



Exploring Ethics of Care in Indira Goswami's *The Man from Chinnamasta*

Tutumoni Boro

Ph.D. Scholar

Department of English, Rajiv Gandhi University

Doimukh, Arunachal Pradesh

India

Abstract

Indira Goswami was a prolific writer from Assam. Her writing demonstrates concern and love for the disadvantaged group. She has become well-known throughout the country for her humanist ideals, which she has shared through her expressive writing and social activity. She has illustrated how inhuman rituals fill the world with bitterness and deep pathos while the old canon destroys people's hearts with inflexible orthodoxy. In her books, Indira Goswami mostly addresses issues relating to women, animals, and the natural world. Care ethics is a moral theory; it recognizes care as a crucial tool for resolving interpersonal conflict. It embodies care for animals, nature, and human beings. The main goal of ethics of care theory is to maintain a harmonious society. The present paper examines the novel Indira Goswami's *The Man from Chinnamasta* (2006) through the lens of care perspectives. The book narrates the social evils, such as animal sacrifices, human sacrifices, oppression of women, and violence in the holy place of Kamakhya. The author also resolved the overall disequilibrium that pervades society through this book. It also investigates the relationship and responsibility between each other. Thus the present paper attempts to analyze the care ethics stances in Goswami's select book per care ethics theory and find out how she has imbued care consciousness in her character portrayal of Jatadhari, Ratnaddhar, and, Bidhibala.

Keywords: Indira Goswami, Care Ethics, Animal Sacrifice, Social Crises, Women Oppression, Disequilibrium

Introduction

"From Caring comes the courage."

(Lao Tzu, ancient Chinese philosopher, 67)

Milton Mayeroff on *caring* (1971) was the first book on care ethics. He states, "To care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help him grow and actualize himself" (Mayeroff 1). Though Mayeroff was the first writer to write about care ethics, care ethics as a distinct theory is often credited to the works of Nel Noddings and Virginia Held. Together, they articulated this theory. They advocated that both the gender (male and female) thought differently about care ethics and moralized distinctively. According to Bernice Fisher and Joan Tronto, care is "a species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies,

ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.” (Fisher and Tronto 40).

Ethics of Care promotes preserving and protecting those or things that people have dispositions toward. Care ethics disapproved of violent acts. Sibyl Schwarzenbach has outlined a definition of caring different from productive labor. She associates caring with reproductive work, meaning not the biological processes related to reproduction but “all those rational activities (thinking about particular others and their needs, caring for them, cooking their meals, etc.) which go toward reproducing a particular set of relationships between persons over time-in the best case, my thesis runs, relations of *philia*” (Schwarzenbach 102) We care for others when we assist them in meeting their most fundamental biological requirements for survival and everyday functioning. Food, clean water, clothing, shelter, rest, a tidy environment, basic medical treatment, safety from injury, and the availability of physical holding and contact, at least among newborns and young children, are fundamental physical needs. Helping others acquire or maintain their basic capacities for sense, emotion, movement, speech, reason, imagination, affiliation, literacy, and numeracy is the second goal of caring in most modern societies. The idea is to give people the tools they need to pursue their views of the ideal life and to acquire and maintain the skills necessary for basic social functioning as much as possible. Helping people avoid or relieve misery and discomfort so they can live as normally as possible is the third fundamental goal of caring. Caring aims to assist people in achieving at least a basic level of well-being, or at the least, survival and as much entire functioning as possible. Carol Gilligan's book *In A Different Voice* (1982), was the first to discuss care ethics. She claimed that men had moral growth that was very different from women's. Females were more prone to experience separation anxiety than males. Quandaries and ethical dilemmas were considered as conflicts rather than abstract notions of rights and obligations. Males, on the other hand, tend to view intimacy as harmful and act morally. Fiona Robinson notes the ethic of care is a practice, rather than a set of principles.” (Robinson 120)

Care has the potential to reshape a person with “more advanced understandings of culture and society and morality and ever more advanced abilities to live well and cooperatively with others” (Held 1993). Care produces compassion in humankind. Ethics of Care acknowledges the reality of human interdependence. Care ethics recognize emotion. This concept greatly values moral sentiments, which include sympathy, empathy, responsiveness, compassion, benevolence, and sensitivity. Humans must learn to foster these feelings. It embraces a person who is morally concerned with emotions and interpersonal skills. Human connection with others is only one application of the Ethics of Care. Taking care of things, the environment, and animals are all included. “Dependent requires care,” notes Eva Kittay Feder (Feder 1). The field of ethics is one of the key contributions of ecofeminism. To counter the dominance of masculinity, ecofeminist theories include care, justice, emotion, and reason for nonhumans. Warren establishes a global ethic and cultivates consciousness. She proposes absolute universals that are true for everyone, always, and everywhere as her ethical perspective (Warren 2000). . In her view, Care is “a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible.” The philosophy of animal ethics was developed by Carol Adams and Josephine Donovan. For a person to treat nonhuman animals with compassion, ethical principles like sympathy, empathy, and kindness must be present. . Mary Midgley argues that “we should give serious moral consideration to those with whom we have emotional or social ties (including animals), acknowledging that as a practical matter, one is often limited to caring for those around one, but she doesn't claim that primary concern with one's immediate circle should automatically override all other ethical considerations” (Midgley 1983, 23). Ethic of care theorists emphasize that “our attention be directed as well as to what animals are telling us rather than to what other humans are telling us about them” (Adams 109). Feminist ethics of care understand humans and animals as interdependent; animals usually need human protection for survival.

Anita Goswami explains the thread of struggle in the human and non-human worlds that led to crisis or conflict in her article “Reconstructing Ecofeminine Identity: A Comparative Study of Selected Works of Mahashweta Devi and Indira Goswami.” According to her, the humans must preserve the ecological balance in order to accomplish ecofeminism.

In her study *A Feminist Analysis of Mamoni Raisom Goswami's Novel, Parishmita Bora* examines the feminist viewpoints in the book. Through the character Saudamani, she explores the feminism of women and the exploitation that women, particularly widows, experience.

Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and Earth, edited by Carol Adams and Lori Greun, was published in 2019. The notion of ecofeminism is discussed in this book as it pertains to the interconnections of gender, racism, and animal rights.

About the Writer

Indira Goswami was a leading Assamese writer. Among her many honours are the Sahitya Akademi Award for *The Rusted Sword* in 1983, the Assam Sahitya Sabha Award in 1988, the Bharat Nirman Award in 1989, the Katha National Award for Literature in 1993, the Jnanpith Award for *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* in 2001, the Padma Shri, which she declined to accept in 2002, the Principal Laureate Prince Claus Award in 2008, and the Asom Ratna in 2009. She was a feminist icon from Assam who felt the effects of patriarchy and oppression on neglected communities and wrote about the socio-cultural issues. The writings of Indira Goswami are largely popular and have gained national and international readership. From the very beginning of her career as a writer, she exposed the prejudice and discrimination done against women and engaged herself in supporting the powerless. Her novels clearly show the readers how society is consciously gender-biased. Indira Goswami's works describe the bonding that exists between nature and women. She has discussed how the Mother Nature has suffered and experienced assault from the profit-hungry and technology-driven contemporary society. Indira Goswami shows ecofeminist concerns in the novel *The Pages Stained With Blood*. The story is set in Delhi in 1984 during the anti-Sikh riot. Women and nature became the victims of the riot. The violence that followed made women and nature the casualties. In her other novel, *The Blue-necked God*, she raises concerns for the widows of Vrindavan. She has depicted how these widows underwent exploitation under repressive patriarchy. They often become the object of exploitation at the hands of exploitative men. In the novel *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, she describes the bonding of women with nature. Women were forced to live in a mud hut in isolation during the menstrual cycle. Society compels the widows to live in segregation. The novel also raises ecological concerns like land disputes, eco ethics, and animal ethics. Her writing is characterized by humanity and compassion.

Religion has always been part and parcel of Indira Goswami's novel, especially the rigid rituals of Hinduism. Her novel *The Man from Chinnamasta* is set in the 1930s- the last few years of British rule in India. Through this novel, the writer discussed the social evils that exist and also provided approaches to resolve those evils. In this work, the oppression of women and the cruel treatment of animals are both depicted in the narrative. The tale also discusses compassion and care for both humans and animals. Because of her inherent "humanness" and close connection with the nature, the protagonist is sympathetic and rises in opposition to the Kamakhya ritualistic animal sacrifice. Goswami seeks to break the cycle of violence repeated from prehistoric times through her artistic endeavors. She offers glimpses into the mythology of the Kamakhya people and the reality of animal sacrifice through her vivid metaphors. She handles the delicate situation with great care and compassion, never disparaging the faith and commitment of those who visit Kamakhya for worship, while at the same time insisting that the horrifying practice must end. She jolts the audience from their complacency and indifference. Animal sacrifice, which includes killing buffaloes, goats, and birds like hens, ducks, and pigeons, is crucial in demonstrating devotion to the Goddess at the Kamakhya temple. When the priests see the animal being brought by the worshippers, they bless it and declare it to be a gift to the Goddess. The animal's meat is given to the worshippers as prasada or a blessing, and it is cooked and consumed by everybody. At the Kamakhya temple, the Tantrik fertility festival known as the Ambubachi Mela is also observed in June, which corresponds to the monsoon season.

The huge Brahmaputra river is depicted in the book's opening pages, with its expanse like a machete and its blood-red waters reeking the raw smell of murdered flesh. There are many passages in which the anguish and suffering of the animals is eloquently described. The animal attempted to escape as it was transported to the slaughterhouse. It wished to escape the death that appeared in the appearance of travelers. The Deodhani or the Deodha Nach, the shamanistic dance, is another heartbreaking celebration that is referenced in the book. The persons possessed by a deity who echo the deity's voice are known as deodhas or shamans. The deadliest and bloodiest deodhas are those of the goddesses Manasa and Kali. Every year, this dancing rite is observed for three days, from August 17 to 19, and preparations begin as early as June. The audience gathers to worship the deodhas, offer garlands, and wash their feet as they dance intoxicatingly to the beat of many drummers while wearing red clothing and having their bodies coated in vermilion and the blood of the sacrificed animals. Aside from the practical realities—the genuine

loss of life and the very real flesh and blood that stain Kamakhya's foundation and the lives of her followers—the ceremony is a labyrinth of religion, history, culture, discourse, and power. Indira Goswami has imbued caring consciousness in her character portrayal. Practicing loving, kindness, and, equanimity comes within the context of caring consciousness. Jatadhari, an ascetic though a priest, rose against animal sacrifice. He is a mystery to his followers. His historical knowledge is extensive. His origin is the subject of numerous rumors; some claim he is a scholar from Banaras, while others assert that he is from the Tanjavore district. The author expertly evokes the aura of mysticism in his lineage and opts for an ascetic rather than an educated man to fight against animal sacrifice. To raise awareness among his followers and end the barbaric practice of animal sacrifice. Jatadhari attempts to investigate the true meanings of Sanskrit scriptures and discusses them in public. The author is aware of the British raj's abuses and the holiness of the Kamakhya temple, the author chooses Jatadhari as the forerunner of the new era. A mother once visited Jatadhari for help. She came rushing with her ten years old son. Her son was playing with his friends when the sahibs practiced shooting. The son accidentally stumbled on a human skull. The mother was about to start crying. She was concerned that her son, who had played football with the skull, would be cursed by some unlucky star. Instead of scolding the child, Jatadhari showed love and kindness to the child. The mother asked Jatadhari what she would do to purge the evil from her child. Jatadhari, a man of reason, offered an alternate solution. Instead of animal or human sacrifice to please God, Jatadhari suggested praying with flowers. He said, "Mai, believe me, these ancient writings and beliefs...You can no longer smell sacrificed limbs burning in the sacrificial fires. Today this terrible history has been confined to the deep recesses of dark caves. We will bury this past in a tomb of flowers." (26) Jatadhari was followed by the artist Ratnadhar. He was a sensitive person who was about seventeen years old. He was also kind and responsible, and he nearly passed out as he witnessed the sacrifice of the buffalo. He incorporates values of moral sentiments, which include sympathy, empathy, responsiveness, compassion, benevolence, and sensitivity. He cries "Stop, stop don't you see it's terrified, it doesn't want to go with you. See how it defecates in fear. Look at its eyes. Have some mercy on the best. It wants to live and play on Ma's earth. Stop I say! Stop (Goswami 90). Ratnadhar is a modest individual who wants to help others but lacks the strength to face powerful foes, so he suffers in silence. When he witnesses Jatadhari's strength, he becomes an eager disciple, and Jatadhari helps him express his emotions via art. As a fine artist, Ratnadhar tries to convey a message in his works. He works earnestly to support the signature camp and seeks information on this issue from the public. To support Bidhibala, he becomes responsible. He publicly declares his readiness to marry Bidhibala when he believes her father has wronged her. But the fanatical father was stubborn in his decision. He scolded Ratnadhar and warned him not to involve in this matter. Ratnadhar conducts a petition drive against animal sacrifice with the aid of Cotton College students but encounters several difficulties along the way. When Ratnadhar saw a buffalo being dragged to the sacrifice altar, he felt helpless and responsible for saving the animal.

Ratnaddhar said "Stop! Stop! Don't you see? Its terrified, it doesn't want to go with you. See how it defecates in fear. Look at its eyes. Have some mercy on the beast. It wants to live and play on Ma's Earth. Stop I say! Stop!"(Goswami 10)

Henry Brown, who serves as Cotton College's principal, is married to Dorothy Brown. Henry Brown started seeing a Khasi woman and got her pregnant in the year Dorothy was away receiving fertility treatment. After discovering multiple letters addressed to her, Dorothy resolves to divorce her husband. To find mental tranquillity, she searches out the Jatadhari. She remains at the Darbhanga House, which served as a shelter for traveling ascetics in the past, and turns into a Jatadhari disciple. "I shall be your shadow forever. Our relationship cannot be defined. It is a very special bond" (Goswami 174). When Dorothy first met Jatadhari, he offered her mahasankha, a garland made of rudrasha beads. He said, "when Shiva saw the cruelty on earth, he wept. Trees sprouted where his tears fell. The seeds from those tress are called rudrasha or god's teardrops. It is said that those who wear these beads need no longer weep because Shiva weeps for them" (23). According to Jatadhari, God will protect Dorothy from the evils. Whoever came into contact with Dorothy felt compassion for her. Her eyes are as luminous as the Brahmaputra's rivers, concealing numerous wounds from the past. Her skin tone was as pale as a gourd's skin that it evoked heartfelt sympathy (12).

Pulu, a drummer, was encountered by Dorothy Brown while she was a guest at Darbhanga House. He arrived to see Dorothy about midnight. Dorothy was the only person who could aid Pulu when he needed it. When Dorothy first saw him, Pulu only had skin and bones, which astounded her. He discloses his matter to Dorothy. He said, "my only son. He has tuberculosis. I have to take him to the hospital in Gauhati today. I don't have any money. We are drummers. The river has eaten away all our land have nothing left" (51). Dorothy grows attached to Pulu after having heard his appeal. She was aware of his sorrow and pain. Immediately, she pulled a trunk out from under her bed. In the light of the lantern, she took out a cloth bag from the suitcase. She asked Pulu to collect the coins as he needed.

The temple was filled with a sense of tension. British people were looking for Dorothy. Ratnadhar overheard British people talking about Dorothy as he was trying to sell his picture. When the Britishers bought up the matter of Dorothy, he felt a sharp sorrow in his heart. He spotted some frightening people on the path leading up from the bank. Someone might hurt her, he felt certain. He took a silent oath to protect this English woman with his life. (47)

In the name of Dorothy Brown, Henry Brown had a home constructed. Dorothy's friend William enquired about the beneficiaries of her will. Without giving it any thought, she uttered, "It is for the Khasi woman's child by Henry Brown, who was my husband till the other day." (65). She contemplated the child, even though it would be a bastard. She cared for the child and made the property in his name. She also exercises maternal practice here. Caring after a child and engrossed in his thought.

Readers are first introduced to Bidhibala through Ratnadhar, who remembers being charmed by her when her family bought her for Kumari Puja. He had been anticipating her arrival back in Chinnamasta ever since. Bidhibala always wanted to visit Kamakhya to meet Jatadhari Chinnamasta and Dorothy Brown. Her father bought a buffalo for sacrifice to please maa Kamakhya. This very thought made her distressed. When she finally shows up for the buffalo sacrifice, she is a little girl of eleven years old engaged to a forty-year-old man who is married and has two daughters. Her father, Singhadatta, is irrational, and she is troubled over the guy she is set to wed. She opens up to Ratnadhar and begs him to let the buffalo escape after being brought in as a sacrifice for her. Ratnadhar caves in, and Singhadatta is furious that the buffalo has vanished. Ratnadhar, who opposes animal sacrifice, is believed to be behind this. Knowing this, he threatens Ratnadhar by saying that he will bring two buffaloes for sacrifice in place of one, even if he has to sell some of his land. Her father prevented her from pursuing an education and ultimately obliged her to assume the roles of a devoted wife and protective mother. The calf sent to be sacrificed for her reflects her pitiful condition. Suddenly she could see the predatory face of the grey-haired guy to whom she would soon be wedded. He and another woman had slept in the same bed. She remained silent. (102). Bidhibala has sympathy for the calf, which, like her, is about to meet its end. One fine day, Bidhibala asked Ratnadhar to take off the cover of his painting. Even though the paint wasn't dried, he gently pulled off the cover and explained the meanings behind those paintings. One of the paintings was of king Rudrasingha in death. The painting was about what happened when the subject took his mortal to the palace. The girls who used to dance in the temple were suspected as spies who had cast a spell on the king. They were sentenced to death between bamboo poles. The story terrified Bidhibala. She felt emotional and questioned the judgment. But Ratnadhar responded, "what difference was there between sacrificial animals and women?" (99). In a patriarchal society, women are held accountable for all negative outcomes. In the guise of religion, women are mistreated. The society compelled women to make sacrifices in many forms. Women are supposed to sacrifice the most in a culture where they are expected to fulfil many roles, including those of mother, daughter, and daughter-in-law. Eventually, Bidhibala was compelled to give up her life. She fled her house and found safety among a bunch of prostitutes. She refused food and water even though they did not force her into their agreement, and she died horribly.

Tantrik was getting ready to sacrifice a buffalo on an altar. He convinces people to offer blood sacrifices. He says, "Deliverance comes only when sacrifice is offered. Sacrifice alone will lead you to heaven" (93). The buffalo was taken to the altar as a sacrifice. It was slaughtered, and the Tantrik took the buffalo's head to give to the goddess. A sizable crowd gathered to observe the ritual. An older woman with a mekhela around her chest could not control herself. When she saw the ceremony, she was both sympathetic for the buffalo and revolted. She collapsed to the ground and put her head on the altar. The woman cried, "A little while ago it was eating grass and leaves. Why did you kill the helpless soul? It was alive. See, see how it voided its bowels in fear. O you blood thirsty goddess, take my head as well" (93)

The writer also talks about the goddess Bhairavi. Her name alone evokes thoughts of dread or the awe-inspiring. She is the world's protector and guide while being a terrifyingly raw spirit. She represents the proverbial mother's fury at those who put her children in danger. There is a fascinating story of Goddess Bhairavi appearing as Chandi in the Durga Saptashati. Chandi exterminates the evil demons Shumba and Nishumba, who caused havoc for humans and gods. Chanda and Munda, the asuras' lords, are supposed to have been slaughtered and devoured by her in her most ferocious guise. She doesn't consume blood in a cannibalistic manner; rather, she does so because she wants to stop the demons' lineage from continuing. Their blood will breed other horrifying monsters if it drips onto the ground. Goddess Bhairavi assumes the form of Goddess Saraswati when she is overflowing with knowledge. She removes all barriers from their path to salvation by raising their inner consciousness. She writes, "Goddess Tripura Bhairavi, the embodiment of compassion, the abode of peace, the manifestation of the supreme soul in the form of sound." (14)

Many students from many districts of Assam attended the signature camp that Ratnadhari started. Students from the Upper and Lower Assam Sanskrit Tols, Cotton College, and Karyam Shastri convened to talk about the group's potential and purpose. An anti-animal sacrifice protest march was arranged, and a letter was sent to the chief priest. All of the Tantriks ultimately demanded that Jatadhari provide his own blood. He pulled a razor from his belt and cut a piece of skin from below his navel without giving it a second thought. He presented his blood to the deity while holding his flesh in one hand. People regarded him with honour as the blood spilled in the holy sanctuary till midnight. All the blood and dirt were swept into the Brahmaputra when the cloud suddenly burst in the morning. Dorothy, Jatadhari, and Bidhibala make the ultimate sacrifice to improve society and eradicate societal ills.

Conclusion

Social crises are prevalent in our society. These problems exist because of humans' distance from caring. Goswami has extensively dealt with social issues and concerns in this novel. Social catastrophes like the sacrificial offering of animals or people and women's oppression are mostly common in our society. Religion is used in our culture to advance the interests of other groups. Radical religious groups, academics, and politicians, for instance, all interpret it in their ways and to their advantage. Under the guise of religion, these groups mostly murder, insult, and take advantage of people. Under the spectre of patriarchy, women experience mistreatment. These are the social imbalances that need to be addressed. Humans can reduce the severity of crises by extending care. Care has the capacity to bring balance between humans and non humans. Every relationship, whether it involves people or animals, calls for understanding. Care can bring social equilibrium in society. The social problems that exist are depicted by Indira Goswami in this novel, along with ways that these imbalances may be lessened through care, kindness, compassion, love, and empathy.

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