

**A Sketch of Life: A Reading of Rasasundari Devi's *Amar Jiban***

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Abstract

In the history of every women's writing, there is a tale of struggle, sacrifice and self-discovery. Writing about one's life seems to be interesting but it becomes so astonishing when a nineteenth century woman in India had experimented it. Life writing has recently attained the attention of scholars from various disciplines and it has gone out various changes. Life writing is a narrative account of one's life and it is a self-conscious autobiographical writing. This paper tries to read a few chapters from Rasasundari Devi's Autobiography Amar Jiban (My Life). It is so curious to know about the life of an uneducated woman, who wrote an autobiography in Bengali and got her work published. The paper discusses the socio political situation existed in Pre Independent India and how Rasasundari Devi had overcome all those challenges to achieve her dream. Her voice is the voice of a subdued female. The process of writing her life made her to realize her self. The book is a reflection of all taboos that hinder the growth and self-development of women. Amar Jiban is a singular literary effort by a woman to bring her identity in the public sphere. Unlike other famous autobiographies by men, Rasasundari Devi's is entirely different as it portrays her original sketch of life and she is a representative of the whole community of subdued women. This paper analyses her work from a feminist lens.

Keywords: Life writing, Private life, self-narration, Women education.

'Life writing', a term that is broader than the concepts of Autobiography or biography. It covers a broad area including personal narratives, profiles, ethnographies, case studies, wills, anecdotes, dispositions and diaries. If someone tells a life story means that the life is worth telling as well as they establish a kind of identity. Moreover life writing offers freedom even though it is definitely private and interior. Life writing is based on one's experience in his own life that was shared by others. Julia Novak, in her Experiments in Life Writing says,

Life Writing stands for a range of writings about lives or parts of lives which provide materials out of which lives or parts of lives are composed. These writings include not only memoir, autobiography, biography, diaries, autobiographical fiction and biographical fiction, but also letters, wills, written anecdotes, dispositions and court proceedings... marginalia, nonce writings, lyric poems, scientific writings and digital forms. (1)

The term 'Life writing' is originated from biography which is in Greek means "bios" means life and "graphia" means writing. It is Virginia Woolf who first used the term Life writing in her memoir "A Sketch of the Past" (1939). It has been a favourite topics for feminists or Gynocritics as their concentration on the lives of women who write about their self. Life writing is a form of non-traditional literature. It provides the reading of previously

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neglected texts of women as they are considered as non-canonical. And even women's autobiographies were considered as low cultured personal narratives and excluded from the literary canon. Life writing gives an opportunity for women to define herself. Apart from other forms of literary texts that make a notion that the author is absent from the text here the narrative becomes the most original genre. These narratives are written in the perspectives of a first person viewpoint

Unlike autobiography, the literary history of life writing wasn't seen as a womanless history. So there is a need to re-read the autobiography of a nineteenth century woman writer like Rasasundari Devi. Though she was born into an aristocratic family, she was denied of education. From a very early young age, she cherished the desire to read, write and learn. She lost her father in the childhood and she was brought under her mother's care. She was married to a landlord at the age of fourteen and the rest of her life was spent in her husband's household. She had all the responsibilities of a wife, daughter in law and a mother. She was busy with her domestic duties and responsibilities. She started to write something when she was 88 years old and it is astonishingly a wonderful achievement. She writes about her childhood, accounts of her personal life. It can be considered as a woman's struggle to articulate a female voice.

Most of her compositions begin with an invocation to God, the Almighty and