

Enforcement of Women's Rights through Education

Deepanjali Mishra



Abstract: *The experiences of successive world wars brought the Universal Declaration, bringing an adherence of acceptance from all the countries which proved to be a comprehensive treatise of inviolable and in alienated human rights. It bestows civil and political rights including right to life, liberty, free speech and privacy. In addition it includes economic, social, cultural rights being right to social security, health and education. These entitled basic rights and fundamental freedom that helps in promoting peace and progress by preventing atrocities against humanity. Widening its domain, today human rights have befitted essential in achieving development goals which enables a constant improvement of well being of inhabitants of the world. The paper aims at drawing a similarity in the case study of an autobiography of 19th century (Amar Jibon by Rassundari Devi) and an autobiography of 21st century (I Am Malala by Malala Yousafzai), one being the earliest of women autobiographies and the other being most horrific and recent one. Both the characters establish an indistinguishable coherence between development and acquisition of basic rights for women. Malala recognized as a human rights champion, continued to speak out portraying the indomitable courage even on the face of religious and military activists. Rassundari Devi silenced under patriarchal norms and a life burdened with duty and responsibilities which eventually made her acquire a greater strength to become a lettered woman. The paper presents striking similarity in the status of women from two different time zones who fought for their rights and carved a niche for themselves as liberated women. They emerged successful in terms of their courage and determination by seeking live of equality and freedom.*

Keywords: *Human rights, social rights, cultural rights, courage, equality, development*

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature is an imitation of the real world which is evident from various works of art or literary texts. Literature and fine art has always been an honest imitation and true representation of the world and its events. It has been able to portray the actual and potential world with its beings. The pre-historical and ancient period literature and art have been drawn and considered to be very efficient in portrayal of the lives of mortal human beings with tales of their struggles during their course of existence which eventually reproduced plethora of writers with their honest representation of their throes in their pathway of life. One of the basic human rights is to acquire education. It not only allows human beings to achieve education but also enables the provisions of education.

It enables access to educational provisions by encompassing the obligation to avoid discrimination in terms of acquiring education. The mortal human being irrespective of gender should not be devoid of this basic human right. Education should be accessible to everyone irrespective of gender. Human beings, are being devoid of basic human rights such as right to education in the pretext of religious rigidity and gender biasness got depicted in the two autobiographies of Ras sundari Devi and Malala Yousafzai. Rassundari Devi and Malala both had to pay their prices because they belonged to a section of society which is dominated and subdued by the patriarchal society. Both of them snatched their right to expression by penning down their tumultuous journey through their autobiographies. The memoirs turned out to be the chronicles of "expressed self" which voiced the needs of the women folk. Human rights law is basically a foundation on a set of stable and positive commitment to law into which states have willingly and voluntarily entered by enrolling into bondage of pulling domestic measures and legislative compatibility with their obligations. The human rights and development activities coherently form a mutual bond. The devoidness of human rights predominantly brings hindrances by barricading in the development process and activities in the lives of human beings. Human rights replete the human lives by providing ample opportunities and enough room to the inhabitants for a purposeful living. The coherence of human rights and development has been also recognized by Action Oriented Policy Paper on Human Rights and Development (2007) which concluded that The importance of human rights for development is widely recognized. Human rights and equitable, sustainable development are mutually reinforcing. Human rights have intrinsic value, and achieving them is seen as an objective in its own right. But human rights are also a critical factor for the long term sustainability of development.

Human rights have broadened its proximity to plethora of rights ranging from right to expression and rights regarding the basic needs of human beings. As Siobhan McInerney Lankford, writes in the article Human rights and Development: A Comment on Challenges and Opportunities from a legal perspective that development projects and programmes now cover the gamut of social and human development, much of which bear a direct relationship to core economic and social rights, and connect to a number of civil and political rights. Development institutions conduct a broad range of operations in the fields of health, education, labour and social security, children and youth, and food. They increasingly promote governance programs, anti-corruption strategies, as well as justice reform and rule of law activities.

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* Correspondence Author

Dr. Deepanjali Mishra*, School of Humanities, KIIT University, Bhubaneswar

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Literature documents the variety of human aspirations and human struggle in the way of fulfillment of ambitions, which eventually turns out to be powerful documentations of self revelation. Autobiographies are obviously the product of such literary expressions which showcase the chronological events and actions of the author's life with a great deal of conscious emotional and internal ebullition. The 18th century era and the pre independence period have seen an ample number of women autobiographers making their

mark in the field of writing establishing their freedom of thought and expression. The autobiographies have specially been the records of the events in terms of their relationship with the social and individual set up. The truthful depiction of self in the memoirs gradually probe into serious social issues relating to the oppression of patriarchal society and womenfolk grinded under set rules and norms eventually leading them to be devoid of their basic rights. The paper extensively deals with two such women autobiographers who stirred the world with their bold attempt in writing and facing the adversities of their lives. Being one of the oldest autobiographies, 'Amar Jibon' by Rassundari Devi, paved the way for all the other women writers to lay bare their hearts in the form of writing. The other autobiography is of Malala Yousafzai's, 'I Am Malala', in which she pens down the spine chilling episodes of her life in the process of fighting for a greater cause in terms of right to education for women.

The late 19th century saw advent of women writers of personal narratives, including full length structural autobiographies, personal letters, diaries, memoirs etc. The coastal area of Bengal came fairly in touch of British and English education that paved the way for liberal ideas resulting to the reforms. The ideas about reforms were introduced, debated discussed and contested. Breaking the clutches of work, burden, social responsibilities in the pretext of liberal and reformist perspective women, very often were motivated to be liberated and thus we find the earliest writers of autobiography. These women not only tried to bring reforms and liberalities in their country but also strived to revolutionize their character and identity in their own spaces. They bore open their hearts and recorded every details in their memoirs. Rassundari Devi's two parts of Amar Jibon(1868 and 1897) is prominent as one of the early autobiographies.

II. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

The paper is theoretical and has been analyzed on the basis of intensive study of texts, newspapers and various forms of print media. The problem statement has been derived from an hypothetical statement and then inference has been made after theoretical study.

III. REFORMS BROUGHT BY RASSUNDARI DEVI

Rassundari Devi's Amar Jibon chronicles her life by detailing her years of struggle as a survivor, as a child bride, a mother, a wife, a widow and ends with a learner, contributing to specific genre of literature. The great effort, ardent desire to acquire education made her the first modern

autobiographer in Bengali language. The transformed self from an illiterate unrecognized house wife to an autobiographer is praiseworthy. Unprivileged to acquire education which barred Indian women to establish themselves as writers made this autobiography more significant as the first part of her autobiography was completed in 1868. She further added the second part at the age of 88 which was combined to form 'Amar Jibon'(1897)

The book chronicles the life of Rassundari Devi by letting us know how she suffered each day due to her illiteracy. She was born in a rural Zamindar family in the village of Potajia in Pabna (Western Bangladesh) in 1809 and was brought up by her widowed mother who was a guide and emotional support for her and the autobiography portrays ample of references of her mother. Out of all her mother's teaching, faith in God was one which had lot of significance in structuring her life as a strong individual. Being devoid of any formal education, Rassundari Devi just tried to have some access to learning when her younger brothers received education from a missionary woman. They received education by a woman from missionary, which was like a formal school providing education to the boys. Rassundari Devi, being very eager to learn, would listen to the boys repeating the letters of the alphabet and try to learn. But very soon the school was burned down by making Rassundari Devi totally devoid of education. The letters learned at the early childhood had a great impact in her mind and she could recognize the letters of alphabet and read with difficulty but her heart's desire was to read fearlessly which would be an achievement of her right to the pursuit of happiness.

In the progression of life, she got married to a man named Nilamani Roy from a well to do landed household from Rajbari, Faridpur. With marriage came the separation from home and mother at a very tender age when she was shifted to a village called Ramdia having several references in her autobiography. Her only solace after the bereavement with family at that time was her memories of childhood and her belief in God though the desire to read and write kept thumping in her heart time to time. With the childbirth things became worse and kept her life surrounded by domestic duties as she became mother at the age of eighteen and bore twelve children out of which, seven died early. Her life moved on with all the ups and downs but she had that sole desire to achieve something which was forbidden for the womenfolk of the time.

Gaining literacy was a tremendous impossible task for women of that period. Her life had abundance of household work to be done where she had heavy responsibilities of running a large family of elders with eleven children of her own. The duties of a large joint family kept her engrossed in work from dawn to midnight. Time was also a great matter and hindrance in her willingness to learn or educate herself. Moreover it was a general belief that women, if learned to read and write, their husbands will have to suffer the consequences of their deed with death. Women Education was considered to be abysmal and a violative action.

Education was a far away thing, even taking birth in India as a woman was like indignity as she confesses in her autobiography.

The zeal and thirst for education finally turned into quest of identity for Rassundari Devi as she realized very soon that if women had to be identified or recognized in the society, they needed to be equipped with literacy. She rejected the social inhibitions and crossed the limits set for women and stepped ahead towards education. Moreover her faith in God and determination never allowed her to surrender to the prohibitive social system. She credits God for bestowing her with the ability and courage to continue and pursue her passion which is evident in her invocation to God at the beginning of every composition. Her thirst for education grew stronger with her eagerness to read 'Chaitanya Bhagabat'. She writes that she had taken innumerable small and big steps to satiate the thirst which even led her to the extent of stealing a page from her husband's 'Bhagbat', which she hid in the hearth of the kitchen stealthily. She tried to memorise the letter coming to them during her childhood days. It is quite unimaginable to assess what possible steps and courage she might have possessed to get success in learning to read and write her autobiography. In fact the entire process of learning to read revolves around her urge to read the scriptures which were in one way prohibited for women of that period. God had always been her constant companion in the path of productivity in her life where she not only invokes God to help her in her mission but also openly confesses everything that she had done in her life. She also seeks God's assistance in dealing with every doubt and difficulty in her life. She even seeks for forgiveness and asks God to excuse her whenever she went wrong. Her pact with God did not make her come in compromise with the adversities of her life which was being devoid of education. She credits God for every noteworthy or menial event of her life as God's mercy or *lela*. She even goes to the extent that her transgressive act of reading is God's intervention and God's will which has happened as a divine purpose. Annes Jung in her book *Breaking The Silence (1997)*, beautifully describes the state of Indian women who find a sanctuary in the *puja* room where they gain courage and strength to be able to endure and face the challenges of everyday life.

The autobiography becomes a true chronicle of every woman's journey towards their wishes and fulfillment of desires by fighting all odds in life. She beautifully reveals grave issues related to woman's life where she gradually turns into a full time labourer bearing the responsibility of every other soul around her. The revealed truths of a house wife managing the entire household, the issues of a child bride, complexities of motherhood, status of widowhood remain very familiar modern topics of discussion even today. Though all the issues of her life somehow revolved around her willingness to acquire education by which she could bring out the grave realities of the then women's life. In broader sense she provokes the issues of gender equality.

The urge for education in Rassundari Devi was such that every sight of paper brought the same uncontrollable desire. She started cursing herself for having the desire to learn to read as it was an evil desire for women of cultured households didn't read. It was made to an issue

if women were spotted in any way with papers in their hands. Women were meant to look after the household and children as these were menial jobs whereas studying was respectable job and was to be done only by the male counterparts. Initially the desire was only to learn to read so that she could read the religious scriptures which was forbidden for women. She aspired to be literate to be able to read religious texts and recite hymns. She constantly struggled to learn to read as she tore pages from her husband's books and her children's books, hid them in the kitchen and carefully learned to match the words to make an identification with the alphabet. She made herself capable of learning at the age of twenty six with relentless toil but her process of writing was a much faraway thing. It was only possible when her son expressed his annoyance about her not replying the letters. The autobiography came into existence after Rassundari Devi was widowed at the age of fifty nine.

The prevailing social customs of 19th and early 20th century made the life of women more pathetic and their efforts equally praiseworthy in living such lives by accepting their conditions as their rightful duty. Rassundari Devi portrays the harsh truth of the time when life of women was similar to that of prisoners where they were devoid of their basic rights; be it the right to education, or right to expression or right to a free life without the impositions drawn by men folk. They were destined to live under Veil (*Purdah*) where she had to work with her veil even in the kitchen. She had to be so soft in her talks even to the maid servants that no male member could hear it which meant that even the voice of women was to be under the veil. *Purdah* was an integral part of Bengali culture presenting the patriarchal domination and the noteworthy part is that women considered their condition as their dutiful service towards their male counterparts. The *Purdah* system not only made women inferior or unequal but also kept them excluded from society. The social and gender inequality remained a great hindrance in the fulfillment of the desire of womenfolk. Being in the same house with her husband, she admits that she had never spoken to him face to face which clears the fact about the condition of women. Moreover the situation of the pre modern Bengali family can be perceived by the descriptions of the Ananthpur tradition, where there was a pure categorization of dwelling. The upper caste or class of the family dwelled in the inner and outer rooms. The bread earners of the house were in charge of the dealings with the public as the lords of the house whereas women were destined to live an isolated life dealing with the inner and household duties. Her desire not to remain as an unlettered woman throughout her life also led to the urge of connecting to people and to read variety of texts. She, by penning down her autobiography, could gain an identity for herself, independent of her husband and children. She becomes a strong advocate of women's right to education as she expresses her joy in seeing the changing times where parents considering to educate their girl children. Her autobiography remains not only a chronicle of dedication hard work and devotion towards learning but also a chronicle of self discovery and quest for identity.

The autobiography is also retrospective where she describes her past events with heartfelt vividness. By ignoring dates and time of the events she just mentions the events in a factual way by focusing on every minute detail. Her dispassionate and objective style of the prose remains well connected and coherent. Thus the autobiography remains an inspirational testimony of a woman's will power to challenge all odds and adversaries of life to gain education and liberation.

Today's changed circumstances and the evolved phase in the women's life in terms of right to education has a strong base which is the compromise and sacrifice of vocal women like Rassundari Devi. Though the book chronicles the life story of a 19th century woman's struggle for literacy, but in broader sense it also presents the changing world of rural Bengal and makes the autobiography a praiseworthy one by keeping in view of the prevailing social status of woman at that time. She was able to refute the belief that women, when learned to read and write would bring disaster and disgrace to their families. She not only read and wrote but also recorded her events of life by making it public after getting it published. She dared to disclose her private life in public which was a forbidden act for the upper class Hindu woman. It is the sacrifice and great efforts of these strong women which paved the way for the later generations of women to pursue their heart's desire. It also led and paved way for the present feminist and women rights movements. The significant title 'My Life' denotes a possession and definitely seeks attention towards the life of someone who was insignificant in terms of her social status.

Rassundari Devi represents the strong willed determined honest and resolute woman, who does not give up and tries to break open the clutches of tradition and patriarchal rules imposed upon her. Though an utterly devotional lady, the protagonist didn't value religion which imposes orthodox beliefs and discriminatory practices. She proves to be a rebel who took a great stand for womenfolk by propounding that women should be fully literate which would make them self reliant. She advocates equality and freedom for women like men and very subtly presents her radical perspective through the autobiography. The autobiography paved the path for the womenfolk to stand for their rights and beliefs, by making it conspicuous that the plight of women can be changed only through a weapon of education which would help them acquire equality and social status.

IV. STRUGGLES BY MALALA YOUSAFZAI

The second case that is analyzed is The book "I Am Malala" which chronicles the story of a young woman, the Nobel Prize Winner Malala Yousafzai, who, with an ardent desire to study, fought for women's right to education when they were devoid of this fundamental right by the Taliban. The autobiography narrates the brave girl's tale in an unsafe country by revealing her fierce determination to make the world a better place. The greatest contributor of Malala is her father Ziauddin, who, working as an English teacher, an education reformer and a man of great moral strength and true knowledge. Malala's independent spirit comes from her father's instillation of independent thinking in her. Her

nature of advocating human rights even in the face of the Taliban's looming presence is evidently from her father's advice and encouragement. A Peshwar based BBC Radio Correspondent, in search of a female teacher or a school girl who could write a diary about life under the Taliban, got Malala under the pseudonym "Gul Makai" and through this Malala snatched her basic human right of expression and fulfilled her dream of sharing her thoughts. The book's strongest sections pertain to her growth as an activist as her web diary becomes popular destination on BBC especially because of her strong position on the importance of education for girls. Her public stature got a strong counter with the Taliban's terrorist rage in the form of an attempt of assassination on her, which left her injured with a bullet injury on her forehead. Several reconstructive surgeries, with proper treatment and blessings of people made her survive soaring high and making her campaign global.

The fearless memoir 'I Am Malala', co written with journalist Christina Lamb, begins from the day on which the tragic event took place by altering her life forever. It was while she was returning from the school, the Talibani gunman, getting inside the bus, shouted for Malala as she had become an advocate of girls' education in Swat valley and shot her point blank leaving her injured and writhing in pain. The autobiography then shifts to the flashback of events from the day she was born. Malala was the eldest daughter of Ziauddin Yousafzai who had been a poet and activist. Malala considers Ziauddin a father different from other Pashtun men, who gave Malala a status no less than a boy. He even permitted the rituals for Malala, which were considered to be done only for new born baby boys. Malala very subtly describes the political situation which eventually disturbed the social life and status of people. The mullahs gained power and brought great social change where Zia's rule brought great change in the life of women. Pakistan became more restricted for women as the crime rate increased, women were restricted from opening accounts without permission of men, the renowned female hockey team was stopped from playing hockey as sports was not meant for women. The other changes which brought great modifications in the schooling system, in the books and even in the study patters are beautifully described by Malala as:

Malala, in her autobiography, presents a very close depiction of the era when the peaceful Swat valley became an abode of the terror groups. It started with the Russian invasion in Afghanistan. Millions of Afghans crossed the border and took shelter in the valley as refugees. General Zia was very happy to provide shelter to the Afghans. These Afghan refugees were trained as resistance fighters by their biggest intelligence service belonging to military. General Zia became a renowned international figure and a great defender of freedom in the cold war. It also got the support of United States of America as those days Russia was their main enemy. Afghans were trained in great number to fight against the Communist Red Army (Russia). Zia was showered with praise and appreciation and lots of money and weapons were offered for the training. Pashtuns were the actual sufferers who were split between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

They slowly started believing that the Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan was horrific and the Russians were infidels. The sentiments of Muslim people were sympathetically aroused for the other Muslim country and more and more people were urged to join the *Jihad* as it was their duty. There were many people who send their children to Afghanistan to fight against Russia by accepting it their duty of being a true Muslim.

Later the same *maulana* organizations turned as The Swat Taliban. Gradually as the autobiography progresses and the advent of Talibanis is described and with due course the rules and restrictions grew harder and tighter on the women. The Talibanis as described in the book were ferocious and fierce armed with knives and guns. The leader of them was maulana Fazlullah, a 28 year old who dragged his polio stricken leg. He was considered to be a wise man, Islamic reformer and an honest interpreter of Quran, but gradually his moral preaching and teachings of Islam transformed in boycotting girls from education which according to Malala can never be true as Malala believed that learning can't be barred by any religion. The entire autobiography juggles between the political condition of the valley and the social structure led by the extremists. The autobiography gradually shifts towards the main concern which was the indirect attacks on education of the girls in her valley. Her fight for right to education for women also turns out to be a fight against terrorism and a fight for the rights and dignity of women.

The school was Malala's world and the attack of 9/11 brought a massive change in the lives of the people of Swat valley. Their world got shattered as it brought war in the valley. The *Maulanas* or *Muftis*, considered themselves to be Islamic scholars having complete authority in Islamic law, didn't leave any stone unturned to close the School as it provided education to women. They reasoned that girls of teen age should be in *Purdah* and shouldn't be allowed to go out of the house and education for girls didn't have any sense for them because they had the fact rooted in their mind that women were born to be dutiful service providers to the men folk. In an attempt to close the school for girls, Mufti and a group of Maulanas, accused Ziauddin of blaspheme and heresy by calling it *Haram* to run a school for girls. To keep the school running and to gain acceptance from people, Ziauddin had to continue with his mind numbing efforts by holding meeting and campaigns. By this time the Talibani ways grew rampant in the valley. The repeated sufferings crashed people's confidence thereby bringing a stoic disbelief in them about their ways of embracing and following Quran. The humanistic and rational nature of Malala is clear in the section where Malala tries to find out the reasons of Taliban not allowing children especially girls to read books .

V. RESULT ANALYSIS

The growing disparity between the men and women in the valley which Malala was habituated seeing from her childhood but being sensible and inquisitive in nature, she became an ardent critic of the rules and restrictions levied on the womenfolk. The campaigns and propaganda led by the Taliban is mostly revolved around cracking down on

women's freedom which they termed as western ways of living. The curbing of freedom and keeping women in restrictions was their way of spreading secularism. The women were gradually losing their freedom of choice, their freedom to act and were only getting subdued and ignored.

Being voracious reader, Malala engaged herself in reading books from all genre ranging from *Anna Karenina* to novels of Jane Austen, which shaped her world and increased her greed to study. She realized soon that it was her education which would make her 'free bird'. Malala propagated and promoted education for women not only by being an orator for the cause but also by being a blogger for BBC about living under the Talibani rule. Following the path of her father, she chose to speak on public platforms about the issue and tried to sensitize people by making it clear that there was nothing wrong in part of girls in acquiring education. The right to education for girls is such a basic right which promotes further growth and hope for the society by ensuring the well being of not only women but also men. In Malala's country and Swat valley, the education for women was considered to be Western Intervention in the lives and ways of women, which definitely was against their religious practice. The education of girls suddenly turned out to be 'Unislamic' without any proper base or reason. Her school and education was an off and on process, when the school was closed she sat at home desiring to go to school, which was a seemingly impossible task for her in the strange political and ecological disturbance

Amidst all the tumultuous political condition, Malala courageously rejected to succumb to the intimidation and with the growing opposition to her studies she grew stronger and clearer in her purpose. The book brings a great message that education to girl children would definitely bring a great revolution and would surely contribute towards community change. The book takes us through a captivating journey of a young girl in the verdant Swat Valley, where hard time Jihadis swept out of mountains, terrorized villages and radicalized boys and finally on one muggy day of October assassinated the girl by shooting her point blank in her head for speaking about her God given right to attend school. The audacity of the extremists is indicative in her shooting in a school van while going home from school. Malala was victimized in the worst way and an intricate process of medical treatment in Pakistan and in England made her survive through all the agony she suffered.

Rassundari devi and Malala Yousafzai brings out a great revelation that education will surely lead to an establishment of ethics and values in every human being and that would pave the way for a better society with aware people. Malala not only emerged as a youth icon after surviving the assassination but also became an international speaker, activist and crusader of women. She became the youngest recipient of Nobel Peace Prize in year 2014 and earned an appreciation as an advocate of peace, women rights, right to education for women and children and a global teacher. Malala rightly answered the fundamentalists or the strict interpreters of Islam by urging action against illiteracy, poverty and terrorism.

VI. CONCLUSION:

Thus as it is seen that education is the primary need of all and it is one of the basic need of every human being. The reformists, Rassundari devi and Malala Yousafzai have represented the incredible social inequalities in a very convincing manner in the pretext of religion and theological aspects. The protagonists went through struggles and traumas and even had to go vocal by enunciating their creed for their rights in the pursuit of happiness, equality before law, freedom of thought and right to liberty.

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