



Research Paper

Themes of poverty and struggle for Independence in Indira Goswami's 'The Journey'

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Abstract: Indira Goswami was born in Guwahati in 1942, primarily known as Mamoni Raisom Goswami. She is one of Assam's pre-eminent authors, renowned for her character and the original style of novel themes. Her stories and novels concentrate mainly on the difficult social struggles of poverty, the struggle for freedom and the harsh lives of workers. The author seeks to show compassion and empathy through her narrative, which are engulfed in the essence for the vernacular, and replicate the coarse conversations of her protagonists. Her way of writing is very distinctive and lends an implicit voice of anger and despondency about prevailing social customs.

Around the age of fourteen she started to write fiction and her first stories were published in the Assamese children's newspapers. Her first book 'Cinaki Morom', containing short stories was published in 1962 and she subsequently published 14 books, some short stories and a series of poems (Pain and Flesh). She also published autobiography (Adhalekha Dastabej). Throughout her autobiographical work, she described how the act of writing brought her sublimation at every moment of extreme misery throughout her life, when she suffered from a sense of almost pathologic depression, and helped her to recover over and over again.

The article aims to delineate the central themes of struggle in the history of indignation in north-eastern India. Her short story 'The Journey' encompasses the essence of a family caught in midst of poverty and insurgency in the state of Assam. Her stories are representing the poverty and social constraints. This article clearly delineates the quest of freedom.

Keywords: Assamese, Struggles, Women, Poverty, Insurgency, Freedom.

Received 08 Feb., 2025; Revised 16 Feb., 2025; Accepted 18 Feb., 2025 © The author(s) 2025.

Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. Introduction

Indira Goswami (1942 – 2011) is an iconic figure in Assamese literature who lived and worked as a peace activist with almost motherly concern for humanity. Albeit, there are a great many disputes about the relevance of the biographical references of an author, for a writer such as Indira Goswami, who usually blurs the lines between facts and fiction in pages, it is particularly important. She twice tried to commit suicide after suffering shocks with her father's and husband's demises very early in her life which damaged her psyche and shattered the very foundation of her existence. Her writing was a positive reinforcement, for which she developed an intense passion and essentially made an identity with her emphatic stories, touching the lives of many. Instead of escaping the harsh realities and the cruelties of life, she confronted them courageously, witnessed them in proximity, experienced and reproduced them through her writing, filtering through her sensitive soul.

As President of the Citizens' Peace Forum of Assam, "Nagarik Shanti Mancha, Goswami even initiated and served as a peace interlocutor – talks between the leaders of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and the Government of India from 2004 onwards." In a bid to write a short story about the detrimental and dehumanizing impact of brutal political violence on the Assam people, Goswami visited the worst-affected areas of the state where ULFA rebels and government forces inflicted the most destruction during counter-insurgency operations. Experiencing people's agony created within an excessively enthralling sensation for organizing and expressing them in a novel structure, as she says herself, "Slowly it dawned in my mind that I should try to disseminate the inferno with a very small capacity instead of writing a novel. I am not a politician. I am not a

politician. Nor in my life was I ever interested in politics. I'm just a writer. I will always be grateful to the government of India and ULFA for having honored me by accepting my call to initiate a peace process."

Her writings are full of imagery, highlighting the issues of politics and militancy in Assam. Further Goswami, emphatically captures the theme of gruesome horror of insurgency, brutality of militant and endless fear of prolonged obscure violence. It is well felt in the writings of her. Her descriptions of brutality and the characters of the stories seem to be vivid imagery, translating the ordeal in most apt manner.

Tracing the themes in the short story 'The Journey'

The title, 'The Journey', signifies the meaning of the looking into the life of people. It mainly features the struggles of life, which seems to never ending and memories still haunting. Through her writings in the regional language the barbaric practices and abuses committed in the name of faith, tradition and patriarchy have been attacked. She stood against the backdrop of armed militancy, marks a crossroads where various modes of aggression coalesce with a dynamic pattern of survival instinct. The pseudo-autobiographical story of 'The Journey' begins with Professor Mirajkar who is unnamed and returns to Guwahati from his visit to Kaziranga. It is marked as the brief journey but an eventful one. The story delineates the various types of emergence and moment of exposing multiple types and existence of aggression. They can be experienced as both visible and invisible – as well as the clear and systemic description. The plot also points to the violence faced by women through the character of Nirmali whose legs are broken by her villagers for being in an affair with an Indian soldier. The details of the story contain gender-based violence, political violence and other forms of abuse. The writer illustrates the sense of destruction and social decay caused by the agglomerates of these different types of violence persistent in the world. 'The Journey' is a largely mimetic story that tends to work through practical codes, with the undersigned female narrator and the 'mainlander,' Professor Mirajkar, who is back in Guwahati from a trip to Assam's popular tourist destination, Kaziranga National Park, as a 'late' ambassador.

"The Journey": As A Perception Of Life

Short story of Indira Goswami, "The Journey" is a departure point for researchers, exploring the ambit of violence and social unjust in Assam. 'The Journey' is also known as an account of militant violence in Assam. Interestingly, the narrator lets slip an interesting detail that, while mortally afraid of 'terrorists,' he has a 'heredity of curiosity' about weapons and ammunition. The narrator captures the description of natural beauty witnessed on his return trip. The space in the car acts as a safe 'enclave,' as the protagonist can look at the rapidly changing view without doing something. Far from acting simply as a passage that impresses with pure lyrical elegance, the descriptions from picture postcards like this introduce a subject that is gradually deconstructed throughout the storyline.

"The National Reserve Park is also a protected location, as is the zoo, aquarium, or exhibition. Both Mirajkar and the narrator can ponder over the natural world from afar in this regulated space. Mirajkar might not be afraid of wild animals because of the tourist drive's protection. At the other hand, the attacker's bullet could potentially cut a swathe through this "safe" area and pledge dreadful intimacy. To paraphrase Hamlet, "time is about to be thrown out of the joint". This spatial non-synchronicity scenario is inaugurated dramatically when the car stops in the middle. All passengers leave their enclave enclosed, standing in front of a number of small businesses. As the driver, Ramakanta, questions the repairs, the narrator sees a man approaching them suddenly. A person (manavmurti) gradually emerges from one of the rows of shops (dukan), which is a bit further from the national road (rashtriya path)."

"This personification is used in the well classified way. This Manavmurti has something distinct, different-world and ancient, and seems to emerge almost as a figure from a picture. Unlike the immediate response of the narrator to this Manavmurti (whom she soon starts to speak to as the honorary Aatoi), the physical presence to his wife is slightly delayed. She makes her entrance with a kerosene lamp when the narrator and Mirajkar sit in Aatoi's decrepit store. Gradually, the storyteller noticed her blouse full of patches and her 'withered flesh' as she fought to make tea. While Aatoi is hard to identify, his wife is clearly identified as a victim of poverty." This picture of distressed village women accentuates deprivation, pain and shallowness.

"The wife is the rough, insistent note of a bad and terror-scarred present. From her we learn that one of her child, Konbap, joined the rebels while Nirmali, a daughter of her own, broke her leg as a revenge for having an affair with an Indian soldier. She is still afraid of Indian military bullets killing her son."

She continues to harangue her husband to see if Konbap, the son who joined the militant party, was seen near the railways. In addition, we hear from her that the annual floods have ravaged much of her land and also killed her eldest son. Aatoi and his wife both mention the absolute misery caused by the slow violent floods and the consequent public and political apathy towards the problem at various points of the conversation. In the following paragraph, the wife's analysis of sluggish abuse reaches its apogee: it quotes,

"I have suffered for seven years. You ought to look at our situation once and tell the government about it."

You must also see the plight of our villagers when you go to see the animals in Kaziranga. The utterance of the wife of Aatoi marks the beginning of the cycle of the "bad" statements affecting the narrator and the time of Mirajkar. It is notable that the protagonist loves and sees from afar into the mesmerizing natural beauty of nature. The wife's comment is a shameful indictment of the indifference of this remote, "tourist" eye. The natural world's beauty is apparent but the misery of the people living in this world remains fortified in ignorance. A little while after his wife's scathing criticism of the distant "tourist" feel, Aatoi says:

"But you see some Kaziranga tigers? I hear that in 1966 there were only 20 tigers, but now there are about 60 tigers. Even the number of rhinos is said to have risen from 300 to around 1500, and I believe over 500 elephants are present." This highlights the reality of wild animals, which along with militant violence creates hazards to their lives, who feel themselves helpless and incapable responding to the situation.

Theme: Portrayal Of Struggles

The crucial point for the initial half of this passage is that the distant vision of a managed area is subtly criticized and combined at the same time with a melancholic awareness of the violence that the time works in the fast-disappearing world. If Aatoi's words condemn the ignorance of the distant gaze oddly compliment the harsh, insistent notes from the realm of need with an unpleasant understanding of catastrophic historical transition. As a result of the conservation efforts made by the state and public, the number of rhinos and tigers has increased. But the devastation caused to the existing worlds of human life by slow violence largely undetermined. Furthermore, rapid modernization, has coaxed a gradual disruption to the existing order collectively. "Previously, we took turns chasing away elephants; now nobody knows about a predator coming and taking something away. Things are broken down, the center doesn't hold."

"After Aatoi finishes telling his stories about the past and singing songs composed by the Vaishnavite saints, time begins to 'speed.' Slowly issues come to the head as the narrator ruminates on what Aatoi's wrinkles mean – Worries, the quest for answers, sorrow. As the narrator realizes that the inscrutable face of Aatoi is something elusive that words cannot capture, the narrative remains open-ended."

The storyteller and Mirajkar give some money to the couple before they leave. In the meantime, a young woman — Nirmali — little by little enters the shop. She is regarded as a "miserable bug" by her parents when she limps inside. Yet attention is focused on her "for a moment," which may mean that her abjection has turned into something superficial, commonplace and peculiar in the scarred world of deprivation. She was only heard a short time before she slinked into a corner where utensils were washed. Nevertheless, the "muteness" and apparent invisibility of Nirmali accuse both parents, as it seems they have embraced abuse that their body has undergone in the "ordinary" order of things. Therefore, in earlier exchanges between husband and wife the future of the militant son seems to be the priority. There's hardly any mention of Nirmali. But the brief instant "for a moment," if a "human tornado," Konbap, unexpectedly flies into the scene "accessing an explosion", is even quicker. Konbap is identified as a "young man with awful arms and one-eye shots on his lips" (ibid.). Under his eyelid a strip of his flesh was ripped at his corner of cheek. The "hideous" guy pushes Nirmali into her belly and calls her a "malignant slut," running with the money to buy two U.S. carbohydrates from poachers hunting rhinos, while his parents are telling him to stay and return the money to Mirajkar and his narrator. The essence of the narrative seems to be influenced by these two sequences that speed the perception of time.

While the wife is pleading with Konbap, a "smile hint" hovers over the face of Aatoi. The narrator is haunted by this expression. "I never knew that a human smile could so sear a heart," says the narrator. The two members of enslaved patriarchal societies travel with seated hearts in silence to Guwahati in the wrapping night. I hurriedly suggested that the "seared hearts" and "silence" in the earlier analysis of this story (2012) illustrate an ethical reorientation of the views of the two middle class characters and their world. I don't believe that the text gives us such a direct reaction. I think it would be much easier to think of this situation, in the terms of Nixon's slow aggression, because it "emotionally gives life." Mirajkar had previously a "negative" perception that terrorism has yet to end in the north-east, however later is affirmative of it coming to an end.

Nevertheless, both middle-class characters presumably know that the word "terrorism" only deals with the swift, unexpected existence of violence, in chaotic fashion, which, like Konbap, seems to leave only destruction and confusion. Yet the emotional bond between the two middle class observers and the poor couple is much more important than that. Through looking closely at the storyline, we note that this relationship develops in a parallel process of coming out of an "enclave" room. This understanding, reflects the gradual discovery of the impact of long violence on the poor people. Though seemingly imitate and unilinear, 'The Journey' demonstrates how various meanings of experiential time complicatedly merge into a single experience to reveal the impact of multiple types of abuse.

Contextualizing the notion of Poverty in 'The Journey' and some other works of Indira Goswami

Indira Goswami inextricably accentuates on intertwining aspect form of injustice and exploitation in the society, and gives an earning voice to the quest for the independence or freedom, inflicting pain upon humanity. Goswami, empirically captures the plight and grievances of society, especially of the poor and the marginalized women of the society. She highlights the wretchedness the society imposes upon the destitute and the implicated realities of oppressiveness, exploitation and cruelty of the society. Her works are testimony to pursuit of independence from circumstantial tragedies coaxed by poverty and rigid social structure.

Similarly the context of poverty and quest to escape the social realities is also conspicuous in the story of 'The Journey'. The condition of 'Nirmali as being described as a miserable bug testifies the grave deprivation she is subjected to even within her family. Mirajkar's repeated mention of 'middle-class', patriarchal society affirm to the prevailing biasness of the society. Further the prolonged violence and terrorism in the state has evidently subjected the lives of poor middle class families, like that of Konbap's, to destitution, violence and poverty.

In many of her stories like "Une Khuwa Hoda", Goswami highlights, how the plight of poverty can induce sense of desperation and cloud morality and judgments of the poor. In yet another story "The Offspring", Goswami captures paradoxical notion of poverty and social order merge to explicate a complex reality. Apart from illustrating on complex social order, Goswami highlights, how scrounge for availing a bare livelihood, in a life wretched by poverty and destitution, can perish social moralities and freedom. The tribal women, and women in rural areas are frequently confronted with challenges prevailing from poor livelihood. The Blue-necked God (Nilakantha Braja), was bold manifestation, highlighting the uglier facade of traditions of Vrindavan. Deprived of any honor and recognition, outside the city walls, and forced by the poor financial state, the widows are endowed with unjust miseries in the name of religion.

The characters of Goswami withstand the blemishes upon the humanity, delineating paradoxical realities and grave of unjust in the social order that prevents the poor and the marginalized to live with dignity and freedom.

II. Conclusion

Indira Goswami represents an epitomic figure in Indian literature, writing in the regional language. The regional flavor, born and raised in Assam, is a significant backdrop to her fiction. She talked courageously and passionately of those whose voices had been silenced or never heard: struggles for freedom, women, the excluded, the poor and the downtrodden. She wrote for the intent of bringing about social change. Critics hailed her as a popular literary figure in India and as a woman of exceptional courage and conviction. She represents an important voice in the advocacy of women's rights, who strived to highlight the plight of widows. Her panoptic approach of storytelling themes makes her popular. Her short stories and novels from various locations in India (including Assam) give an insight into the lives of the places. There are numerous themes in her stories such as the social problems of urban life, the poor worker's life and the widows' plight. She expresses her anger at the very subtle orthodox social structure. Goswami's concern for the society is clearly evident in her writings, she writes not only to state the social facts but to bring about change with zeal.

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