries to find her existence in the established system. She does not go out in search of truth, but tries to find the real truth of life in the existing system. Their transformation of life is from dependent to independent, from shadow of man to real identity. It is not an easy task for them.

The whole research can be summarized like this: The broad survey of literature was traced to find the roots of autobiography in the first chapter. Later it is discussed how autobiography was developed into an independent genre. Autobiography passed through many stages such as a diary, letter-writing, confession and memoirs. Thus it has gained its special qualities like individuality, straightforwardness, confession and search for truth. This genre gave liberty to the writers to express the self. They are written as mess, documents and as mark of success or as confession. Whatever is the motto of the writer's behind writing an autobiography, it has become a popular form of literature. People started reading more and more autobiographies because it is not just a story but a real story of a person with its merits and demerits. People started connecting themselves with autobiographies.

The growth and developed autobiography in India and the prominent autobiographies of India were discussed in the second chapter. An attempt is made to understand the difference between Eastern and Western autobiographies. It traced the development of women's autobiographies in India. We see how women got education, and when they had a place in literary world. We see the comparison of the position of women in pre and post-independent and modern times, content in general and autobiography in special. Women suffer from male-domination for centuries. Their existence and identity have been torn apart. They became marginalized in both family and society. The status of women's autobiography was given by

tracing the significant autobiographies. Then I have tried to find out the difference between men's and women's autobiographies.

Further discussion is on the struggle for existence in the select autobiographies of Amrita Pritam, Kamala Das, Indira Goswami, Urmila Pawar and Bama. Here the focus was concentrated on their struggle for life in different phases such as domestic, professional and social. Here we can observe the difference in their struggle; all of them are unique character; each of them tried to get the meaning of existence in different ways.

The struggle for existence is traced minutely through these autobiographies. Do they find it? Was it expressed transiently in their autobiographies? These questions got satisfactory answer through these autobiographies. These women are successful in getting their existence as an independent soul. My study has classified into three categories to study struggle for existence. The first one is domestic struggle. We Indians have stereotyped mindset for women like Sita or Sati Savitri. It tells women are not even allowed to think of any other than husband and glorify marriage as religious /spiritual bondage. This image of woman is associated with man, as obedient and dutiful daughter, faithful and loving wife, and caring, loving and responsible mother. This indicates indirectly women's life to serve men. But the selected autobiographies for study show us that these women came out of the cocoon and stood independently.

Amrita Pritam was not an obedient daughter, though she behaved like obedient. She was rebellious, especially if something was imposed. When her father forced her to meditate, she used to close the eyes and enjoy her imaginary world instead of concentrating on God. Likewise she wrote poems on romance and torn them. She was too young to protest. She married to the man to whom she did not want to marry. It was her physical defeat. Her mind was full of her

ideal lover. She managed her married life to some extent but when she felt it was a burden she talked with her husband and came out of it and remained in touch with him as the best friend. When she was with him she supported him in every step of life and encouraged him at the time of failure. She found comfort in the company of her soul-mate. But the one for whom she left everything, did not accept her whole heartedly. She did not think of society and the system. She followed her will and lived as she felt correct. Many times she felt humiliation for her decision and even her children opposed her. Though she lived for self she did not forget her responsibility. Though Amrita Pritam was not an obedient daughter, she never opposed her father's imposing of prayer and marriage. This was just because she did not want to hurt him. In the same way her relationship with her husband was with certain understanding. She told him directly and came out of married life. She was very friendly with him before and after the break-up of her marriage. She was most caring and loving mother. As a child, she faced negligence and therefore she looked after her children properly. She fulfilled all their emotional needs. She was a responsible mother. Thus she found her existence.

Kamala Das found her existence as she liked it. She did not bother about social conventions. She was in search of true self, because her parents never thought of her feelings. They always took decision about Kamala Das whichever was favorable for them. She remained silent and tolerated everything and wrote poems on the broken dolls as an image of self. This was her protest. She was much disillusioned with her husband later. Her father enquired her about the cause of her marital failure and she did not respond. She remained silent because she did not want her father feel repentance for his wrong choice. It shows us that she was a sensible daughter. She had an image of an ideal lover in her mind but her husband was interested only in sex and apart from that he had illegal relationship with maids and his cousins. It made Kamala

Das disobey her husband. She crossed all the boundaries of married women and made friendship with many men and led her life freely. She remarried a Muslim and stood with her decision and justified her view. She was bold enough to face the controversies. Kamala Das and her husband were not attached emotionally but she had fulfilled all the responsibilities of wife. They had a good understanding as she supported him and he supported her. But the tragedy of her life is that her desire for true love beyond physical attachment remained unfulfilled. She was a caring mother and supported her children. By doing all her duties, she found her domestic existence.

Indira Goswami's domestic struggle for existence remained unfinished like the title of her autobiography. She was a sincere and obedient daughter in childhood. Later situations made her take wrong decisions. She married a man stealthily but did not accept him as her husband. She refused to stay with him and find her true partner in another man. She divorced him and married another person. She did not follow any rituals, after his death, because they were against the dignity of women. She completed her search for self at domestic level. She lived independently without domestic restrictions.

Urmila Pawar found her domestic existence in the right way. Her father died early. Her mother took the responsibility of the family, and her mother thought of running the family by weaving bamboo baskets. Urmila Pawar was not intelligent in early age. She thought her mother did not love her, but the incident in the school made her realise her mother's affection. She became serious in her study and never failed. Urmila did not complain against the family or marriage system as Kamala Das and Amrita Pritam did. Instead she tried to manage it successfully. Urmila's was a love marriage which was opposed by her family but she was firm in decision and her family members agreed. Her mother, sisters, and brothers were not happy about Urmila and her husband. They did all the rituals related to marriage only for formality. She

earned love and affection, even from the in-laws and her co-sisters. She got her identity in that house. Her husband supported her higher education. Later he started feeling jealous. She tolerated him. As a mother she was very strong, and she was not like any traditional mother. She was at her daughter's side and supported her love and cancelled the marriage just the previous day of wedding. Urmila Pawar managed for the stay of her daughter outside for a few days and later arranged for her marriage. She did all these things in opposition to her husband. Her husband blamed she was responsible for this. But Urmila Pawar never tried to escape from the reality. She faced it and solved the problem. When her husband was suffering from the cancer he insulted her, and held her responsible for his ill-health. She took all the things positively. Urmila Pawar was successful in her responsibilities as mother, wife and daughter. For her family, social responsibility and profession were equally important. She managed all the things without losing the self. All the people forced Urmila to remove mangalsutra and kumkum, but she did not bother about it. Thus she found her true existence.

As Bama is a spinster she did not face much domestic struggle for existence. But she fought against her parents to continue her education. After the 10<sup>th</sup> her parents did not want her education to be continued. But she joined a college with the help of her teacher and departed from the house and stayed in a hostel. She completed her education independently. She became a nun. Her parents opposed it because usually the Dalit are not allowed to become nun. They protested her decision to come out of the church because they knew what horrible life will be waiting for her. As everybody expected she was not whole-heartedly welcomed by society. She took a long time to rebuild her life. She searched for real existence.

All the above said things make it clear that these women writers fought against domestic system and got their true existence. It does not mean that they are faithless but they lived life for the self, and not for society.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century women are independent and they did not restrict their talents to the household activities. They explored new things in life. They worked equally with men and got success even more than men. All these women are professionally strong with their good academics.

Professional existence is more important than domestic for Amrita Pritam. She clearly tells, "The writer existed in me is more strong than woman". She was working in All India Radio. There many men ill-treated her and commented on her behaviour. Many men-writers did not want existence of women writer with them. They targeted her, insulted her and humiliated her in many ways. She answered all with her bold and beautiful literature. She has shown others what the existence of women can be with her public career. Her books were rejected considering worthless for syllabus, but the same book got awards. Many men-writers tried to stop her from getting awards, but she got all the prestigious awards of India including the Janapeth Award. Identification of writership and her position in literary circle mattered more to her. She loved that fulfillment. She crossed all the boundaries of regional level and reached a universal level. It is only her literature which introduces us her real nature. It shows how bold, confident, and rebellious Amrita Pritam was. Her literature represents how she identified her existence in the world of literature.

Kamala Das did not talk much about her profession in her autobiography. But the act of writing has given her identity. She wrote with the name K. Das because she had a fear from

prejudiced men. Later she completely shook the literary world by her bold writing. Kamala Das used to write at night after all slept at home. The one who does not have room for ‘one’s owns’ such person’s name was shortlisted for Nobel Prize. Kamala Das used literature as a means to express her inner feelings which cannot be expressed otherwise. She has become a role model for the new genre of writing. Her literature is mirror to thought that she had. Her works are so powerful that they shook all the traditional concepts of women’s writing. She proved her independent existence in Indian English literature.

Indira Goswami through her literature represented the whole of Assam. Her works have given her the best identity as the best human being. She did not talk much about her profession in her autobiography. She was most successful in her career both as a lecturer and writer. She tells she took inspiration from all the incidents of her life to write literature. Her novels have a genuine voice of humanity. She wrote about the downtrodden, the depressed and labour class of the society. Indira Goswami found her real existence in voicing for them. The literary awards given to her in the field of literature are witness to her literary brilliance.

Urmila Pawar’s professional life, as a writer, as a leader of Women Liberation Movement and in her office, is difficult. She fought hard to establish her existence. She joined a job as clerk after 12<sup>th</sup> and continued her higher education and got promotion. But her colleagues teased her by telling that she got promotion on the basis of reservation. When she became an officer, men in the office were not ready to accept her as their boss. They continued to call her as ‘bai,’ instead of madam. She faced the difficulties and proved herself as the best officer. She is an activist and a member of Dalit movement. There she faced discrimination: men leaders did not tolerate her presence as leader. Women’s works were neglected. Urmila Pawar started Women’s Liberation Movement and wrote a book on women’s contribution to Dalit movement.

She faced humiliation in the field of literature. Her works were not considered as cultured, and they treated them as secondary. Her style was insulted, because it was raw and unsophisticated. She started Mahila Sahitya Sammelan and got success. Urmila Pawar has found her existence as a writer and activist.

Bama was a teacher in a missionary school and later left that job and started writing and established her own school for Dalit children. Bama joined the missionary school with lots of ideals in her mind. But soon she was disillusioned by the system within the system. The caste system was practiced: the other nuns did not know the caste of Bama and they used to insult her Dalit community. It was difficult for her to remain silent. When her caste was revealed Bama was posted to a remote school. She wanted to leave the missionary, but they did not allow her easily. She was paid well, and had all the luxuries and comforts of life in the church. Her soul was not satisfied, and it told her repeatedly that it was not her aim of life. She knew that horrible life was waiting outside the church. Still she came out and stood independently. She started her own school and proved her self. As a writer Bama proved her existence as a new writer. When her *Karukku* was published, critics were in confusion to categorise the genre of the book, because it was so original. She created a new era of literature in Tamil language.

Indian women writers did not lag behind in taking social responsibilities. The selected Indian women writers got social existence by fighting for social justice.

Amrita Pritam was much concerned with social activities. She believed in the principle of equity. She raised her voice against caste and gender discrimination. She was much influenced by the Partition and its effects especially on women and children. Other writers of her age remained silent about the injustice done to women for the fear of power in the system. But

Amrita Pritam protested them through her novels. She protested against the entire unjust things including the assassination of Indira Gandhi.

Kamala Das's autobiography did not reveal much about her social behavior. She belonged to a royal family of freedom fighters. She responded much for the condition of women especially the middle class women. She opposed the inhumane condition of women in Malabar. She wanted a peaceful society without fear. When bombs were exploded in Mumabi and people were suffering everywhere she said that she wanted to take Mumabi city in her arms and console it.

Indira Goswami dedicated her life completely to the welfare of society. She has become the voice of society and represented her people. Her heart was much troubled by anti-social activates in Assam. She worked as the bridge between the Government and Nextalites, and tried to establish peace. She has been called Peace Dove of Assam and she was awarded a peace prize. Her work and her concerns for Assam people are beyond words. When Indira Goswami died the whole of Assam lamented for her death.

Urmila Pawar made her name in social service. She visited slums of Mumbai and tried to convince Dalit people to live a dignified life. She organized Dalit movements and Women's Liberation Movement. She encouraged her people to get education and lead better life. She continued her social work. All these works helped her to establish her identity in society.

Bama in her social services concentrated mainly on education. She tells that education is the best weapon to fight against injustice and discrimination. She supported education of her community people. She has become the voice of Dalit people and encouraged them to protest and get the things what they deserve.

In this way all these five women writers struggled and searched their true existence in family, profession and society. It is difficult to give a satisfactory answer to all the questions, because none of them is identical. They did not have the same point of view, and all of them understood life in different ways. Each of them has a unique character and individual opinion about the self as well as world-view. The content varies according to the conditions of their life. The connecting and the most significant point in all is their concern for women. All of them voiced the problems of women and their basic protest against the conventional way of life for women and male-dominated society. They fought against patriarchal system. These women autobiographers with their different racial, religious and linguistic backgrounds represent the condition of women in India.

Finally my study "Struggle for Existence in Indian Women's Autobiography in English - A Study of Selected Works" brings out a comprehensive understanding that women autobiographies reveal insights not just into the experiences and attitudes of the individuals but also of the society in general or of the specific/social/cultural/regional/tribal groups the writer belongs to. It made clear that the 20<sup>th</sup> -century women are independent and they do not restrict themselves and their talents to the household activities and explored new things in life. They proved that they can work equally with men and get success even more than men. All these women are professionally strong with their good academics. These are evident to show Indian women are strong enough to take any task. They did not lag behind in taking social responsibility. The selected Indian women writers fought for social justice. Their fight is not for self but for the entire women race. As for Dalit writers they worked for the betterment of their community. They tried to bring their people to the mainstream. They did not want their community children to face the humiliation which they faced. These women lived their lives in

true existence. Some of them went against the system to find the existence, but a few find their real existence in the existing system. We can give justification for selecting and analyzing the autobiographies of women with an existential point of view. These autobiographies changed the earlier notion of autobiography as the literary genre basically meant for men and therefore women's self-expression was limited to letter and dairy, and women did not write autobiographies. Now the status of autobiography has changed in the intervening decades, both within and outside the academy. Women's autobiography is now the privileged site for thinking about the issues of writing at the intersection of feminist, postcolonial, and postmodern critical theories. Indian women autobiographers have been exploring this genre to the fullest and the number of women autobiographies is multiplying every year. This positive change indicates women's steps towards an inclusive social structure, keeping aside ideological differences between men and women.

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