

## **An Ecofeminist Reading of Indira Goswami's *The Man From Chinnamasta***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Ecofeminism, also known as ecological feminism, is a type of feminism that studies women's relationships with nature. In 1974, French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne invented the term. This theory, in particular, highlights how patriarchal societies treat both nature and women. This method aims to deepen the bond that exists between women and nature, eventually demonstrating how both, as sensitive components of the cosmos, are exploited and mistreated by a male-dominated society. Indira Goswami's work *The Man from Chinnamasta* is chosen for this article to shed light on her as an environmentally conscious writer. The novel, originally published as *Chinnamastar Manuhto* in Assamese and translated by Prashant Goswami as *The Man from Chinnamasta*, is a novel written by Indira Goswami and released in 2005. It is based on the Kamakhya temple and is an appeal from the writer to end the age-old tradition of animal sacrifice at the shrine. *The Man from Chinnamasta* is set in colonial India near the 2,000-year-old Kamakhya Temple of the Sakti cult, and explores how humans and the environment have a continually changing connection.

#### **Keywords**

Ecofeminism, patriarchy, woman-nature relationship, oppression, emancipation, green politics.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The current research initiative is designed to use a critical lens to perform an analytical study of the text *The Man from Chinnamasta*, authored by Indira Goswami.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The theoretical formulation of ecofeminism will be reviewed as propounded by theorists, scholars, and writers relevant to the book by Goswami as part of the critical examination. With a close essential reading of the texts, the paper intends to use ana-

lytical, critical, and explorative approaches by incorporating inputs from feminism and ecofeminism.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Indira Goswami's novel *The Man From Chinnamasta* features as its central theme the ever-increasing conflict between humans and the natural environment. It serves as an eyeopener to readers when it comes to understanding women-nature dynamics under patriarchal control. The narrative functions as a primer for understanding the presence and absence of ecology in our lives as living

in a tradition-bound Assamese society. Ecofeminism emphasizes the earth and all life on it, in its inextricable physical and mental interconnectedness. Humans, as members of this community, rely on the earth and sea, as well as the life they create, to survive. Nevertheless, they are even more fundamentally a part of it, as one component element of the living whole. As Diamond and Orenstein define ecofeminism as "a new label for an ancient wisdom" (Mies and Shiva 13). It originally gained traction in the early 1980s, with roots in feminist philosophy, environmental activism, and the late 1970s European and American peace movements. In 1980, the word was coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne (Mies and Siva 13). The 1980 'Women and Life on Earth: A Conference on Eco-Feminism,' held in reaction to the Three Mile Island nuclear catastrophe, focused on "the linkages between feminism, militarism, healing, and ecology" (Mies and Shiva 14). Most of women's poetry and literature predated the term's use in the 1960s and 1970s, and it has received greater importance thanks to philosophers Val Plumwood and Karen Warren's work. It has also been embraced by many writers, such as Arundhati Roy in Indian English Literature.

Ecofeminist analysis examines the cultural, economic, religious, political, literary, and iconographic ties between women and nature, as well as the parallels between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, "Ecofeminism is defined as a philosophical and political theory and movement which combines ecological concerns with feminist ones, regarding both as resulting from the male domination of society" (7). Ecofeminists argue that a woman's association with nature is accepted in two ways: as an exploited community susceptible to the violent goals of males; and as a gentle, ordinary, and submissive being, like nature. There is a behavioural predisposition to think of nature and women as second-class citizens.

Indira Goswami is an Assamese writer and is considered a luminary figure in the arena of

women's writing. Most of her writings have a universal appeal for their authentic expression and strong imagery. Goswami was born on November 14th, 1942 in Assam. She is famously known by her pen name Mamoni Raisom Goswami and more popularly as Mamoni Baideo, who is an Indian writer, poet, professor, scholar, and editor. She was the winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award (1983), the Jnanpith Award (2000), and Principal Prince Claus Laureate (2008). A celebrated writer of contemporary Indian literature, many of her works have been translated into English from her native Assamese, which includes *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, *Pages Stained with Blood*, and *The Man from Chinnamasta*. She was also well known for her attempts to structure social change, both through her writings and through her role as a mediator between the armed militant group the United Liberation Front of Asom and the Government of India. Her involvement led to the formation of the People's Consultative Group, a peace committee. She referred to herself as an "observer" of the peace process rather than as a mediator or initiator. In Goswami's works, a strong ecofeminist sensitivity is evident. Most of her prominent works deal with the ecological aspect in close relation to women. In her novels, *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* (2004), *The Blue-necked God* (1976), *Pages Stained with Blood* (2001), *The Man from Chinnamasta* (2005), and the short story collection *The Shadow of Kamakhya* (2001), Goswami has shown great concern for women and nature and portrays the unexplored world of patriarchal savagery on women and nature.

The pioneer of the American environmental movement, Murray Bookchin, assures us that the domination of nature came after the domination of humans by humans. Therefore, it is important to dismantle such hierarchy and domination to ensure a secure and liberated status for both. Goswami investigates how patriarchal culture exploits both nature and women. Indira Goswami's groundbreaking novel *The Man from Chinnamasta* is an appeal from the writer to end the

age-old practice of animal sacrifice at the temple. The novel *The Man from Chinnamasta*, set in colonial India at the ancient Kamakhya Temple of the Sakti cult, explores the ever-changing interaction between man and the environment. Shakti is a concept in the Hindu religion that preaches the strength of the feminine. It refers to the divine mother, who is worshipped for her fertility. The novel has the male priest, Chinnamsta Jatadhari, as the protagonist who fights against the age-old ritual of animal sacrifice at the celebrated Kamakhya temple of Assam. Another male character, Ratnadhar, is equally sensitive and moved by the brutality inflicted on innocent animals, who could not bear the scene where a calf was taken for sacrifice and became emotional. Ratnadhar, a young artist who has been treated by him, and Dorothy Brown, an Englishwoman who comes to Jatadhari after leaving her husband, who has adopted a local woman as his mistress, are among his followers. After a terrible attack on Dorothy, a relationship develops between Jatadhari and Dorothy that becomes a source of nefarious talk among the people, and Dorothy and Jatadhari decide to leave for a while. These characters are presented in the novel as active participants in combating the heinous practice of animal sacrifice. The novel thus represents such male characters whose ecological consciousness debunks the gynocentrism of the conventional ecofeminist school of thought. Greeta Gard's proposal of queer ecofeminism seems relevant in this regard. She quotes, "We have to examine how racism, heterosexism, classism, ageism, and sexism are all related to naturism." (Loughlin 148). The perspective of queerness is an attempt to break apart the gender binaries to develop a broader understanding of nature and culture.

The female characters in Goswami's novel, *The Man from ChiChinnamasta*, are vital to grasping the woman-nature interconnectedness and receiving a sense of their intricate affinity. Bidhibala's passive existence in *The Man from Chinnamasta* while fighting the dominant males of her family makes her capable of understanding the trauma that the voiceless calf experiences right be-

fore sacrifice. Dorothy, an abandoned English woman by her unfaithful husband, and her recuperation correlate with the Brahmaputra River when she changes along its bank, demonstrating the ecological intimacy she shares with the other women, and it is expressed in the following words:

Within a week, the house was habitable. And on a full moon night in mid-January, Dorothy Brown disembarked from the boat, firmly clutching the hand of the faithful Minchi Vepin. A mantle of fog shimmered like silver dust over the leaf-littered abode of the Mother Goddess—much like scrapings from the silver pot used to make offerings of sacrificial blood to the goddess. And there was the Brahmaputra. In silent repose. (Goswami 19).

The river Brahmaputra, like the riddle of an abandoned woman desperately trying to keep her splendour, is a wonderful metaphor steeped in thousands of years of mystery. Dorothy's correspondence with Jatadhari is equally mysterious and unclear.

Goswami glorifies women's emancipation by offering a dominant formation and influence all the way through the stories of Dorothy and Bidhibala. Continued existence is the technique of attaining access and raising one's potential with the view to contributing vigorously to determining one's own life. Bidhibala has been subjected to a great deal of oppression and prejudice, and her father, as a dependable and trustworthy figure, has chosen to marry off the eleven-year-old to a forty-year-old married man. While Dorothy Brown waited a year away from her husband, Henry Brown, who was involved in an illicit relationship with a native lady. Dorothy's pregnancy news reaches the Brahmaputra's beaches, demonstrating the fragile life of a solitary woman in society. Bidhibala's father functions in the novel as an agent of patriarchy and takes the role of an oppressor, who not only oppresses but also subdues her with extreme parental brutality and renders her voiceless. There is a continuous struggle with patriarchy, and this is what binds together these

women from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Dorothy's shift near the river and her suppression, similar to the traditional Indian women around her, makes her a hybrid character of the colonial domain. Goswami portrays Dorothy's character this way in her novel, "Amazing! She was a white woman, but so different from the Europeans they had seen on the streets of Gauhati." (Goswami 12). Her presence is seen as a new shared space exclusive to women that transgresses all colonial boundaries to produce a unified need for liberation and show the universality of women's problems. Dorothy's status as a white woman living in a colonized land has been attributed more to her sufferings and suppression than anything else. Dorothy defines the postcolonial as a feminist space without any geographical boundaries to identify how patriarchal power relations are the only colonizing principle. Thus, both the female characters, Dorothy and Bidhibala, and their subjugation correspond to the natural elements present in the novel. Women's exploitation and marginalization go hand in hand with animal sacrifice. Moreover, Chinnamasta Jatadhari's presentation in the novel is perhaps intended to throw light on the philosophical arena inherent in the author herself and expose society's absurd nature in the words of the protagonist, Jatadhari, "No one is happy. No one. People somehow manage to string body and soul together and carry on." (Goswami 14). The author is seen seeking to highlight society's ridiculousness while also analyzing the fragility and tragedy of both women and nature in patriarchal societies.

One of the most touching elements in the novel is Goswami's projection of animal cruelty by a vicious society blinded by religious irrationality. Because of her authentic expression and truthful delineation of social ills in the novel, Goswami received numerous threats from religious fanatics. The writer's radical stance was that she disregarded any death threats and continued to use her work for reformative and progressive causes. As a realistic writer, Goswami represents truth in its utmost subtleties, and one such example is when a buffalo is

taken for sacrifice. The scene as projected by the novelist brings an active image alive in the minds of the readers—"The animal tried to break free as it was being hauled away to the slaughterhouse. They wanted to escape the death that came in the form of pilgrims. But the harbingers of doom kept tugging at it. Shoving. Yelling. Prodding." (Goswami 15). The animal's inability to break free and avoid a horrible death exemplifies how animals and the environment have always been subjugated and enslaved by people. It also connotes masculine anthropocentrism, in which men regard themselves as the centre of the world, with everything else occupying a secondary role. Goswami peculiarly presents her progressive ideology while protesting societal evil practices and the brutality of men toward animals and nature and puts forth her opinion in these words,

But humans shouldn't be replaced by animals. They drag helpless animals to the sacrifice. The Mother has never said that she would reduce the earth's abundance to ashes if she were not offered blood. According to the holy books, flowers are equally acceptable to the mother. The writings say that anyone making an offering of a thousand Karabi flowers and a thousand Kunda flowers will have all his desires fulfilled. Also, he earns the religious merit of living in the abode of the goddess. (Goswami 128).

## CONCLUSION

Indira Goswami's *The Man From Chinnmasta* is a brilliant indictment of patriarchal cultures and anti-feminist ideas, as well as a stinging attack on socio-religious irrationality. Goswami's writings are notable for their absolute originality and ability to bring to light the most significant societal concerns. More importantly, as a brilliant writer, Goswami not only highlights societal issues but also adds a unique perspective on how to address them in a constructive way. Considering Goswami's philosophy of fair and equal treatment for the environment, Green politics deserves a mention here. Green politics (also known as ecopolitics) is a po-

litical theory based on ecology, nonviolence, social justice, and grassroots democracy with the goal of creating an environmentally sustainable society. It originated in the western world in the 1970s, and since then, green parties have grown and established themselves in a number of nations throughout the world, with some political success. Green politics advocates have a lot of views in common with the ecology, conservation, environmentalist, feminist, and peace movements. Green politics is concerned with civil liberties, social justice, nonviolence, and occasional forms of localism. In addition to democracy and environmental problems, it tends to promote social progressivism. The author's pleadings to foster an ecologically sustainable society mark the beauty and remarkableness of the novel. One of the major elements of green politics is increased moral sensitivity and awareness of our interactions with the nonhuman world (from the advocacy of "animal rights" and "animal welfare" to views that the Earth is "holy" and/or has inherent value); While numerous schools of thought such as Green Politics, Ecocriticism, and Ecofeminism try to present a holistic picture of nature in order to emancipate women, the women's cause becomes more dependent on when and how nature is liberated.

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