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Social Reform and Remedy Rendered in the Select Novels of Indira Goswami

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Abstract

Dr. Indira Goswami (Mamoni Raisom Goswami) is one of the leading writers of the India today. She has won the Jnanpith Award for the year 2000, which is the highest literary award of India today. She belongs to the family of Sattra adhikars (Head of Vaisnava monastery) of South Kamrup in Assam. Her father, Late Uma Kanta Goswami, was an economist, who worked as the Director of Public Instruction of the Government of Assam. Indira did her schooling in Guwahati and Shillong. She has written eighteen novels, and several hundreds of short stories. Her novels and short stories have been translated into many Indian and Foreign languages. She tries to write from her direct experiences of her life. She only moulds her experiences with her imagination. Her language is like a velvet dress by which she endeavors to cover the restless soul in its journey through existence. But however hard, she might try, the fabric of this dress seldom takes on the texture of velvet or fine Muslim, and it comes out rather tattered. Sometimes they feel that it is a futile effort to arrest the soul with language and capture it in cold print. It is better, perhaps to feel it only in numb science. But, then, those very experiences impel a person to unload them from the psyche by creative effort which gives a sort of relief. And, the tattered fabric has a beauty which puts to shame the finest of velvets.

Keywords: Symbolism, Imagery, Social issues, Deprivation.

1. Introduction

Dr. Indira Goswami began writing from a very early stage of her life. Almost her entire life now has been spent dedicated to writing. Her fictions generally deal with the life and sufferings of the downtrodden and underprivileged. The three novels *Chenabor Strot* (*The Current of the Chenab*), *Ahiron* and *Mamore Dhara Taruwal* (*The Rusted Sword*) are celebrated novels on the pitiable conditions of the migrant workers who work for the private construction companies far away from their homeland. The time span in the stories is 1960s, a time when the casual workers were not organized at all to fight for even their basic rights. The workers, mostly from Orissa, Andhra and Tamil Nadu come and work in Kashmir (*Chenabor Strot*), Madhya Pradesh (*Ahiron*) or Uttar Pradesh (*Mamore Dhara Taruwal*) and their rootless condition makes them even more prone to exploitation. She later joined the Modern Indian Language (MIL) department of Delhi University, and went on to head it Assamese language department. To honour, the University made her the Professor Emeritus in 2009 after her retirement. It was during her stint in the national capital that she attained national prominence.

She has also worked in Jawaharlal Nehru University. She was appreciated and respected by all not only for her literary talents but for being a great humanist as well. She shall be remembered forever for her celebrated works and also for her charming personality. Dr. Goswami received the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award for *Mamore Dhara Taruwal* in 1982.

2. Reform and Remedy in Indira Goswami's Novels

The Blue-Necked God (Nilakantha Braja), published in 1976, is one of Indira Goswami's early novels and the first time that a writer highlighted the exploitation and the poverty of widows, dumped in a 'scared' city. To eke out their days in prayer by uncaring, callous families under the guise of religious sanction and tradition. It was a book that raised many eyebrows when it was first published for this amazing narrative combined fact and fiction, autobiography and reflection in a fascinating mix as she tried to depict the confusion and the mental agony she herself experienced after the death of her husband through her character Saudamini.

The physical, emotional, financial deprivation faced by the young widow has been woven into a perceptive text that drew on the author's own research and experiences as she roamed the streets of Vrindavan and exposed, for the first time, the uglier side of the city and its traditions.

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In this novel "*Neelakanthi Braja*" (*The Blue- Necked God*) Saudamini the heroine of the novel has come to Braja in quest of mental peace. But what did she get? Instead of finding peace, she sees the heart-rending sights of the indescribable exploitation, deprivation, sorrow, and misery, sexual exploitation, inflicted upon the Radheswamis. So, contentment of her mind is out of question. In fact, she is forced to transform into a rebellious woman. And like, saudamini, the Radheswamis have also come to Braja in search of peace and shelter. "I am sure that she must have left something with one of you. After all, she was a radheshyami, in the Bhajan Ashram". (p.56) But they are victimised to the so-called society and exploiters. Radheswamis lost their identities. The writer has illustrated the situation, the society has to reform their ideas. Her father spoke,

Look at my hands. I have been feeling for some time that these hands are becoming weak. And that after some time I will become useless, and will have to spend the rest of my days sitting somewhere, huddled up like a useless burden. (p.170)

Though Saudamini develops a rebellious attitude, yet she cannot overcome the existing rigidity. That is why she is compelled to suicide in the end.

In this novel "A Saga of South Kamarup" the character Saru Gosani is agonized by mental conflict. In spite of this, she is unable to break the chains and come out. Immersed in superstitions, she crushes her misery and conceals it within herself,

This is a feeling of great sin! A feeling of great sin!
This feeling can cast a Gosani of the Damodari line into hell!!
But this thought is deep-rooted in the heart. This feeling has risen at the very first sight of Bapu Mahidhor. Saru Gosani's conscience shuddered. As if she whispered to herself, "Forgive me! O Lord! Forgive me!"

(P.88,*Dantal Haatir Une Khowa Howda, Third Edition, 1997*)

The character like Giribala is compelled to commit suicide. The embarrassment and indignity of being a woman in an orthodox Hindu family has been very movingly described in this novel. A Brahmin girl must be married before she attains her puberty. The author wants to reform their society through her works. The novel describes the anguish of the young members of feudal families who forced to obey the caste conventions which alienate them from the people and also the misery of their subjects who are degraded by poverty, ignorance, superstitions, and the scourge of opium addiction, rampant in the region.

The inheritance of the noble trend of renaissance is difficult. Very few people can inherit and transmit this, even one can enlighten the human society to its right path. Her perceptions as well as depiction through her writings are only means to assess this rare quality. While keeping view of her writings the readers find the modern approach in a different way. Sometimes her characters articulate protest and dissent and simultaneously voices concerns of reform and redress. While narrating a story her situation configures its own and means of expression and transmission.

In her second novel "*Ahiron*" Mamoni Goswami portrays a positive love affair a couple in conscious pursuit of fulfilment. The novel, based in Kashmir, was a new setting for Assamese readers in the terms of background and characters. The background is a construction site for a bridge on the river Chenab in Kashmir and the plot of the novel involves the work and the lives of men and women who worked for the construction company. In this novel the affair is between Harshul, the thoughtful, serious and humane elderly Manager of the establishment, and Nirmala, formerly Mrs.Pandey, who has been recently widowed. What went wrong with them was not simply due to false assumption of character, or incompatibility, but for some deeper psychological reasons which were not fully surfaced in the narrative. Harshul is elderly and there was a sense of inadequacy in his sex-life; his loneliness increased and he began to leave Nirmala too freely with his younger Assistant Engineer Mr.Thakur. But that itself could not have been a danger to a mature woman like Nirmala.The deeper trouble was that Nirmala herself feared that perhaps she could not conceive. She had an elemental urge to test herself, and went out with Thakur to watch Hashdeo river in full spate. The barrage gate would be opened in no time but she persuaded her younger admirer to go to a small island on the shallower side of the barrage in a small boat. To quote from the text:

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3. Conclusion

In her novels, Indira Goswami, has extended her sympathy to tribals, labourers and other oppressed and marginalized sections of society. She wants to redress the society through her writings. She always like to said "I am a man of determination, and I will not stop at anything". (p.70) The main features in Goswami's writing have been the focus on women and the cultural and the political construct of the Assamese society. But when all our reservations are listed, one persistent awareness remains, that Mamoni Raisom Goswami's novels and short stories are complex and disturbing and they command serious attention.

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