
**"Subaltern Voices and Women's Emancipation in Indira Goswami's
"The Blue-necked God" A Postcolonial Analysis"**

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Abstract

Dr. Indira Goswami is one of India's most famous writers, constantly advocating for the emancipation of women and other marginalized groups through her influential writings. In her novel "Blue Necked God," she shows how religious beliefs force women to live a silent, inhumane life. These women, defined as "subalterns" in postcolonial terminology, represent a class that is constantly oppressed by the dominant powers. Famous critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak "Can the Subaltern Speak?" It is written in his book.

"The article believes that although the people at the bottom can speak, their voices can not be created to speak because there is no platform. Goswami's female characters are strong instead of weak in creation, but their efforts did not lead to major changes, hence their classification as petty officers." This article aims to examine the subaltern movement in Goswami's novels through the lens of Spivak's article and analyze how Goswami integrates subaltern consciousness into his female characters.

Keywords: Subaltern, Women's emancipation, Religious doctrines, Female resistance, Subaltern consciousness

Introduction

Indira Goswami, a renowned Indian author and recipient of the Jnanpith Award (2000), made significant contributions to Assamese literature. A poet, writer, and teacher, she was born into a rich *sastra* (religious institution) in Assam. Goswami won the Sahitya Academy Award (1984) for her novel "A Saga of South Kamrup." Her writings reflect a deep concern for marginalized communities, and she consistently wrote about their injustices, exploitation, and oppression. As a humanist, Goswami sought social change through her works and highlighted the connection between nature and women. In her novel "Pages Stained with Blood," set against the backdrop of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in Delhi, she depicts environmental destruction and the exploitation of women for sexual purposes. In "A Saga of South Kamrup" she portrays the deplorable conditions of women in an orthodox Hindu family within a *sastra* in Assam and the inhumane treatment of elephants. Her work, "The Man from Chinnamasta," criticizes animal sacrifices in the name of religion.

Initially published in Assamese in 1976 and translated into English by Gayatri Bhattacharya in 2012, "The Blue-necked God" reflects Goswami's concern over the victimization of women and nature in the holy city of Brindaban. The novel draws parallels between the domination of nature and the suffering of radheshyamis (widows in Brindaban who sing devotional songs in the temple). Through the character of Saudamini, a young widow, Goswami depicts the plight of radheshyamis. Saudamini moves to Brindaban with her parents after her husband's death. She falls in love with a young Christian man, a relationship unacceptable to her orthodox Hindu parents, who bring her to the holy city to repent and help the needy. Sashiprova, another young widow, lives with a priest, Alamgarhi. Goswami highlights the pitiable and horrifying realities of the radheshyamis, abandoned by their families and oppressed by priests.

India's complex hierarchical structure determines an individual's status based on caste, class, and gender, with hierarchies existing within the same caste or gender. Being a woman in a patriarchal society is challenging, but being a widow is considered a sin. Widows are blamed for their husbands' deaths and are excluded from family functions, becoming outcasts within their own families. When they need familial support the most, they are abandoned and sent to religious places like Brindaban and Varanasi, as they are deemed burdens.

"Give some donation to keep us alive. You people live to eat, but we need to eat in order to live. Give something to live" (22)

They ask for donations to survive, contrasting the lifestyle of those who "live to eat" with their struggle, where they "need to eat to live." This emphasizes their urgent need for necessities and highlights the stark difference between those who take food for granted and those fighting for survival.

Old widows live their lives as if they are the living dead, while young widows are often forced to sell their bodies to avoid dying of starvation. They are physically and mentally exploited by men who take advantage of their desperate circumstances. Young men, aware of the immediate hunger these widows face, prey on them, treating them like animals to be inspected before purchase. Goswami draws a comparison between these men and butchers, describing how they make the young widows strip to examine their bodies for any blemishes. Brindaban has become so corrupt that young men are constantly looking to exploit innocent and unsuspecting victims. Once lush green forests around Brindaban have turned into dried bushes and thorns, symbolizing the destruction brought by power-hungry men, much like the historical attacks on the city by rulers like Mahmud of Ghazni and Aurangzeb. These attacks, driven by a desire to demonstrate dominance over weaker rulers, left lasting scars of bloodshed and terror haunting the place to this day. The state of nature reflects the miserable existence of the radheshyamis.

"Yes, more than three thousand homeless radheswamis had perforce to adjust to live with the great heat of the vraj summer, lying naked inside hovels."(83)

It describes a challenging situation faced by over three thousand homeless Radhaswamis during the intense summer heat in Vraj. Due to their circumstances, they had no choice but to adapt to the extreme conditions by lying naked inside makeshift shelters or hovels. This implies a severe lack of resources and highlights their struggle to cope with the harsh environment.

A few clerics misuse the desperate conditions of youthful dowagers, advertising them as "security" in trade for sexual favors. Sashiprova, for example, lives as a mistress to the priest Alamgarhi in the Biharimohan Kunj Temple and shares her humiliating experiences with Mrinalini. Widows like Sashiprova face daily violations, and when Alamgarhi dies, numerous young men eagerly offer their "protection." In a patriarchal society, women are seen as property, dependent on men at every stage of their lives. Nature and women both suffer silent exploitation and oppression at the hands of men. Unseasonal rains, the drying of the Yamuna River, and the shrinking forests exemplify the environmental destruction caused by men. The drying river reveals dead animals and other horrific sights, while unseasonal rain signifies climate change.

Carol Adams expands ecofeminism to include animal oppression alongside the oppression of women. She argues that animals are as much a part of Earth as humans, but men treat them as "other" for their benefit. Goswami empathizes with animals, portraying their suffering at human hands. Bullocks are overloaded with heavy carts, and their owners ignore their pain out of greed. Outside a temple, Saudamini witnesses a man selling animal products and a snake charmer digging up roots for snakes, who then skin a rare-colored snake for profit. Goswami draws parallels between the exploitation of animals and the violation of radheshyamis by pandas.

Even in death, radheshyamis are not allowed peace. Pandas search their bodies for hidden money or gold and dump their bodies in the Yamuna instead of providing proper cremation. Radheshyamis often starve themselves to save money for their funeral rites, only to be denied proper cremation. The silent suffering of radheshyamis mirrors the silent pollution of the Yamuna caused by the pandas' actions.

"The only purush in Braja was the flute-playing Lord Sri Krishna. All else was Prakriti." This quote reflects the belief that man (purush) is supreme, with everything else (Prakriti) – including women, animals, and plants – deemed inferior. Goswami illustrates the close link between women and nature. In ancient times, Radha, the consort of Lord Krishna, planted flowers in Radha Bagh, representing nature conservation. Nature thrives in the absence of humans, as evidenced by the fearless tortoises under the bushes. Saudamini finds peace only in nature's embrace, while Sashiprova enjoys playing and swimming in the river to lift her spirits. Goswami compares Sashiprova to a jasmine flower.

During the Jhulan festival, Brindaban becomes littered with garbage left by pilgrims, including remains of fireworks and food packets, causing air pollution and environmental damage.

Goswami is a dedicated ecofeminist, portraying the domination of nature and oppression of radheshyamis by the powerful. Her work highlights the close connection between women and nature, with Saudamini finding comfort only in nature. Both nature and women are silent victims of male oppression. Through her depiction of unholy events in the holy city, Goswami also exposes the inhumane treatment of animals. Men destroy the environment for their gain, reflecting Goswami's concern for the human and non-human worlds.

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