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+91 99405 72462



+9163819 07438



ijmrsetm@gmail.com



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Tracing the Social Issues in Indira Goswami's *The Man from Chinnamasta* and *Pages Stained with Blood*

Shubhi Gupta

UG Student, Amity University, Lucknow Campus, Lucknow, India

ABSTRACT: This paper aims to elucidate the social issues discussed and elaborated in Indira Goswami's *The Man from Chinnamasta* and *Pages Stained with Blood*. This article starts with an introduction of the social issues in India. Further it enumerates about the life of Indira Goswami and the social issues discussed in her books. The paper discusses the correspondence of social issues, which are discussed in the books, with society in today's world. Along with this, it also includes a small insight about the similarities and dissimilarities among the writer's style of writing.

KEYWORDS: Social Issues, Indira Goswami, animal sacrifice, assassination, anti-sikh riots, blood, violence, Delhi, Assam.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indira Goswami, an assamese writer, penned down two of the social issues of India which is "Animal Sacrifice" and "Anti-Sikh Riots" in her books *The Man from Chinnamasta* and *Pages Stained with Blood* respectively. Both books have been written in consideration with developing more awareness about these issues and bringing about a change in the society.

Jatadhari, a tantric or an ascetic who is the protagonist of the novel, *The Man from Chinnamasta*, repeatedly puts an emphasis on abolishing the cruel practise of "Animal Sacrifice" carried out in the temple of Kamakhya in Assam. He backs his yearning of abolishing the evil practise by educating other people of the village about the ancient Sanskrit Scriptures. He elaborates on several other alternatives such as Debi Bhagavati, Yoginitantra and Kalila Purana. Published in 2005, the novel was set in pre-independent British Assam. Goswami wrote this novel at the peak of her literary career. The Novel created a sensation in assam after publication due to its rebellious nature. The Brahmins were offended in particular because of Goswami's forthright request to end a long-standing custom carried out at the most significant Shakti temple. The novel depicts the illustrious past of Assam's most famous Shakti temple, Kamakhya, during the turbulent days around the beginning of the 20th century.

Pages Stained with Blood is another book of Goswami which gives the account of the ghastly amalgamation of religion and politics in contemporary India. The novel depicts how theruling class still controls the imperial mechanism and how "delicate" the idea of a nation is. "Operation Blue Star" is the instantaneous operation of the Indian Military which exterminated India's entire history. It left the country with the biggest massacre and the first genocide in Indian history in 1984. Followed by these events, the murder of the then Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi, took place. Punjab, the home to the Sikh population, had to suffer a year of significant bloodshed, in accordance with the historical records found. Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister of India, dispatched the Indian army to carry out the "Operation Blue Star" in the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab, in June 1984. The "Operation" was prosecuted to force out the militants who were present inside the temple area. Attacks on Sikhs were rampant in India after the assassination of Indira Gandhi, especially in Delhi.

Keeping the above introduction in mind, this paper will explore the social issues of India which have been elaborated in Indira Goswami's *The Man from Chinnamasta* and *Pages Stained with Blood*.

II. THROUGH THE LIFE OF MAMONI RAISOM GOSWAMI

Indira Goswami, also known as Mamoni Baideo or by her pen name Mamoni Raisom Goswami, was an acclaimed Indian writer, professor, and social activist. She was born on November 14, 1942, in Guwahati, Assam, and passed away on November 29, 2011. Goswami was well known for her writings, which explored social issues such as

gender, identity, conflict etc. She wrote in Assamese, and many of her works have been translated into English and other languages.

Some of her notable works include “*The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*”, “*The Rusted Sword*”, “*The Man from Chinnamasta*”, “*The Bronze Sword of Thengphakhri Tehsildar*”, “*Pages Stained with Blood*”. Goswami was also a recipient of several prestigious literary awards, including the **Jnanpith Award** which she received in 2000, **Sahitya Akademi Award** in 1983, and **Padma Shri** in 2002 which she refused to accept.

Goswami is recognised for her innovative topics and creative, contemporary style. Her books and short stories, which are set in other parts of India, provide her readers a glimpse of life outside of Assam. Goswami has considerable empathy and compassion when tackling the difficult socioeconomic concerns of urban life, the hard lives of labourers, and the fate of widows in Vrindavan and Assam. She can mimic the vulgar talks of her protagonists because she has a good ear for slang. She is very discreet and reserved in how she expresses her outrage or displeasure towards compelled rituals and oppressive social norms. She exudes assurance, bravery, and tenacity in all her work.

Her 1976 novel *The Blue Necked Braja*, which is about the suffering of the Radhasoamis of Vrindavan who lived in utter poverty and were routinely sexually exploited, is an expression of her experiences as a widow and a researcher. The hardship of young widows, for whom contact outside the boundaries of their ashrams and fellow widows becomes impossible, is one of the key topics that the book talks upon.

She also wrote her two classics during this time, *Pages Stained with Blood* and *The Moth Eaten Howdah of a Tusker*. The other books like *Ahiron*, *The Rusted Sword*, *Uday Bhanu*, *Dasharathi's Steps*, and *The Man from Chinnamasta* were the ones she finished while she lived in Delhi. *Jatra (The Journey)*, which is based on the issue of militancy/secessionism that has plagued nearly the whole North-East India frontier since Indian independence, was another significant work of her fiction around that time.

III. SOCIAL ISSUES IN INDIA

India has always been a multi-religious, multilingual, multicultural, and multi-regional society. There has been a prodigious cultural impact on Indian society in accordance to this diversity. It has also helped to uphold or sustain India's rich cultural history. The interrelatedness of social, cultural and political aspect of Indian society have been influenced by these differences in the country in a number of ways. India is a country with a diversified population and prosperous cultural heritage but at the same time it suffers through a number of social issues that affect its development and progress. Some of the prominent social issues are as follows: -

India is a country with a diverse population and rich cultural heritage, but it also faces several social issues that affect its development and progress. Here are some of the prominent social issues in India:

- **Poverty**
- **Gender inequality**
- **Caste discrimination**
- **Religious intolerance**
- **Child labour**
- **Environmental degradation**
- **Healthcare**

These are just a few of the social issues which are being faced by India.

Two main Social Issues discussed in *The Man from Chinnamasta* and *Pages Stained with Blood*:-

i) **Animal Sacrifice in *The Man from Chinnamasta*:** Animal sacrifice is one of the prominent themes in the novel, *The Man from Chinnamasta*. Animal sacrifice has been a part of controversial and complex issue of India. It has been a part of religious and cultural practices for hundreds and thousands of years, with a long history and deep cultural significance. It has faced backlash and criticism from many others yet it remains an important part of religious and cultural practices for some communities. The future of animal sacrifice in the country remains uncertain as India continues to modernise and evolve.

ii) **The anti-Sikh riots in *Pages Stained with Blood*:** Another social issue discussed in the novel *Pages Stained with Blood* is the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. These riots were a tragic chapter in the history of India, in which thousands

of Sikhs were killed in violent attacks following the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the then-Prime Minister of India, by her two Sikh bodyguards on October 31, 1984. The assassination was a response to the “Operation Blue Star” of the Indian army's storming of the Golden Temple in Amritsar earlier that year, where Sikh separatists had taken refuge. The sikhs were targeted by the furious mobs majorly in Delhi and other cities, as a result of the assassination on the Prime Minister. It triggered a wave of violence against the community.

IV.ANIMAL SACRIFICE IN THE MAN FROM CHINNAMASTA

Summary: *The Man from Chinnamasta*, originally known as *ChinnamastarManuhto*, published in 2006, a novel by one of the most profound Indian writers, Indira Goswami, is the narrative of the conflict of two ideas. The strong priest community and their supporters, who support animal sacrifice and regard it as being of the utmost importance in the shakta tradition of worshipping the goddess, are on one side of the issue. On the other hand, there is the titular character from Chinnamasta, the ascetic known only as Jatadhari, and his adherents who fervently believe that the goddess may be worshipped equally effectively with flowers and other pious practices which did not involve bloodshed of any creature on the land and as a result, take a position against the practise of sacrificing animals. This conflict between the two factions develops into the novel's main theme and the plot's primary motivator.

Jatadhari, one of the major roles in the novel, who, despite spending a significant amount of the book out of the action, is portrayed as being cloaked in mystery. He is a yogi with strong intentions and power. The inhabitants regard him as wise leader. The follower of goddess, he can be spotted meditating in the holy river of Brahmaputra and is supposed to be able to swim through it even during times of heavy downpour. His dreadlocks are He is a follower of the goddess, and the populace regards him as a wise healer. He can be spotted meditating in the Brahmaputra and is supposed to be able to swim through it even during times of heavy rain. Snakes are also said to live in his dreadlocks.

Ratnadhar, a young artist who has been healed 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, Dorothy and Jatadhari decide to separate for a while as their connection grows and becomes the subject of hostile rumours among the populace.

Ratnadhar and other young students had gathered signatures on a petition to end animal sacrifice by the time they return, and the book's dramatic finale occurs when the two opposing sides meet in the temple. The narrative of Ratnadhar and Bidhibala, a young girl forced to wed a man who is much older than she is and already has a wife and children, is the book's subplot.

The festivals celebrated in Kamakhya: The novelist draws inspiration for *The Man from Chinnamasta* from being strongly reliant on rituals, religion, folklore, and myth and cultural customs. She is capable of resolving all disequilibrium, including her own and those of her readers, because of her richness both inside and outside the body. She is able to actualize herself in order to write a story that is highly innovative. The book's main focus is the blood sacrifice that takes place at the Kamakhya temple in Assam. Between the airport and Guwahati City in Assam is a place called Kamakhya, which is steeped more in legend than history. To the left of the road, on a hill called Nilachal, is where the Kamakhya temple is located.

Sati surrendered herself to the Yaga fire since she was unable to handle it. With the dead remains of his spouse on his back, a furious and resentful Shiva began a destructive dance that frightened the other gods. Vishnu was given the assignment of soothing Shiva.

He accompanied Shiva and started dismembering the corpse with his sword, Sri Chakra.

Those pieces fell in 51 places that were afterwards recognised as sacred. On the Nilachal or Kamagiri hill, where the genitalia fell, a temple was built. The temple's sanctum sanctorum is a cave with a little, unnoticed stream of water that perpetually moistens a stone with the shape of female genitalia, called a yoni. Every year, for three days, the water turns red, signifying **Ambubachi**, or the Goddess' menstrual cycle.

Every year during the monsoon, the Ambubachi Fair is held in the Kamakhya temple. Hundreds of thousands of devotees travel from throughout the nation and overseas to attend the fair. It is believed that Mother Earth periodically becomes impure, and that this impure state is similar to the unclean state that women experience during menstruation. The temple doors remain closed to visitors during these three days. “For Ambubachi Mela the door of the temple has closed” (Goswami.92).

Another festival observed in Kamakhya is **Devdhani**. Mother Goddess Manasa is venerated during this festival. The snake goddess Manasa. "Two snakes are present on the shoulder of Goddess and other two are on the head of Goddess of Manasa" (Goswami.159) To appease the goddess, people sacrifice animals like buffalo, goats, pigs, and birds. "The buffalo, who was taken to sacrifice, did not want to go; he tried to come down." (Goswami.10) And "The scarified heads of goats make a hill on the feet of Goddess Manasa" (Goswami.165). Additionally, it is thought that human sacrifice is more beneficial than anything else. It is also possible to offer one's own blood. All of a devotee's desires will be satisfied in six months if they sacrifice their own blood, even if it is equivalent to a till (sesame seed).

The persecution and harassment of the book's main character, the Hindu tantrik Jatadhari, make religious intolerance in *The Man from Chinnamasta* more apparent. Through his request to halt the long-standing tradition of animal sacrifice in front of the Mother Goddess, Jatadhari enrages a significant number of devoted Hindus and fellow tantriks. Jatadhari's attempts to replace the ritual of animal sacrifice with the veneration of flowers in order to elicit the Mother Goddess's blessings make him a target and he is treated with scorn and hatred because it is widely held belief that the Mother Goddess, or Shakti, can be easily placated and satiated with blood.

Overall, "The Man from Chinnamasta" is a powerful portrayal of the social issues that plague Indian society, particularly in the state of Assam. It highlights the need for social reform and the struggle of the marginalised and oppressed to assert their rights and dignity.

V. PAGES STAINED WITH BLOOD; AN AFTERMATH OF THE ASSASSINATION

Indian society has frequently seen communal unrest, which keeps happening for many causes. Riots often reveal the precarious state of racial peace in our nation and force us to confront the blatant cruelty and violence that leave people traumatised. To depict horror and pain, literary authors must develop new narrative techniques and strategies. Through the use of metaphors, symbols, and literary tropes, this horrific reality is indirectly depicted in literature. What acquires tremendous importance is how representation functions, not just the graphic depiction of horror and violence, nor is it just the representation of specific lives that have been traumatised.

Indira Goswami's *Pages Stained with Blood*, originally published in Assamese as *Tej Aru Dhulire Dhushorito Prishtha*, is about the 1984 anti-Sikh riot, where Operation Blue Star at the Golden Temple in Amritsar gives the story an unexpected twist. The protagonist, who is mostly close to Sikhs, dives headfirst into the situation. It takes the form of the diary of a young Assamese novelist and teacher at the University of Delhi. She consistently documents her first-hand observations of the violence in Delhi as she continues to write a book about the happenings in Delhi.

While studying in Delhi, the author witnessed some of the tragic and fearful days of her life. Her former residence during her time in college was next to the Roshanara Garden, which served as a haven for local thieves and goons. According to the adage, the senior scribes who performed the 'Ram-charit Manash' for the populace owned the locations during the day.

Guru Hanumanta, Sikh driver Santokh Singh, Balbir Raddiwala, and brigadier Mansingh are the book's key protagonists. She had a close friend from her university in Kaikaus Burjhur. Before she departed, Guru Hanumanta gave her a shawl with a handwoven floral pattern, which she kept with her as one of her prized possessions. Santokh Singh used to drive her to school in his three-wheelers. While performing his duties on time, Santokh Singh started to fall in love with her, but the narrator rejected his feelings. Because she always refers to him as "bhaiya" and treats him like a brother. However, she recently became aware of her developing feelings for him. Singh once makes an unannounced visit to her room while acting awkward. Because she could not stand his behaviour, the narrator chased him out of her room. After a while, he stopped coming to see her, which made her feel awful for him. When the narrator began looking for him in the "galis," or congested lanes of drunks and booze stores, this led to some dark evenings.

Balbir Raddiwala frequently visited her home to recover his belongings from her balcony and to give her some of them as gifts. At her house, he used to enjoy his evening "chai and biscuit." Additionally, Balbir kept two of his crates of books at her residence.

After missing their connecting flight, the narrator encountered Brigadier Mansingh at the Calcutta Airport. She was forced to spend that night in the lounge. The brigadier did, however, provide her a place to spend the night. With his dark, wiry appearance, the brigadier looks like American actor Burt Lancaster. He sends her a bouquet of red roses

one evening while residing in Delhi. She incorporated this understanding in her stories since it makes her feel amazing.

Sikh Baba, a refugee who appeared in the book, was another figure. Three buses departed for Delhi in 1947 from Dera Ismail. Kuldeep Kaur, his daughter, disappeared at that point. Kuldeep was killed, and a week later the body was discovered in a wheat field in Khankhana. The attack began on September 7, 1947. Sikh Baba was brought to the scene so he could identify the corpse. She was naked except for the breasts that had been severed and hanging from a peepal tree. Baba had been silent ever since.

The prostitution epidemic in Delhi is another significant aspect of the book. The narrator went to these locations to get to know these women and their personalities in preparation for a thorough examination. Due to terrorist attacks during that time of year, Punjab was terrorised by a violent environment. The Golden Temple was even attacked by them. And it was at that time that the Sikh Army shot and killed India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The Sikh Movement thereafter began in Delhi. The Sikhs' routes have been destroyed and set on fire. Delhi was covered with a stain of blood and tears.

The smell of burning man permeates everything. Santokh Singh's body remained there around the same moment when Balbir was missing. His son was killed, and a blade removed both of his eyes. Finally, she loses all her recorded material as Santokh Singh's blood seeps into her book. Everyone left the narrator alone one by one till finally Mansingh also departed for China for his own reason.

The most sad and intense days that took place in Delhi in 1984 comprised a significant element of the book. The subject of the book is Delhi and the areas around it. The protagonist describes all the minute details she records in her notebook, including the riots that followed Indira Gandhi's assassination, and the narrator meticulously recounts the events that occurred in Delhi in 1984. Along the journey, she encounters individuals who share their tales with her, fall in love with her, and introduce her to fresh facets of the city.

The narrator travels to numerous locations, including Mirza Ghalib's home, the prostitutes of GB Road, and the well-known red-light district of Delhi, in an effort to finish her book and highlight all of the significant events of the enormous political and social crisis. Her main focus is typically on researching the ruins of Mughal Delhi and the dispossessed Delhi. The Delhi riot is a serious attempt to recreate the tragic events that occurred when a minority community in an independent country suffered at the hands of the majority population.

Blood is implied as an intense metaphor and presence throughout the book by its very title. The anti-Sikh riot depicts a heartbreaking scenario of human loss. The narrative's presentation of all the horrifying details of the Delhi neighbourhoods devastated by the riots within the context of the horrors and slaughter creates a contrast that heightens the emotion by creating a contradiction on the other. Blood is a symbol of violence, which is what she concludes about the war, the murders, and the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi. The connections between 1984 and historical tales of horror and bloodshed give the dark periods of human history a diachronic continuity.

Pages Stained with Blood by Dr. Goswami is notable for its portrayal of the riots and carnage that engulfed Delhi in 1984. She used realistic visuals while writing about personal and real-life experiences. As "the shadow cast by vultures on a corpse" spread over Delhi, the brutal reality of the people and their communal activities such as murder, killing, bombing, raids, operations, and destruction. There were numerous losses, including both material and human losses. Over time, these violent actions moved to the nearby states of Punjab, Haryana, and Kashmir.

The horrifying scene is described by the author as follows: '...Killings and more killings! heaps of used cartridges. Some villagers are etched in my mind, too deep to be wiped away.' The narrative also depicts historical occurrences, society around them in general, and a particularly important period in Sikh history. In "Pages Stained with Blood," a sequence of snapshots of ruined lives and dashed ambitions are brought to a violent and ferocious conclusion by the Delhi riots of 1984. The anti-Sikh riot's basic historical facts, the movement that gave rise to it in terms of historical perspective and sequence, and its effects on India's socio-political climate have all been attempted to detect and discuss.

The goal is to understand how this internationally renowned author has described these basic historical truths. Between November 1 and November 3, 1984, Delhi was destroyed by an unprecedented surge of violence that claimed the lives of more than 2000 Sikhs. The charred remnants of the bodies, the burned-out shells of houses, and

the 50,000 people who were uprooted and traumatised while living in the relief camps are scars on India's history that are reflected in this book.

Pages Stained with Blood depicted the 1984 anti-Sikh riot's duplicity, cruelty, and unfairness. The memories of the horror of the partition and the sight of the human wrecks it has left behind serve as the prelude to the explosion of blood-mad violence. In her obsessive search for retribution, the author restlessly explores Old Delhi's dark nooks, which hint to her of comparable brutality, treachery, and violence down the years in the form of its twisting byways and historical recollections. She aims to address and capture the most horrific and agonising depictions of man's treatment of man without faltering.

The encounters are recalled because of the images they gave the author. In the story, the narrator employs a variety of techniques to conjure up memories, including visiting historical locations and conversing with figures from the past, hearing people's tales, and reading about historical events.

The partition of India in 1947 is where the causes of intercommunal violence in the post-independence era may be found. The postcolonial political environment in India put a great deal of strain on the country's whole social structure. Violence has taken many different forms as a result of separatist movements in the Punjab, Northeast, Jammu, and Kashmir, as well as divisive and centrifugal tendencies in other regions of the nation.

VI.CONCLUSION

The Man from Chinnamasta is an idea-driven story, and the notion transcends the book's plot. The plot is loose and descriptive since it is used to further the theme. Goswami combines her descriptive skills and her understanding of the mythology and rituals of Goddess worship to immerse her readers into this universe.

The cultures, traditions, and many schools of religion that are brought to life in front of the readers transport them to another realm.

The reverence of the kumaris, the bringing of animals for sacrifice, the group of prostitutes who come for partaking in the celebration, the pilgrims travelling from far and wide to adore the goddess during festivals—all of these things come to life in front of the readers. The Ambubachi and the Deodhwani, two significant temple festivals that Goswami depicts, and which also play a key role in the plot of the novel, are highlighted.

As we see the activities performed by its practitioners with the intention of appeasing the goddess, much attention is given to the tantric traditions of worship and the techniques employed by them. Similar to this, she goes into great detail to describe the customs observed at the festivals, the dances performed, the veneration, and the many sacrifices that take place, giving the reader the impression that they are actually present there. She succeeds in convincing the audience to join Jatadhari and his supporters in speaking out against the practice by her thorough descriptions of the sacrifices, tantric rituals, and the recurrent imagery of animals being carried to slaughter.

Additionally, Goswami skilfully incorporates Assam's history and historical details into the novel. Through the interactions of various individuals, the gossip mongers, and the paintings of Ratnadhar that have historical themes, we learn more about the Ahom emperors as well as the Mughals, the Burmese as well as the English rulers. Additionally, she incorporates the status of women in society through the female characters she creates. No one is permitted to exercise agency over their own life, not even Dorothy, Bidhibala, the devoted spouses of the priests, or the buffaloes being carried to slaughter.

The novel can be a little challenging to follow for someone who is unfamiliar with the area because it is so strongly rooted in Assamese culture and temple worship rituals.

Whereas the narrative "*Pages stained with blood*" is an unrealized ambition and unfinished task. The narrative's collision of romanticism, horror, and murder offers a contrast that heightens the impact by creating a contradiction on the other. The narrator meets the people through the routine daily interactions that any regular person would have in a society. The astonishing ambiguity, incompleteness, and hope that characterise "*Pages stained with Blood*" are what make it such a significant work of Assamese fiction.

Goswami's book serves as a timely reminder that the tragic 1984 pogrom, in which more than 3000 Sikhs were killed by lynching or burned alive after being doused in paraffin, left 4000 children orphaned, thousands of women widowed, and 50,000 people displaced, requires much more public awareness and widespread moral examination. The rehabilitation and relocation of the riot victims have not been satisfactory even after three decades.



Instead of feeling empathy for the victims and aiding, the political parties have been engaging in petty politics and basically utilising them as vote banks while they try to pick up the shards of their lives. Even the court's involvement in this situation has not really changed much. Adding salt to the already severe injury, the legal process to find the guilty and punish them has been agonisingly drawn out: Justice delayed is justice denied in its purest form. Twenty-eight years have gone with rarely any notable convictions; even those who have been found guilty are only foot soldiers, and the main offenders still hold influential positions. The stain cannot ever be removed. The victims are advised to "Move On or Get Over". However, someone needs to guide these victims in how to go on or overcome them.

Indira Goswami's book may not contain a cure-all, but her tortuous narration does highlight the fact that narrating atrocity requires not only extraordinary talent, but also serves as a constant reminder of the skeletons that keep popping up in our own backyard. Goswami's literary works are an effort to bring about transformation in society. She uses it as a tool to combat the socio-political abuse perpetrated against society's underprivileged and marginalised groups. She illuminates the core of human cruelty, which manifests itself daily in a variety of violent acts.

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