PREFACE

The opening up of the English curriculum in the Indian academia in the last few decades of the twentieth century coincided with my induction into the realm of undergraduate teaching as a college lecturer. Attending various Refresher courses mandatory for college teachers across the country in diverse locations like Amritsar, Jadavpur, Shillong and Guwahati exposed me to research pre-occupation of various university teachers, who perhaps enjoyed their freedom from the dictates of the university curriculum, and brought in fresh ideas in their interactions with teachers like us. Thus, one would come away with new ideas from such courses only to be claimed by the daily grind of teaching that hardly afforded any scope for innovation and the regular cycle of year end invigilation and evaluation. Thus Derrida, Foucault, gender imperatives and discourse analysis would recede from the immediate memory until the time came to attend the next course or seminar.

But changes were inevitable, and in a sudden radical departure, the Gauhati University brought in far reaching innovation into its undergraduate English major course in 2003. Thus, along with the likes of Wordsworth and Dickens, the Metaphysicals and Shakespeare, in came ‘unknown’ women writers Aphra Behn, Anne Killigrew, and Mary Astell and the curriculum took a cultural turn with Raymond Williams
and Richard Hoggart sharing space with the Yeats and the Eliots. It was perhaps because of being a woman that the responsibility of taking up course content with a feminist orientation fell upon me, and an interface with newer ideas was inevitable.

Meanwhile in December 2002, while attending a Refresher course in CIEFL (now EFLU), Shillong campus, Professor P.C. Kar of M.S. University, Baroda, had given a series of lectures that delved into the changing notions of textuality, and how cultural studies was becoming an integral part of the evolution of departments of English literature into departments of English Studies. A fresh world of gender studies and different expressive traditions that included both the oral and written behaviour opened up as potential areas of research. Later, discussions with Professor K.C. Baral, the director of EFLU, Shillong and Dr. Parag Moni Sarma, my husband and his supervisor Dr. Kishore Bhattacharjee during one of our meetings at Guwahati led to the resolution that I should work on the expressive behaviour of Assamese women for my research degree. Dr. Kishore Bhattacharjee agreed to supervise my work as well in the Department of Folklore Research, Gauhati University, and accordingly I registered in the month of May 2003.

However, soon after, my husband left for Assam University, Silchar to take up an assignment as Reader in the Department of English in April 2004. Thus, along with professional responsibility, I had to take over
domestic responsibility completely and the pace of my work was extremely slow. But I had the benefit of having access to the Library at Assam University, and was able to read many important theoretical works. My husband's professional visits to Hyderabad also helped me in procuring books from the former ASRC library in the Osmania University. Though the pace of the work was slow, I managed to present my final registration seminar in November 2005 after getting reasonable grasp over my subject.

The field visits were mostly conducted during summer and winter breaks, when my husband was home for his vacations, and I could leave familial responsibilities to him. As my work drew to a close, he took up a new assignment as a Reader in the Department of Cultural Studies at Tezpur University, in January 2008, and the holdings of the Departmental library was of immense help to bring the work to a close.

My sincere thanks are due to Professor Sunil Kumar Dutta, Head, Department of Cultural Studies, Tezpur University for his encouragement and the books that he had provided me with. The fact that the research project has reached the submission stage is due to the academic and moral support of many who came to be associated with it.

Sincere thanks are due to Professor Ulo Valk of the University of Tartu, Estonia, who in his two visits to Tezpur during the course of my research not only gave important suggestions, but also gifted me the valuable
book *Mondays on the Dark Night of the Moon*. I am also immensely grateful to Professor Dilip Das of EFLU, Hyderabad, who gifted me the invaluable *Gender, Genre, and Power in South Asian Expressive Tradition*. Professor K.C. Baral of EFLU Shillong has been a pillar of support right through the course of the project, and I remain grateful to him for his moral and academic support and for giving me access to the wonderful library at his centre. Rajmohan Das of Nizsilabandha village deserves all my gratitude for facilitating the field trips and guiding me right through the project in data collection.

The patience that my supervisor, Dr. Kishore Bhattacharjee showed was a big factor in the completion of the work. He would only remind me of those who had registered around the same time like I had, and already submitted their thesis. His goading, guidance, and understanding made the work possible. I thank him immensely. I also express my immense gratitude to all my informants, who helped me to understand a bit more of what it is to be a woman.

Finally the work is dedicated to the memory of my father, Dr. Lohit Chandra Goswami, who would have been pleased for he was the first in the family to venture into the field during his doctoral research in the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya. He had certainly shown the way.

\[\text{(Neelakshi Goswami)}\]

Dated the 26th of May 2009